Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The writer implemented this practicum in a middle school in the northwest part of a suburban city with a population of approximately 98,000 in the southeastern United States. The area inside the city limits is 21 square miles. The values of the homes within this city range from approximately $20,000 to over $400,000. The neighborhood immediately surrounding the school consists of upper-middle class homes and many luxury rental apartments. The city has a diverse socioeconomic population ranging from migrant workers to white collar executives. The community, well known for its excellent schools, attracts parents who highly value education. Thus, the majority of parents actively support their children’s schools through a variety of volunteer efforts such as fund-raising and tutoring.

Writer’s Work Setting

The writer’s work setting is a middle school including sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. The school is 1 of 193 public schools within the county ranging from the elementary to the adult and vocational education levels. The school opened 2 years ago designated as an environmental science and technology magnet. The curriculum delivered to all students, regardless of magnet status, is the same as the rest of the county, except that environmental themes enrich it.
The school has state of the art technologies because it is a technology magnet school. A laptop computer has been assigned to each teacher, and each classroom has four desktop computers and a printer. Distributed throughout the school are six scanners for student and staff use. Digital cameras, laser disc players, and numerous software programs are available for check out through the media center. In addition to a business lab and a computer instruction lab, two computer rooms are available for teachers to use for classroom instruction and Internet access.

The school includes eight completely retrofitted separate buildings networked on wide area and local area networks. This school is the only one in the school district that has both Macintosh and IBM compatible computers in the classrooms. Dell computers are located in the social studies and math classrooms. Macintosh computers are in all other classrooms and in the administrative offices.

The school's vision is to prepare its students for the demands of the workplace and the society of the 21st Century through the active involvement of all its stakeholders. These include (a) administrators, (b) teachers, (c) staff, (d) students, (e) parents, and (f) business and community partners. The school is very fortunate to have a very active Parent Teacher Association, Parent Teacher Advisory, and a School Improvement Team (SIT) involved in transforming the vision into a reality. All three of these organizations are comprised of (a) parents, (b) teachers, (c) administrators,
and (d) business representatives within the community. The SIT committee is also comprised of students.

The mission of the school is to provide a positive environment where students experience academic and personal growth while being actively engaged in learning. The staff is to provide, as part of this mission, an innovative education program integrating the county core curriculum with Environmental Science while incorporating the most recent technology. The mission objectives state that the students will be actively engaged in a wide range of performance-based learning experiences. They will hear guest speakers in the areas of Ecology, the Environment, Biodiversity, and Conservation. The students will experience first-hand, various ecosystems through field trips. They will also participate in electronic field trips, and communicate with other students throughout the world via the latest technology. The students will become versed in problem-solving and decision-making, becoming self-directed, self-motivated, life-long learners. The teachers will incorporate a variety of teaching strategies to accommodate individual learning styles and to help students meet the objectives.

Approximately 1,493 students living within the boundary radius attend the school. Of these 1,493 students, 77.49% are Caucasian, 6.97% are Black, 11.72% are Hispanic, 2.95% are Asian, .27% are Indian, and .60% are multi-racial. The magnet office selected 139 additional students to attend. These magnet students, chosen from a list of 500 applicants living
outside the boundary radius, ride busses to school. Of these 139 students, 56.11% are Caucasian, 33.81% are Black, 5.04% are Hispanic, 3.60% are Asian, .72% are Indian, and .72% are multi-racial.

Four main criteria need to be met for a student to be selected as a magnet student. The student must maintain a B average in all subject areas, and must achieve a minimum score at or above the 80th percentile on the reading and math sections of the Stanford Achievement Test. In addition, the student must show an aptitude toward science as evidenced and documented by his prior teacher(s). Residency north of a designated boundary line is the final requirement.

The staff of the school consists of over 100 personnel. There are 68 classroom teachers, and the administration is comprised of one principal and three assistant principals. Each assistant principal is assigned to a specific grade level. The guidance department includes a counselor assigned to each grade level. Each guidance counselor works as a team with the grade level administrator. The support staff consists of (a) one magnet coordinator, (b) one technology coordinator, (c) one drop-out prevention coordinator, (d) one Media specialist, (e) one Media aide, (f) one office clerk responsible for photocopying materials for teachers and administration, (g) one part-time speech therapist, (h) one part-time school psychologist, (i) one ESE specialist, (j) three special education aides, and (k) one
school resource officer. There are also (a) four administration secretaries, (b) one guidance secretary, (c) one attendance secretary, (d) one registrar, (e) one bookkeeper, (f) one data processor, and (g) the principal’s secretary on staff. Five custodians and eight food service employees round out the staff.

Writer’s Role

The writer has been the technology coordinator for 2 years. The writer’s position includes diverse responsibilities such as (a) setting up and maintaining the network, computers, printers, scanners, and the two computer access lab rooms; (b) administering the network file server; (c) troubleshooting technology related problems; (d) setting appointments with computer service technicians when the problems warrant assistance beyond the writer’s capabilities; (e) monitoring software licenses; (f) placing orders for additional hardware and software; (g) arranging with companies for software and hardware to be available for preview; (i) writing and overseeing adherence to the state technology grant; and (j) assisting teachers in the use of the technology.

The writer has served as the chairperson of the technology team for the past 2 years. The technology team decides the hardware and software needs of the staff. It writes and updates the Media and Technology Handbook. In addition, it monitors the student and teacher use of the
Internet, and decides what technology training is necessary based on a technology needs assessment (see Appendix A).

The writer has also held the position entitled inservice facilitator for 2 years. This position entails registering staff members for county and school workshops, and initiating the paperwork for school-based workshops for county inservice credit. The writer also informs staff members of their certification status and provides them with inservice printouts.

The writer has been a teacher for 25 years and has state certification in the areas of (a) Mentally Handicapped, (b) Emotionally Disturbed, (c) Elementary Education, and (d) Middle School Science. As a member of the Science Cadre for the past 8 years, the writer has co-written the Science Middle School Curriculum and the Middle School Science Assessment Test for the county. The writer has also conducted numerous county workshops for teachers in the areas of science and technology.