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Suzanne K. Becking
Fort Hays State University, skbecking@fhsu.edu

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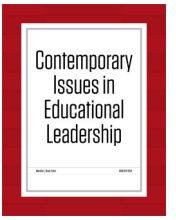

Change Agents in Global Initiatives

Suzanne K. Becking

Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
skbecking@mail.fhsu.edu

In 2009, the 40th anniversary of the Internet, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA),[1] a research branch of the U.S. Department of Defense, offered a competition to explore the Internet and Social Networking. They were authorized to offer awards and sought ideas leading to national security. One of the awards was a cash prize for the first team to locate ten red weather balloons randomly placed around the United States. The teams were to report findings on their information-gathering process to DARPA. The balloons were deployed between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. in one day. DARPA planned to wait up to one week for the results. One of the challenges for the teams was to discern the false reports from the true. The contest concluded when a team from MIT successfully found the location of all ten weather balloons in less than nine hours.

Metaphor

American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Vice-President, George Mahaffey used the metaphor of the *Red Balloon* to challenge state colleges and universities to "reimagine undergraduate education." One of the universities to accept the challenge was Fort

1. (2015). Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). http://www.darpa.mil/ Retrieved October 13, 2015, from http://www.britannica.com/topic/Defense-Advanced-Research-Projects-Agency.

Hays State University (FHSU) in Hays, Kansas. The leadership at FHSU began to consider how they could support and encourage innovation. "What are you doing for Kansans?"

The FHSU College of Education faculty were committed to helping schools succeed. Both higher education and school districts had experienced reductions in federal and state funding. The struggle, due to reduced personnel and lack of funding for technology, was a clear challenge as technologies changed and schools were encouraged to provide 1:1 technology initiatives. As the U.S. economy suffered, schools in rural Kansas experienced an even greater burden to continue to operate effectively.

In December 2012, the President of Fort Hays State University attended a meeting with faculty and staff from the Department of Advanced Education Programs. During the meeting, he asked an important question," What *are you doing for Kansans?"*

The question became a challenge for a few faculty members that helped guide the direction of an initiative to provide professional development support for teachers on technology integration in the 21st Century classroom. The President's question provided the impetus to keep going and to develop a more succinct plan to provide support for schools; especially as schools developed Google Domains and began to use the free applications offered by Google and others.

The Change Agent Team

As a result, 19 faculty and staff worked together to become Google Certified Educators. The process, itself, helped form a team of six individuals who went on to complete Google for Education Trainer certification. The *gTrainers* quickly developed a vision for what could be accomplished based on the belief that technology integration is more than an "add-on." It is a mindset where the tools become the means for creating challenging, engaging projects and an environment for student learning. One teacher commented, "It is not the focus of the instruction, nor is it central to instruction."

We had been modeling use of innovative, free technologies in our graduate classes for several years. Students who were educators responded positively to the technologies. Many began using the tools in their classrooms that they had used in their graduate courses at FHSU. Because of the team's knowledge of Google Apps for Education (GAFE),

and the schools' lack of funding for email services, web conferencing, and collaboration tools, current and former students began to invite us to help them implement GAFE. GAFE provides schools with a secure domain and the tools to communicate, organize, and collaborate at many different levels. The applications GAFE offers include: email, calendar, drive (docs, spreadsheets, presenter and others), G+ communication tools, YouTube, and many other products. These products cost schools between $10-15 annually which is solely for a domain name. Where once schools paid $10,000-20,000 to lease web conferencing equipment for a small group of students, they could now use the tools in Google, with no additional cost, to conduct virtual classes and communicate with a group of students or an expert from another part of the world. In addition, email service, web-development and other costs of internal and external communications could be eliminated.

One of our students, a teacher, stumbled upon the value of collaboration as she designed an assignment using Google docs. She mistakenly gave the students access to the assignment document before giving them instructions. Her original intention was to have the students download and print the document, complete the assignment and bring it to class the next day for discussion. Instead, they began editing the document together and she was able to watch the product develop. The result, according to the teacher, was a richer learning experience than they would have created individually. The teacher's comment was, "I was amazed" (Nixon, 2012).

Google domains offer teachers a myriad of collaboration tools. Combining Google Apps with other free applications and extensions from developers who have created these technologies for open use as well as use within the Google Domain, have resulted in rich learning opportunities for students.

GoogleEDU 2014-15 Growth and Changes

Since their first training at a local private high school [Thomas Moore Prep Marian] in February 2012, the *gTrainers* have visited more than 130 institutions, covering more than 25,000 miles, affecting more than 10,000 teachers and 100,000 students. Ninety-four percent (94%) of these workshops were initiated by current students or alumni from the Advanced Education Programs Department. We also have been contacted by local and international technology schools and universities,

and a college of education in southeastern Oklahoma, to discuss partnering and training opportunities to help bring Google Apps to their campuses.

How to Expand the Network

On April 1-3, 2016, the *gTrainers* hosted the first Kansas Google Summit in partnership with Lawrence College and Career Center in Lawrence, KS. On December 3, 2016, the 3rd Annual Wild West Cloud Fest was held on the campus of FHSU. The team is excited about the future possibilities for this initiative.

GAFE Growth in Kansas Schools

In August 2013, one of the *gTrainers* created a Google+ (G+) Community titled *FHSU-COET Support 4 Kansas Educators*. Interest was high from the start. By April 2014, the Community had reached the 1,000-member mark; all Kansas educators. The GoogleEDU team asked us to join with a growing number of other G+ Communities to form a Google Educator Group (GEG). There are currently 5,055 member educators in this GEG from around the world. And, GEG Kansas continues to grow daily (figure 1). *GEG Kansas* is the largest educator group

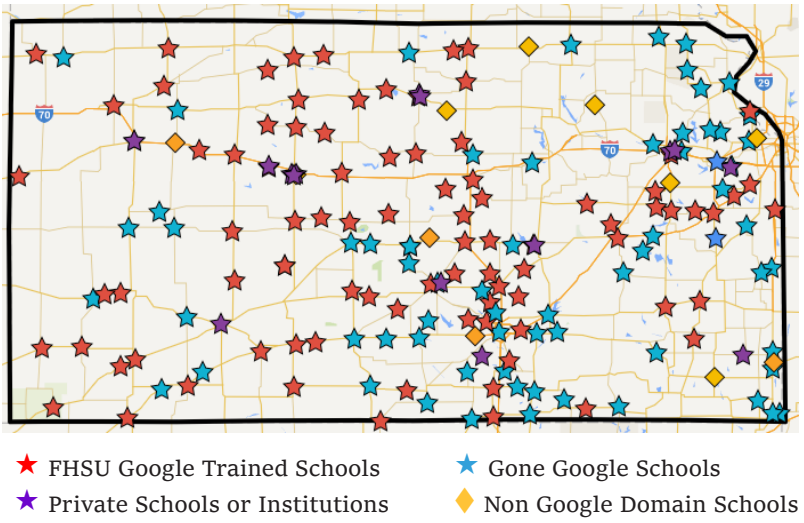

Figure 1. GAFE Growth in Kansas Schools

of its kind in the world. The Google community has been a rich and diverse source of collaboration, information, answers to questions, and learning. Members are encouraged to bring their technology integration questions to their peers in the GEG. Educators in the past searched Google for answers to questions of practice. The searches resulted in up to 10 million responses to sift through. The GEG community members, instead, offer each other practical answers to their questions along with discussion on best practices. To be considered as a member of GEG Kansas, use your Google+ profile, search for *GEG Kansas* and ask to join!

GAFE in Higher Education

As the *gTrainers* have had contact with educators from Kansas and other parts of the United States, we have identified a greater need--for our higher education institutions to actively model, promote, and support technology integration especially for current and future teachers. We believe that because we have modeled the tools of GAFE in our online graduate courses, there has been significant movement toward GAFE adoption. Students have become fluent with the technologies; and are ready to implement the technologies in their classrooms. One student commented, "I can't tell you how much I enjoyed the class. Collaborating and discussing it on Google + was a learning experience I haven't had before. I can see why FHSU is well liked!" (D. Bik, June 2015).

Another student commented,

> I thought of myself as a somewhat tech-savvy teacher. I was able to create "awesome" PowerPoints for my students, we could play virtual Jeopardy, and communicating with them was no problem, as long as they had access to their e-mail at all times... They would be able to see all the helpful websites and resources that I wanted to share with them and gave them the ability to access and turn in all the assignments on Edmodo. So, they never needed a paper copy. Then, I took the AEP 800 [Utilization of Technology in the Classroom] course and realized just how outdated my sense of technology was, and how many helpful resources have been developed that will make my job as an educator easier. They will help me to become more effective (M. Seeman, 2015).

Conclusion

These experiences with schools have reinforced our commitment to students who are the educators in those schools. These are the people we need to prepare so that they can pass on to their students the effective use of technology for their future in a changing world. Preservice teachers are included in this group. When a higher education institution can graduate beginning teachers ready to bring 21st Century skills to their classrooms, the institution has done a great service to multitudes of future leaders in a global society.

To contact the team for more information, email them at admin@fh-su-gtrainers.org