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GEE ID: G38

English First Language

As the final hours of GEE draw to a close, I find myself still filled with the same nerves and anxiety that I felt when Deb first announced this project to a gobsmacked class three weeks ago. However my ideas and knowledge around international leadership and communication has changed dramatically. Being an international leader is by no means any small feat and something I initially had no idea about. It was a big learning curve understanding different ideas, values and communication styles.

Frustratingly for the first two and half weeks little was achieved. I just could not believe it! What was I doing wrong?! I was using every tool I had learnt in class, I was asking the right questions, initiating discussions and yet I was receiving little feedback. Finally I realised that I was not being direct enough. In New Zealand we have a remarkably flat structure around management where we are expected to use our own initiative. However for those in my team, more direction was needed. This was my hardest lesson learnt, I was not comfortable with telling people what to do.

I was sitting here thinking “why can you not think for yourself? Where is your motivation?” Consequently I decided to take that big step, I wrote a rather strict and no nonsense message on Geebiz and also emailed it to make sure everyone received it, about participation and I delegated the workload. Initially I feared that this approach would bring rejection from team members. However next thing I know, our groups generating numerous ideas and approaches to the project. I was also able to set up meetings with four members and in the space of one day we had eight hours of meetings on Skype and Facebook! Unfortunately this was hampered by Facebook problems where team members could not see one another so I spent 2 hours from 5am-7am Saturday morning relaying conversations between team members, something I NEVER want to experience again!! It was amazing how much more was achieved in those wee small hours of the night than what had been over two and a half weeks! Regrettably I lost three team members, two not bothering to log in at all and one contributing once then disappearing, I was heartened to know that Elizabeth, Camila, Shan and Yeming were all fired up and ready to go and will forever appreciate their commitment and knowledge.

For me, my team members life situations highlighted how unfair community structures are for women where they are from and while New Zaland is not perfect, at least my parents didn’t pull me out of school when I was 14 to prepare me for marriage and babies. In fact my experiences were quite the opposite to what one team member was used to. I loved learning about the different expectations and ideals my team members have, it highlighted why international team work is so popular yet so hard. The ability to fully develop ideas around a project is so much more because their views and my views are so different we think of diverse ideas. This is essential to finding the best outcome for the team.

I have learnt that even the best laid out plans can be thrown inside out and upside down when in an international team. I feel that nowadays time zones may not be so much of an issue if you have team members (like myself) who are committed to being on skype from 12am to 7am in the morning! But really, who in their right mind wants to do that?! I have learnt that even with all this awesome technology we have, explicit and clear communication is key to facilitate the completion of the project. You need to make sure that what you are saying and what your team members think you are saying are the same. I did have a few communications where I was sitting here thinking what the heck are you talking about? And then realised they were thinking the same about me! This is why synchronous communication is invaluable to sorting out the nuts and bolts of the project. GEE has left me exhausted, but the lessons learned are invaluable. More than anything GEE showed us that if countries worked together, the world could definitely be a better place.