

CREATING FUTURE FOCUSED STRATEGY

WHOLE SCHOOL PROGRAM DESIGN

International School of Prague,
Czech Republic
2015-18

NoTosh Team:
Ewan McIntosh, Malie Watsons

The International School of Prague (ISP) has been working closely with NoTosh since 2015 to create school-wide strategies that are dynamic, give room to evolve and which reflect a clear path towards what they want to achieve and what they want their school to become.

Determined to create more than the standardised and impersonal five-year plan, ISP decided to take a more human-centred approach and engaged students, staff and parents in a collaborative process with three key components:

- A multidisciplinary student, teacher, parent, Board and staff design team researched, interviewed and observed where the school's strengths and opportunities for the future might lie;
- The leadership team worked with the design group to hone the conclusions of their evidence into a tight set of core strategies, written in plain English;
- The whole school community created ideas that they immediately put into action, testing whether the strategy worked for them and brought the school closer to its new objective.

The leadership team were familiar with the NoTosh Design Thinking process and saw this approach as one that would allow them to shape and mould their working process, taking it from something set in stone to design and innovation action on the ground. We began to work with the ISP team to dig in and identify the problems they were facing and to establish the current state of affairs across the school. This immersion stage was powered by a design team (made up of students, teachers, leadership and parents) working closely with the wider school community as they gathered thousands of stories, data and evidence, including photographs, comments, sketches and interview notes, to build a big picture of their school over a two month period.

The ISP design team then began to make sense of all the information that was gathered during a day of synthesis which saw them review and categorise the evidence to identify different types of patterns and trends.



The design team also created 'archetypal' stories that reflected their understanding of the trends they uncovered. The findings were then presented by the design team to the ISP leadership who were tasked with crafting draft a collection of draft strategies.

The leadership team were challenged to generate a collection of 'How Might We...?' challenge questions to help further narrow down and identify the real issues they were facing as a school. The 'How Might We' task saw the team take existing information which was in-actionable, and turn that into actionable and addressable questions for moving forward. Leadership were also encouraged to consider how the illustrative stories created by the design team might lead the school to build strategies that address a particular issue, such as student voice and choice. These stories were paired with the 'How Might We' questions to create a solid understanding of the main problems facing ISP and the areas that required before being consolidated to create a list of draft strategic questions - left as questions so that ISP could embark on a period of prototyping to test the validity of the potential strategies.

One of the bigger issues that was identified through the immersion and synthesis stages of the process was communication. ISP saw they faced a big challenge in improving both their internal and external communication and the way in which they told their own story.

Blowing your own trumpet is something that most people struggle with, and as collective this can be even more challenging. The leadership team saw an opportunity to learn how they might share more of the goings-on of the school, the accomplishments and challenges overcome, or the significant change taking place.

We ran a workshop that saw the ISP staff generate numerous prototyping ideas, based on the draft strategies, and the leadership team took on several prototyping teams each as their "champion".

Agile, flexible prototyping at ISP encouraged a new way of thinking and represented another welcome disruption to their learning culture. Out of this prototyping culture ISP has seen the development of an all-faculty professional inquiry process - LIFTs (Learning Inquiry Focus Teams) - which are now in their second iteration.

ISP continue to strive to do things differently and break traditional binds in education through investigating and implementing new strategies across the school using the NoTosh Design Thinking process as their scaffolding. The school has been able to create strategies that are much more responsive (active) and are now much more about pushing the school forward in the direction they want to go in: to put the the needs of 21st century learners first, to be able to evolve and change.

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The way they approach teaching and decision making, and always think about what kids learn and how, ensuring that they are always in the driver's seat.

Through online coaching and regular face-to-face facilitation, NoTosh has assisted the ISP leadership team in their quest to improve their communication both internally and externally. The inclusion of students, faculty and parents in the process of change has created a greater sense of school belonging and ownership over progress. Parents and the wider community are more aware of the school's daily activity, goals and the strategies involved with getting there.

Prototyping culture has seen further benefit for all across the school, with fear of failure becoming less of an obstacle in the face of change, challenge and everyday learning. Each member of the school community is trying with a refusal to give up on great ideas when they don't come to fruition first time around.

The change in mindset of the leadership team has been felt across ISP, their relationship with one another changed, as with all sections of the school community, as they collectively continue to push forward and transform.

"As a school we were able to get clarity when we needed it but the NoTosh team was far more on an instigator and facilitator than a support system - there was not a lot of hand holding. NoTosh actively put the thinking and onus into the hands of us at ISP and that made us accountable for how and why we were changing.

"The leadership and coaching from NoTosh throughout the process to date has helped us take this journey from personal to general, and overcome the obstacles in our way" Dr Arnie Bieber, Director, and Teresa Belisle, Director of Learning, Research and Development, ISP.

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Let's start talking.
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