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### **REFLECTIONS ON LAS EDGE AT LEYSIN AMERICAN SCHOOL IN SWITZERLAND**

Upon my arrival as a visiting scholar for the third time at Leysin American School (LAS), I talked with Dr. Paul Magnuson about the innovative project that had been put into practice for grade 8-10 students. I became increasingly interested in hearing the experiences of this unique program. I was given an office in the Edge Chalet, where space is provided for visiting scholars, resident scholars, and the Alpine Institute. I was thrilled to hear that the chalet was decorated by the students, who had been given the chance to design their own work spaces as well as the social setting. During my one month stay, I learnt a lot from this privileged group of students who were working on innovative projects. Edge students are provided with many opportunities to develop their intellectual capacities as well as their leadership skills. It is an innovative model that requires the commitment and willingness of students as well as faculty.

Faculty members who serve as mentors are those teachers ready to move the traditional walls of the education system and open alternative paths for their students. In this process they are not only providers but are also supporters and road pavers, enabling students to reveal their potential. Looking into an Edge classroom, you will see groups of students working on their projects. Innovators Lab is a course in which students are asked to put an innovation into practice, examine all the necessary steps, and take any necessary precautions. This scene reminded me of the “action research course” practiced at the Arizona State University doctorate program on leadership and innovation that I was a part of ten years ago. I was pleasantly surprised to see a group of young innovators working on research projects that seemed to align with the innovative approaches of action research in adult education. From my perspective, Edge students are given a very precious tool that they can use throughout their careers, whether in academics or business. Here are a couple of examples through my own lens: While one group is working to arrange a cultural trip to Bilbao, another is importing smoothies to sell them at school. We gave an order to one of the students who had opened her own local mini food service within the school. She was very professional when taking our orders and provided timely delivery. She explained that she would need to recruit a partner to help her meet the increasing demand. This was an experience different to any other I had witnessed before. I came across students at the Fish Bowl, a social gathering place in the Edge Chalet, where students can interact while cooking, watching movies, playing games, or working on projects. Their discussions and conversations that I overheard from time to time from my office sounded like a unique melody of professionalism. After a while, I realized that I was beginning to see them as colleagues rather than students and our conversations were as professional as if we were working in a multicultural professional environment.

I have also been involved in a project initiated by a French-Turkish student, Leo, who invited me to speak at one of the TILE talks he was arranging. TILE, or Talks in Innovation, Leadership, and Entrepreneurship, was familiar to me since I had spoken at one the previous year. Leo was planning a panel discussion hosting two of us under the theme of leadership. The process of the TILE talk is as important as the talk itself. Leo made sure that he had at least two meetings with us before the talk. I was impressed by how he researched my own

area of expertise as well as the other speaker's field. The questions he proposed were challenging and innovative. The way he moderated the session was also significant. He allowed both speakers to express their ideas, complementing one another.

I believe Edge serves as a platform for creating a community of practice between students and teachers. It serves as a means for collaborative leadership in which each student is willing to contribute to making change. Edge can also be seen as one of the main tools of professional development in the students' career paths. It allows them to enact their stories as well as document and reflect on the phases of their projects. Along this path there may be "ups and downs"; however, it should be noted that the journey is more important than the final destination. Therefore the experiences and insights acquired from being an Edge student will have a cumulative effect on their career. Edge is based on creating a culture of collaboration and innovation based on constant interaction. From my own observation, the model is based on the notion that "leadership is not a one person phenomenon but a collaborative practice." Edge is a unique model providing a platform for creativity and innovation. This may take time and energy. As Tierney (2012) put it:

"Innovation: Creativity and Risk Taking"

Since Edge is based on innovation, students are aware of the fact that whatever new step they take will be a risk, something that applies to all spheres of life. They are given the encouragement to take risks as well as to develop alternative strategies to overcome any roadblocks and barriers they might encounter. I was impressed to see how Edge students document their stories and reflections in their journals, which will not only feed their souls professionally but also contribute to their professional portfolios in their academic careers. This has been one of the most insightful experiences I have observed so far in a school setting. I look forward to hearing the new stories that will be written by Edge students in the coming days.