

Innovative Learning Environments

Sabbatical Report



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Part One: What does Innovation Look Like in Schools?

Don McLean's Tour of schools in Canada and the US in May 2015.

Background:

As Principal of [Hampden Street School](#) I have been part of the journey our school has taken to increase student engagement, their ability to collaborate and to manage themselves and their learning. Like many educators, [Ken Robinson's](#) 2006 TED talk about "Schools killing creativity," got me thinking and questioning our practice and whether we were truly catering for the 21st century students. Subsequently I have heard a large number of educationalists speak on different aspects of this new paradigm in education that we are facing.

Many schools globally have attempted to address these challenges and changes with varying degree of success. In New Zealand schools demonstrating the level of innovation in all aspects of their practice to fully address this paradigm shift are few and far between so when Hampden Street School went down the road of Modern Learning Environments (MLE) the first thing we learnt was how much we didn't know. We were very much entering new territory by the seat of our pants and there weren't a lot of local experts to draw on.

We quickly found that the actual physical innovative learning spaces were only a part of the bigger picture and most importantly teaching and learning pedagogy needed to be addressed and defined. With the assistance of CORE Educations, Mark Osbourne we started looking at what the research was telling us. John Hattie's ground breaking research into effective practice made us question many of our "tried and trues" and ask why. We were also part of the Ministry of Education's ALIM project and as part of this we researched the "Best Evidence Synthesis" this again made us look at our practice. One of the key aspects we discovered was we needed to look carefully at the role of the teacher and the importance of students having ownership of their learning and the ability to drive it themselves. Initially, our focus has been to develop our senior syndicate (Year 5/6) area as that was where our MLE was first developed but pretty quickly we realised this will be something we need to roll out across our school, with or without MLEs in place. Last year our Senior and Middle syndicate leaders, along with the Senior DP, attended the [Edutech conference](#) in Brisbane. This was a big picture conference with some of the world's leading minds in education presenting. It was a great way for the leaders in our school to really gain an understanding big picture of Future focused learning. They came back buzzing with a commitment to ensure our school as a whole, embrace paradigm shift.



The big picture is great but the "How to" always brings challenges. As a school we are embarking on a teacher-led inquiry into what our future focused pedagogy will look like across the school, how we will implement it, and how will we ensure that all staff have some ownership. As part of this I have focused my sabbatical investigation on the following questions: What is an Innovative Learning Environment (ILE)? What do innovative learning

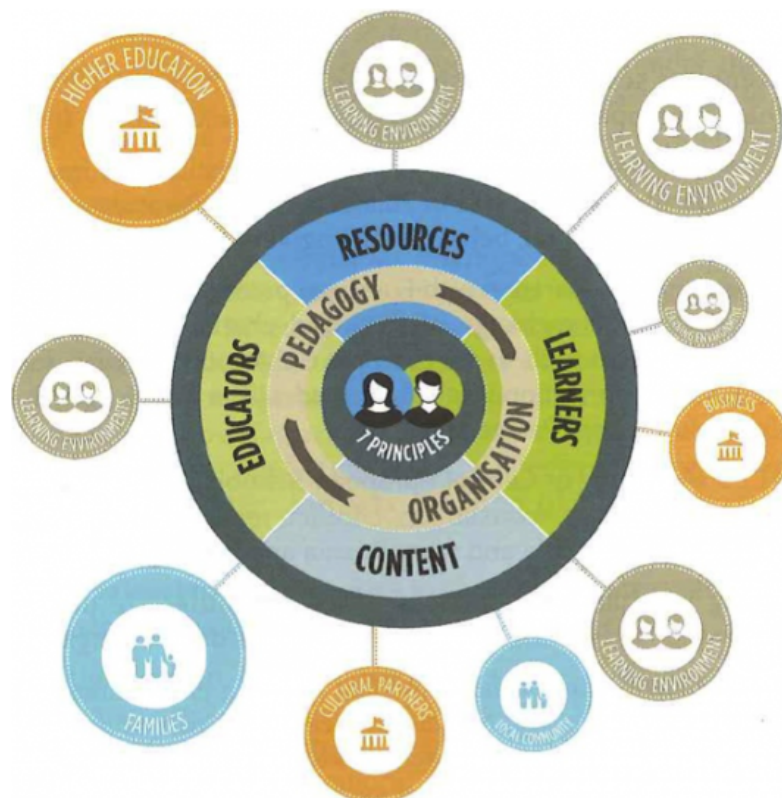
environments do differently, and how do they ensure and know that this innovation is improving student outcomes? This is a broad topic and ILE should not be confused for a MLE, although I believe to be truly innovative the right physical environment is important. I have based my study around an [OECD report on Innovative Learning Environments](#) released in 2013. The report was part of a [project](#) which began in 2008 which was to "analyse how young people learn and under which conditions and dynamics they might learn better. By identifying concrete cases of innovative learning environments from all over the world, ILE aims to inform practice, leadership and reform through generating analysis of innovative and inspiring configurations of learning for children and young people."

To help sharpen my focus in my observations and discussion with schools I will be visiting I will use the seven transversal principles identified in the ILE project:

1. *Learners at the centre* -
2. *The social nature of learning*
3. *Emotions are integral to learning*
4. *Recognising individual differences*
5. *Stretching all students*
6. *Assessment for learning*
7. *Building horizontal connections*

These seven principles are expanded on page 6 and 7 in the Paper, "[Nature of Learning - Practitioners Guide](#)," (Hanna Dumont, David Istance, Fransico Benavides- 2010)

The OECD team also developed a model of ILE which demonstrated well the relationship between these seven principles, pedagogy and key elements and dynamics around them.



I am particularly interested in the four key elements in this diagram- Educators, Resources, Learners and Content, their roles in the ILE and their relationship with the dynamics shown around the outside. My version of these elements would be Educators, Learners, Environments, and Curriculum but basically the same intent. This will also help frame my observations and discussions.

Part Two: Overview of the Schools/ School Districts

During my time in North America I will be visiting a number of individual schools and school districts. The schools in Canada are from school districts highlighted as 'best practice' case studies in the OECD Innovative Learning Environments Project.

The Schools in the United States were chosen through my own research. At a time in the US where the 'No Child Left Behind' policy has created a high stakes, grade focused environment in many schools and school districts, these schools/ school districts have introduced projects that are innovative, engaging and provide opportunities for students to lead their learning.

Note: These overviews are taken from either the OECD ILE report case study summary or, in the case of the American Schools, from the profile on their websites. They are not necessarily the view of the author of this report.

Community of Learners Network, Nanaimo Ladysmith BC Canada - *This is a 'mini-network' within the larger Network of Performance Based Schools in BC. It involves intensive collaboration on applying inquiry methods. Despite operating in the traditional structures, the teaching/learning interface is markedly different from traditional modes of schooling. The curriculum and schedule are built around large-scale inquiries that blur traditional school subjects and schedules. Formative assessment and metacognition are integral to the learning, as is collaboration through the 'Circle Discussion' approach which is also a core element: circle discussions are referred to as Literature circles, Information Circles and Numeracy Circles, and generally comprise 4-8 students. Aboriginal place and culture are fundamental and Aboriginal and nonAboriginal students are taught to respect traditional values. Community members with expertise are regularly invited into classrooms, and community and local resources viewed as an integral part of the learning environment. Beginning with three teachers, now there are eight learning environments that fully integrate the core approaches. (OECD - Innovative Learning Environment Project)*

Elementary Connected Classrooms, BC, Canada - *"This project exists in three elementary classrooms with students from grades 4-7 students. It is an intentional departure from the traditional approach to education in its approach to technology and instruction; it has been an extremely successful pilot project in its district. Three teachers collaborate to combine their classrooms via daily videoconferencing, online collaborative work, and have students create a variety of multimedia content. This is a full time learning environment that is funded by a public school district, and is planning to expand the project to a second team next fall. As collaboration lies at the core of the project, Connected Classrooms enjoy a broad organisational foundation and promises sustainability. In addition, the project has proved to increase the learning experience for students in a school district with a high proportion of Aboriginal students. Throughout the course of the project, we have witnessed new and exciting learning relationships and partnerships between students, and increased engagement and motivation to learn," (OECD - Innovative Learning Environment Project)*

Colorado Academy, Denver, Co, USA - *Colorado Academy, an independent Pre-K - 12 college preparatory day school with an exceptional campus community. Here, we turn ideals into action - challenging our students to become lifelong learners, thinkers, inquisitors, and contributors. Please explore our school's innovative and rigorous curriculum, variety of artistic and athletic programs, opportunities for advanced work, student-organized service, and unique programs for learning beyond the classroom. From academic excellence to "whole person" development, there's nothing quite like the CA experience.*

Castle Rock Elementary School, Castle Rock, Co, USA -*Castle Rock Elementary School will be recognized as a child-centred elementary school focused on excellence. All children will have the opportunity to experience success in their academic, physical, social and emotional development. Castle Rock Elementary School will promote global thinkers who are life-long learners, literate, communicative, culturally sensitive, respectful of others and prepared to be future leaders.*

iZone Schools Project, NYC, USA - *Now and in generations past, education has been our nation's foundation for opportunity. But today's education system requires transformation if we want to prepare students for success in a globally-connected world. To thrive, our students need to be engaged in learning that is relevant to their lives, and allows them to master the skills of tomorrow.*

The iZone harnesses today's resources to design school around the unique strengths, interests and needs of each student. We believe in expanding learning opportunities beyond the classroom walls and the dismissal bell. And we provide teachers with the resources and flexibility to support each of their students in developing the skills required for college and career success.

Avenue World School, NYC, USA -*Schools are historically rooted in the villages, towns and cities in which they are situated. Almost all are single-city, single-country institutions. They teach about matters beyond their boundaries, but they do not operate in any meaningful way outside them. Over time, some—boarding schools, for the most part—have evolved to serve “national communities.” No longer particularly identified with a specific locale, they recruit students widely, increasingly from beyond national borders. Leading examples include England's Eton, India's Doon School and America's Exeter. While these schools teach about the larger world and include students from diverse locations, their operations still largely exist in one country and on a single campus. If “local” schools are the first step in the evolution of schooling and “national” schools are the second step, the coming years are destined to see an increasing number of “global” schools. Avenues plans to be the best of this new breed of educational institution—hence its subtitle: *The World School.**

Part Three: Community of Learners Network, Nanaimo Ladysmith School District BC Canada

Background

Nanaimo is a city located on Vancouver Island, 45 minutes north of the State capital of Victoria. It has a population of around 90 000 and its main industries are forestry and fishing, however unemployment is high. The school district has over 40 schools. My contact was Laura Tait, who is director of Instruction and Learning Services for the school district.

A group of teachers have been developing an innovation project called The Community of Learners. The project is values/ competency based student led inquiry which extends through elementary school to secondary. The project is a journey and the teachers are working through many of the issues and barriers Hampden Street faced in our MLE project. Mary-Lynn Epps is now looking at refining their Community of Learners to better reflect the values and understandings of the First Nation people (aboriginal people of the island).

The central Philosophy for the Community of Learners is "We are all Learners; we are all teachers." Collaboration is key whether it be working with partners, in circle meetings, in peer conference sessions or elbow to elbow in coaching sessions.

Like the students the teachers are very much learners and they are encourage to investigate aspects of their own practice in a teacher-led inquiry. They then showcase this to peers.

The school district is very much about community partnerships, whether that be hosting students from teacher training programmes in the school, hosting an author or tribal elder, photographers, visiting local places of interest etc. One of the many benefits of the school district concept is the ability to attract quality partnerships - culturally, in the community, academically and with business.

The Community of Learners Inquiry Cycle was similar to many you would find at schools in NZ. It was as a cycle not a series of linear steps and it allowed for students to direct their learning and collaborate with each other.

Something that stood out to me was the concept of the 'Showcase' to celebrate learning at the completion of each inquiry. When a learning showcase is used as a required element of the inquiry cycle, it provides an opportunity for a powerful culmination event for the inquiry. Classmates, school administrators, families, teachers and students from other schools and community members are all invited to view the products that the students have created, and to discuss their learning with them. Most of these Inquiry Showcases were held in the evening so working parents could attend.

Dover Bay High School.

Lynn Brown is a passionate 8th Grade teacher and, along with Mary-Lynn Epps and Terill McDonald, created the Community of Learners. Lynn shared two of her Year 8 Humanities classes. These classes are an integration of the Social Sciences and English.



The Totem sits in the Foyer of Dover Bay High school

Year 8 cohort developed and negotiated the Descriptors for the four "Cs" Community of Learners values - commitment, cooperation or collaboration, communication and contribution (self) or control. They did this at the start of the year as a collective group in their multi-purpose room. This process was also shared with new teachers so they had buy-in and ownership of the process. These are guiding values not just for the class but for any project inquiries.



The Community of Learners Agreement in the Year 8 Humanities class

The students had completed three linear (longer) inquiries this year each allowing students to drive their learning to some degree. The Inquiries go for a longer length and students worked

in 4 x 80 minute periods a day, although many students felt for Year 8 60 minutes would be better. However, most students commented that allowing the extra time to complete their inquiries allowed them to investigate to a greater depth. As an important part of their assessments students presented their inquiries to an audience that included parents, and teachers from contributing schools. Students that did present their inquiry (not all did) commented how much they enjoyed it and looked forward to doing their next inquiry. Overall 100 students presented to parents on the night with the class teacher doing an introduction and then parents could move around the stations where students presented. The students had set ways to present - PowerPoint, board game, video clips, and speeches. The next project which is about Global citizenship will allow the students to choose how they will present their inquiry.



The Year 8 Community of Learners at Dover Bay High School

The inquiry process is based on the "Spirals of Inquiry" Model developed by Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser in association with the BC Principal and VP's Association. Laura gave me a copy :-)

It was interesting to hear the students talk with excitement about their next inquiry. As a global citizen they need to choose a cause that interests them and develop some way to promote and participate in it.

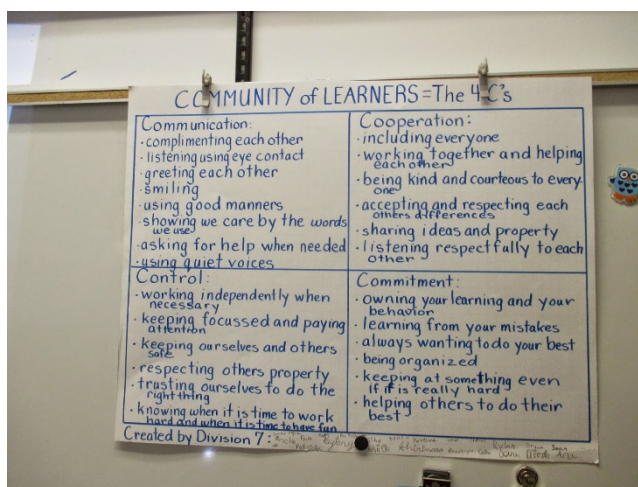
Challenges and Barriers: Although the Community of Learners/ Inquiry are being driven by a passionate group of teachers, some of the more traditional style teachers are questioning its merits, which is leading to some negativity from students. It has also caused some parental concerns.

There was a wonderful collaborative environment in the class where the students spoke freely but also respected each other and their teacher. They had a growing ownership of their learning and were excited about future projects.

Randerson Ridge Elementary School

We visited Terrill McDonald at Randerson Ridge. She has been running the Community of Learners for a number of years and it was well embedded into her class. She had built on it throughout the years, linking it to Gardner's Multiple Intelligences where students have identified their learner's strengths and the areas they need to develop. They had also looked into kindness and students have been challenged to do random acts of kindness for class mates, families etc. When they do this they add a link to a kindness chain.

The thing that struck me in Terrill's class was how well embedded the Community of Learners is. I asked the children my golden question, "Point to the person in charge of your learning." The response was immediate, all students pointed at themselves. Not bad for 8 years old!



Community of Learners Agreement in Terrill's Class

Terrill has also extensively used the [MindUP™](#) programme. MindUP™ teaches social and emotional learning skills that link cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology and mindful awareness training utilizing a brain centric approach.

After leaving Randerson Ridge, Laura Tait and I went and had a coffee and discussed our day. The children's response in Terrill's class resounded with us both. Laura talked about four questions that they often ask students:

- What are you learning?
- How is your learning going?
- How do you know you are learning?
- Name two adults in the school that care about you and your learning?

We also discussed the importance of building relationships with students and particularly the at-risk one. Laura talked about the "10 Challenge," where teachers or teacher aides are assigned a at-risk students and for 2mins every day for 10 weeks they check in with the students just to see how things are going.

First Nation People:

A real challenge for Nanaimo Ladysmith Schools is ensuring the First Nation People feel they have a place in the school system and their values and beliefs are valued and integrated into class programmes. There are some real parallels between the plight of Maori and the First Nation people in Canada. The big difference is the huge destruction the [residential school system](#) has done to family life for generations of the first nation people. The pace of progress in recognition of First Nation Peoples' place in society is slow and has a way to go but with the hard work of people like Laura Mary - Lynn and Leila things are happening in this school district.

My Reflections:

The Community of Learners is being driven not only by a group of passionate teachers but has great support from the school district. They are a forward thinking group who have a clear 'Big Picture' view of their district. Having visited Canadian Schools before I am convinced the School district model is something we need in NZ. The COS project the Nelson City Schools are engaging is an exciting opportunity but it is a beginning and rather than having one associate Principal released for a couple of days a week, a fulltime COS supervisor/ director would provide a better overview of the project and have the time to ensure positive outcomes. The school district system allows for more collaboration between schools and teachers. The teachers felt they belonged more to the school district than the school.

There was a genuine connection between the high schools and the elementary schools. Teachers moved between schools and this included taking leadership roles in the High Schools. Elementary teachers attended presentations of projects by high school students. Again our COS will allow us to do this but we probably need to focus on Teaching and Learning as a whole rather than individual 'silos' such as Mathematics or Literacy.

The Community of Schools had a well embedded Inquiry cycle that the students liked and were very familiar with. They were introduced to it at Second Grade and the same model was being used up to Ninth grade. It integrated subjects well and meaningfully and it allowed time for students to really delve deep into their chosen topic. Because it is student driven the children are engaged and motivated and I think this is key. Often classes run a teacher driven inquiry that misses the interests of the student, often drags and as a result the final outcomes are disappointing and often pointless.

There was not a big investment in eLearning as a tool for learning.

On a completely different topic, after visiting two schools and discussing administration organisation with the Principals and District members I think I'm going to look at how other schools on my trip organise their office. All the schools we visited today had fulltime office managers and they did all administration. The Principal's role was very much the core business.

Implications for HSS:

As a school we have discussed how do we embed our learner qualities and values? We have also debated their worth over the key competences. However, seeing the Community Learners embedded so well in the classes I observed I believe we should look to introducing our learner qualities to students, new teachers and even parents at the start of the year in a mass collaborative way. Then develop a plan of how we ensure they are effectively reinforced throughout the year. Dare I say it may be time to consider whether our six qualities and five values still reflect our schools and do we even need nine separate words.

With the current COS model we would appoint an Associate Principal for 0.4. Something no school is truly excited about and really I don't see any Principal putting up their hand. If the larger schools in the cluster contributed a further 0.6 we could then appoint a fulltime COS Director who could then focus solely on our project and the needs of the district. Either way I now strongly believe the COS is vital to our cluster.

We need to look at how we present our inquiries and whether we are truly integrating these through the curriculum. We have a model which is good but do all teachers, and more importantly students, understand and own it. We need students speaking the language of the Inquiry Cycle.

Consider a 10 Challenge type programme. We have talked about it but I believe this idea may be more achievable.

Part Four: Connected Classrooms Projects - School District 74, BC

Background:

This school district is geographically isolated and also the schools have very small numbers, both the high schools and the elementary. Obviously this makes class sizes small and each cohort year group is very small and most students could conceivably go right through school with the same children in their class. Socially this is very isolating. At high school level with few specialist teachers subject content could be limited.

The school district is situated in the Rocky Mountains area about 4 hours east of Vancouver, BC. Each school is around an hour apart.

The school district has 60% First Nation people and this comes with historic social issues in families with many parents struggling with parenting skills. This is due to a lack of role modelling parenting skills through generations - an outcome of the institutionalising of generations in the Indian Residential schools. Attendance was not an issue as school was the most consistent thing in their lives. The behaviour of the students was generally good as the students respected the institution of the school and the teachers built relationships with the children and so explicitly understood their needs.

Along with the social and geographical isolation, the teachers felt real professional isolation as they hardly saw another teacher throughout the year apart from the small number in their school.



Connected Class at Cayoosh Elementary

The Connected Classroom Project:

With the challenges described above a group of teachers and administrators from the school district got together to come up with a way of making cohort groups bigger and addressing the social isolation students felt. They developed the Connected Classrooms Projects with Lytton, Cayoosh, Cache Creek and Ashcroft Elementary Schools.

This project brought a Grade 6-8 class together from each school every day via video conferencing.

Each class had cameras, sound equipment, and interactive whiteboards installed and teachers would collaborate together planning their units of study. One teacher would take the lead for a unit. When the classes got together the lead teacher would review what they had done or a student would do this. All four classes are visible on the large screen in the classrooms. Collaborative work is seen on the SMART boards of all classes and in the classes I visited students seemed to manage the SMART board. A sound system allowed students from each school to share their thoughts and where they were at in their integrated unit. They also could ask questions and students from other schools could suggest answers.

I was impressed with how student-led their learning was with the lead teacher role being just to manage the link-up. Students I observed had been working on projects for a while and were excited about how they were going to present their project and were sharing ideas across schools on how best they could share with their audience on the presentation night. There was a real buzz about this.



Lytton Connected Class heads off on a field trip with a class from Lillooet

Another innovative aspect to this project is when a class goes on a field trip it generally includes one or more of the classes in the Connected Classroom group. The day I was there the students from Lytton were heading off on a field trip to a Farm and were picking up a Connected Class from Lillooet on the way.

The teachers commented that the video conference connections are great but the opportunity to get together on a field trip was rich socially and was an important part of the project.

I had the chance to visit Kumsheen High School in Lytton and while there the visual media class linked up with students at Ashcroft High School. The visual media specialist teacher was in Ashcroft and the teacher at Kumsheen took a facilitators role during the lesson.



12th Grade Kumsheen High School students connected to Visual Media teacher and her class Ashcroft High School.

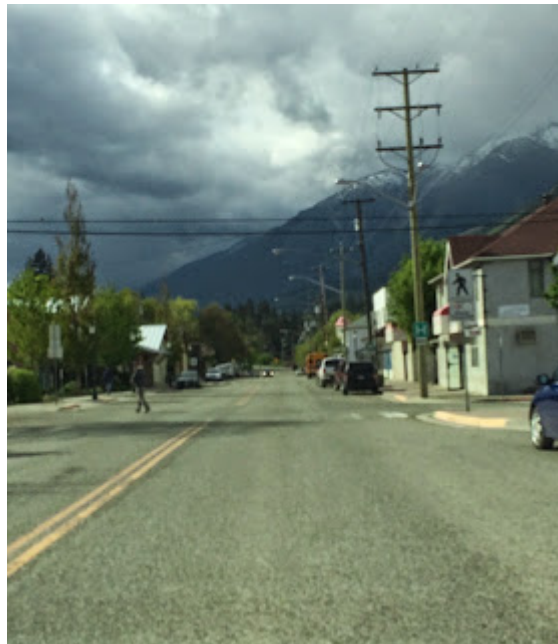
The students were reviewing a recent photography field trip all the Year 12 visual media students had been on to Victoria, the state capital. The students I spoke to were very excited about the trip both because they loved the work they did with a professional photographer in Victoria and because of the social interaction with other 12th grade students. On its own Kumsheen could not have afforded to employ the services of a professional photographer but as a collective of schools it was possible.

All the teachers I spoke to said for them as professionals the Connected Classrooms was a wonderful tool for allowing them to connect with colleagues and they felt they were better teachers because of it. They commented that they learnt a lot from each other and they had to be on top of their game when they were the lead teacher in particular, so this meant they really had to reflect more on their practice. Despite their geographical isolation they said they felt very connected to the community of teachers within their school district.

One of the spin offs of the connected classrooms has been the breaking down of the competition between students of the various towns. Historically, there had been huge competition between the four towns - Lytton, Lillooet, Cache Creek and Ashcroft to the point that when they got together for sports, games would often turn to violence. The students had no connection with each other and only knew students from the other towns as historic rivals. The connected classroom projects, now five years old, has brought these students together and they have got to know them as fellow students and even friends - a face, a name, an individual.

Lytton Elementary School

This was the first school in this district I visited. With 90% First Nation People there were many challenging social issues in the community - alcoholism, domestic violence, and unemployment. However, despite this, immediately you could see the school was a warm and caring environment. With a roll of 70 and four teachers the Principal said they "rattled around" in the large building they had as it used to be the District High School.



Main St Lytton, BC

When I arrived the students were all sitting around having breakfast, something that happens every morning. The Principal, Denise O'Connor was busy finding some lunch for some students heading away on a field trip. There was no doubt there were some challenges teaching in this school but the atmosphere was about learning and the students were keen to get stuck into their day. Denise had lived in the community all her life and clearly had a real passion for the community.



Maggie with Principal, Denise O'Connor

Chris Lewis, the class teacher, of the Connected Class was a very positive teacher who clearly had an excellent relationship with the class. I spoke with him briefly before he headed off on his class field. He said the Connected Class Project is vitally important to his little class (15 students) as it socially and academically expands the student's world. However, he said the issue for them was connectivity. Their network was poor and connection was unreliable. Across the town the problem was the same and although there has been talk from both government and business level, the solution is a distance away. The problem was not so bad in other towns, which were larger.



Lytton Successful Learners Traits

Kumsheen High School

We briefly visited Kumsheen High School with Denise. This school has 45 students and Principal, Chris, explained the challenges and limitations of so few students.

Because of these the Connected classrooms were vital. The students can access specialist teachers in subjects at other schools and also have access to experts who can link in the school via the video conferencing. The professional photographer used for the Victoria field trip is a great example. They have the ability to link with the expert before and after the field trip to set up and then review the project. The school was using the Google Apps to collaborate with peers.



Both staff and students were very positive and focused on learning. One 12 grade student commented with pride that he was going to College next year and not going to waste time taking a gap year off.

Cayoosh Elementary School - Lillooet

This is one of two elementary schools in this town and is the largest in the school district with 180 students. I was welcomed by Patrice Barth, the Principal, who gave me an overview of the school and the area and escorted me to Errin Gregory Connected Classroom. Lillooet is a small town with the main industry being a large plywood factory. The school had around 60% First Nation People.



Cayoosh Elementary in Lillooet, BC

Errin's class had 26 8th Grade students. One of the features of the class was Rosie its pet tarantula. Quite a unique pet and the children were excited to demonstrate feeding Rosie.



The class also has 1:2 Workbook laptops in the class, which many students were using when I was in the room.



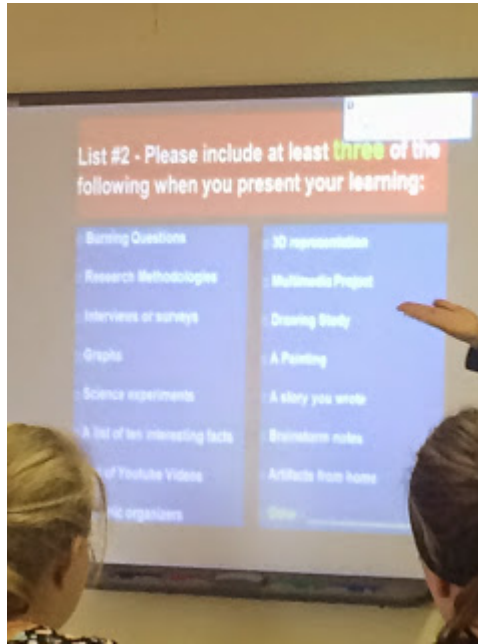
1:2 Ratio of Workbooks in the class

The students had been working on individual projects at all three schools in the connected conference. Errin was the lead teacher for these projects and was leading the video conference with Cache Creek and Ashcroft.



All three Connected Classrooms working together.

Each school reported on their progress, with students leading all of the discussion. Then Errin collected in ideas for presenting projects from her class and wrote them up in a document on the SMART board.



Children discuss presentation ideas - screen visible to all three classes.

Each class shared their ideas for presentation by either sharing their documents on the second screen in each class or by one student verbally reporting back. The process was clearly well embedded in the class's routine and students responded well to their interactions with students from other schools.

Ashcroft High School

We did actually spend a great deal of time in this school but went to lunch with their Visual Media teacher and one of the original Connected Classroom teachers, Brooke Haller who worked at Lytton Elementary School at the initiation of the project. She commented that the School District leaders and Principals were 100% behind the project both in terms of financial costs of setting up, allowing flexibility in the curriculum and by encouragement and interest in the project and it's progress. They now see it as a vital part of success in teaching and learning in their district. She also mentioned the difference the Connected Classroom project has made to overcoming professional isolation in her region. Teachers from other schools are interacting and sharing with each other on an almost daily basis.

My Reflections

Innovation in this unique environment has been about overcoming barriers and creating innovative modern learning environments where students can interact with their peers. Class programmes observed model best practice – student led, choice for students.

Clearly, access to a quality network is a barrier they need to overcome but this is achievable and it didn't stop them achieving a level of connectedness. The idea of Connected Classroom doesn't need to be limited to schools in isolation - it also has applications for all schools as the technology and concept would allow classes to link up across districts, countries or across the globe. Neighbouring small rural schools in New Zealand would really benefit from this model. If they could get over their local rivalry and competition (which this model would help with) their students would really benefit from the greater level of social and academic interactions. As Principal of Tasman, we had around 18 Year 7 /8 students. 9 Year 8s. If genders were 50/50 then that would leave 4 or 5 of each gender. Chances are these children would have gone through the past 7 years with the same students, not an ideal situation. If we were to link with other local schools of similar sizes we could have increased the size of the cohort, increase the opportunities, and reduce the isolation of each school "Island." Tomorrows School has given us many opportunities but it has also made each school an individual island that we tend to protect pretty closely.

Hampden Street is truly lucky with the level of ability and capacity we have in IT and our network connection. We could connect with local schools but as we are relatively large we don't have the same social isolation issues. We could easily link with schools in other parts of the country and collaborate on projects. I think our best opportunity would be to be a global Connected Classroom with a school in Indonesia. This would easily be achievable at HSS. With the staff and student's skills in using Google to collaborate on work and our existing relationship with Indonesia through AsiaNZ, we have a good opportunity to genuinely collaborate in a global connected classroom.

Parallels with the needs of the First Nation people and Maori was interesting. Clearly the needs of Maori and support for their culture within education is well ahead of where the First Nation people are. The generational effect of the residential schools has been a limiting factor. Many aspects of the First Nation Culture has been lost through the affects of the residential schools. Very few First Nation can speak their native language and so even with 90% First Nation students at Lytton, establishing any type of bilingual programme would be difficult.

It's all about relationships and this was so true in this challenging environment. These teachers were dedicated and knew their students well. The staff cared about their students and knew the community.

Implications for HSS.

Clearly visiting after two school districts I can see the need for student agency at all grades is the way forward in modern education. Students owning their learning and being able to articulate and own their inquiry process is vital. Once again the opportunity for student's to **present their project to an authentic audience** was key to the success of the Inquiry Process. Many (even most) schools in NZ, including Hampden Street, tend to have their inquiry as a teacher led model. The teacher may say it is student led but the students are following a model they don't own and see it almost like a 'paint by numbers.' We also tend to run our inquiry separate from the "valuable" literacy and numeracy time" which always happens in the morning. Why!!! Genuinely integrating these subject's into a student-led inquiry makes them so much more relevant, engaging and authentic for students.

As mentioned in my reflection, the concept of the connected classroom has excellent applications for our school. It would give us the ability to link up and collaborate with another school either in another part of the country or internationally in Australia or Indonesia. It could be linked with our Google Apps for Education. We would not necessarily need to spend a fortune on expensive audio visual equipment as we could use Google Hangouts or Skype for Free. Using Google docs students would have the opportunity to genuinely collaborate on projects between schools.

A Connected Classroom concept could also be used to link classes with experts and teachers with other teachers to collaborate on projects. Several classes working on the same topic could video conference with an expert as a rich way to share knowledge, without the expense of getting them in and with students and teachers being able to interpret the information together as they listen to the information.

Part Five: Colorado Academy - Independent Not for Profit School, Co, USA

Background:



Colorado Academy is a K -12 independent school located near the city of Denver and situated on 95 acres. The school is over 100 years old and started out as a church based school, then became a Military Academy and has been in its current independent school format since the early 1970s. The school has 950 students with 23% of students of colour, 75% of students are receiving some form of financial support.

The school features small class sizes of between 16 – 21 students. They also provide on-site child care for staff, free lunches for students and staff and private music tuition, of which 47% of students take advantage.

The school has a Board of Governors who are nominated to the position, an overall Head of School and then three Principals who run the three levels in the school – Lower, Middle and Senior schools.

My host for the day was Principal of the Lower School (elementary level), Lisa Ulsh. Lisa has been in the role for three years and is responsible for teaching and learning programmes in the K – 6 area as well as being a member of the overall leadership team.

The school is extremely well resourced and its extensive grounds are well maintained.

One feature of the school is its focus on quality professional development for staff. The school puts \$239 000 into professional development/ year. The school 100% funds individual teachers workshops or conferences etc. If a staff member wishes to complete their masters, the school will cover 85% of the tuition costs.

Innovations:

Project X – traditionally, the school had operated as three separate schools but staff felt more collaboration between each “school” would be beneficial for continuity for students and good support for teachers particularly at transition years. In Project X teachers from each ‘school’ do a tour of each area. For example 8 teachers visited maths at 9th grade, 6th Grade and 3rd Grade. This gives these teachers an overview about what the subject looks like at each level.

Below is a copy of the invitation Eric Augustin, sent out to teachers inviting them to join a Literacy tour:

"All,

You are invited to spend an afternoon, December 9 (F day), witnessing first-hand how students experience literature at CA. This is open to all, not just English teachers!

We will spend an afternoon beginning in a LS classroom, move onto a MS class and finish with an US Literature class. At the conclusion of the tour, we will gather to toast the teachers who opened their rooms to us, share and discuss our observations. See below and the attached for details.

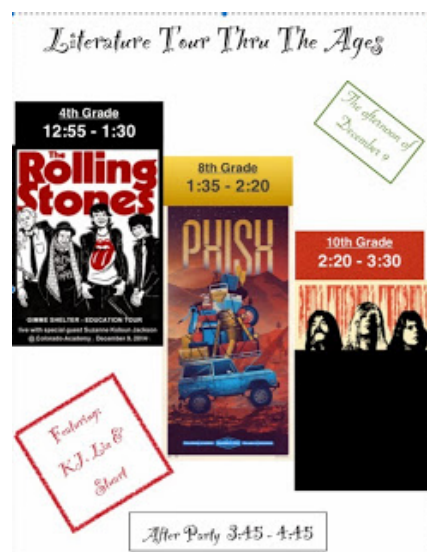
We request you participate in the entire tour, not just select one class to observe. Therefore, this may result in missing a class of your own and if so, let me know how we can help provide coverage for that class.

Please email me if you are interested in joining the tour. Dependent upon response we may have to limit the number of attendees.

Schedule: Dec 9 - F Day."

12:55 - 1:30	4th Grade - Suzanne Kolsun-Jackson
1:35 - 2:20	8th Grade - Liz McIlravy
2:20 - 3:30	10th Grade - Stuart Mills
3:40 - 4:30	Debrief in Project X Room

To add a bit of fun to the concept, Eric makes up tour posters to advertise the tour and create a bit of interest and discussion amongst staff. See the example below:



Another idea in this project was more radical. 'Student for a Day,' in this programme teachers spend a day in a classroom in different areas of the school as a student. The teacher does everything the student has to do including any homework.

At the end of the day Eric poses some reflective questions to assist the teacher think about their experience. Here are a selection of questions from a recent 'Student for a Day' experience: (Taken from an email from Eric to the teacher)

"For the reflection I encourage you to be descriptive rather than judgmental

How would you describe the student's day?

What was it like to be a student here today?

How interesting were the classes from a student's perspective?

How much input did the students have in the learning?

How much 'air time' was controlled by the student's vs the teacher?

How active were the students?

What did you find most challenging throughout the day?

What did you wish a teacher did to make the learning more accessible?

In terms of your own practice, what takeaways do you have?"

Below is the teacher's honest response to the questions:

"Eric,

Thanks so much for setting this up! I did find it incredibly valuable, thanks.

I would describe the students day as fragmented. Inserting a transitions into a student's schedule every 45 - 15 minutes, makes it tough to create a state of flow and deep exploration. The longest time a student is in one particular place is 60 minutes during the first period of the day, but every other class, advisory, break, lunch and sports are a maximum of 45 minutes. It takes the average kid at least 5, maybe 10 minutes, to re-engage in a new subject and classroom, which leaves about 35-40 minutes of actual work.

I really enjoyed being a student and feel like the majority of classes are taught well, in the sense that teachers provide meaningful and relevant lessons. From a student's perspective, I get the impression that they feel supported, care about and generally enjoy themselves.

My personal benchmark for 'interesting' is a class that compels kids to investigate a topic further on their own. I would say that Math and Photography met that benchmark. It's honestly hard to say how engaged students are in a given class, because they are so complicit and obedient, most of the time. Many of the classes felt didactic and didn't leave a lot of room for self-expression or investigation, but I also understand that some kids are acquiring basic mastery of subjects, so direct instruction may still be appropriate.

In math, students were allowed to solve algebraic expressions in several ways, which left room for choice and also cultivated a real understanding of the material, rather than plugging numbers into an equation. In science, students had just finished a unit on Mendelian genetics and were asked to create a hybrid creature that (octopus and cat) took into consideration dominant and recessive allele's to figure out which characteristic of each animal would show up in their offspring. The photography class showcased student's portfolio's focused on the concept of 'reflections'. Students gave one another feedback on their composition, angles, frame of reference, etc. It was a really cool project and allowed lots of room for student voices.

The photography class was especially student driven followed by input by students in English as they reviewed and analysed essays from previous Wrap tests. It's clear to me that student engagement is directly correlated to their participation and voice in the class. The more they are given direct instruction, the harder I found it was for them, and me, to concentrate.

I found the transitions most challenging and the lack of time to sink my teeth into a topic. When I read

a great book, magazine article, Khan Academy video, etc. in order to gain a deep appreciation or understanding, I usually need a minimum of 1 hour to tinker with the material, process the information and reflect/synthesise the things I've just learned. I like the idea of creating longer blocks of time, but don't know how to achieve this with all of the other competing demands.

I wish more teachers allowed students to teach their peers and learn from one another, create opportunities for personal choice and we're responsive to student interests, rather than arbitrarily completing a lesson in order to 'stay on schedule'. When students are forced to explain a concept to a classmate, their learning is deepened in a way that cannot be achieved through direct instruction. When kids are allowed to take a concept and investigate it further on their own, they gain a sense of ownership and agency to be active and engaged learners. Lastly, when a teacher can realise that a concept needs additional explanation or a conversation goes in an interesting, and relevant tangent, a good teacher will cultivate this exploration, rather than cutting a rich conversation short in order to finish a lesson.

My take away from today is that kids want to be joyful and when they feel joy, it opens their minds to learning. When a room is an anxious, stressful and rigid place, those same habits of mind are cultivated, which stunts growth and learning. I realise that I need to make an effort to be more of a student of teaching by seeking input colleagues and looking to others for examples of excellent teaching. I am a better teacher as a result of frequent and ongoing dialog with Dani and Adrian, and I believe this approach should be duplicated across the school. It's more time consuming than planning lessons alone, but the outcomes from many thoughtful and intelligent minds is always better."

The teacher made some real insights that can only strengthen themselves as teachers. These insights were not about subjects and content but more about the sort of environment they experienced first-hand that was conducive to learning. The "Student for a day" concepts sound quite out there but when you read the teachers response you release how powerful such an experience could be.

Buddy Project

Next week was going to be senior launch week. This week is post exam week where senior students do some college orientation but also spend some time with their junior buddies. This would include in class help but also attending a zoo trip together. Throughout the year these student support their buddy. This buddy project is part of a larger pastoral approach across the whole school around positive behaviour and respect. Both Maggie and I noted how friendly polite and respectful the students were.

I attended a global perspective class (Humanities) where these students were really engaged in their learning and were doing a project where they were developing a new city anywhere in the world. Students had to understand why the host country was the best location for the city. It was a student-led project and one student even commented he enjoyed the level of **student agency** in the Global Awareness class. They said it allowed them the time to gain a greater depth of understanding of the topics.

Facilities:

One of the special features of the school grounds is in the junior Science lab. This lab is an old observatory that sits on pontoons in the middle of a lake. The lake has just been dredged and surroundings replanted so that it will become a living habitat that students can study from the science room.

As mentioned earlier, the school is incredibly well resourced. The innovation lab is a new feature of the school. It replaces the old technology rooms we would have at intermediate and high schools and could be something a Primary school could look at. It incorporated the best of technology rooms in terms of wood and metal working equipment but featured many high tech machines such as 3D printers, Laser printers, robotics and computing. The emphasis is

very much design and build. As well as normal class sessions the school also runs an engineer's club for students who have a passion for this area. Their latest project is to convert an old school bus into a camper van!



The High tech Innovation Lab



The Learning Centre a feature of each of the three "schools." Features the traditional library and a suit of desktops for student research. It is also manned by a full time teacher who is available to assist students.



Sets of iPad in junior classes



Robotics in the Lower School - Lego Mindstorm

Around the High School block was a number of breakout spaces for students to use in study periods. They were being well used and some were collaborative spaces and other quiet spaces. One of the features of them was whiteboard walls where students could do problem solving for science, maths etc. These were also a feature of many of the classrooms.



Student collaborative work space with whiteboard table and wall



Quiet zone student work space with blackboard wall.

Staffing:

Independent schools typically don't pay as well as state schools but it appears the conditions are excellent. As mentioned earlier the school has a commitment to professional development and in supporting their teachers to Masters level qualifications. Because they are independent they have the opportunity to carefully choose staff to suit their schools strategic direction and Head of School, Mike Davis, emphasised this is a really important area for them. Teachers are provided with lunch daily, they have a gym and weights room at their disposal, there is onsite childcare from babies to pre-k (5Years) and staff have plenty of release time to allow for planning and studies. There was a genuine positive 'buzz' amongst the staff.

Finally a neat idea for literacy. Called Literature Circles, the teacher previews a number of novels/ books. The preview would be done in an exciting way to create interest. The students then choose a book that interests them. You may need to limit the number of children in each group (4-5 would be ideal). The children are then grouped according to their book and work together as a book club. Coming together to share their thoughts on the book and could collectively decide how they would present their book.

The school has 1:1 iPads for students in the Lower School and 1:1 devices in the Middle and Senior school. Most seniors had both a Macbook Air and a iPad Air. Students used these extensively to assist their learning.

My Reflections:

This was a beautiful school with a passionate staff. There is lovely tone right down to the children and staff sharing the same lunch room. Like so many schools they are transitioning into a new pedagogy that is more student led and takes the teachers off the "stage." The very positive thing at Colorado Academy is, after talking to all the leadership team, the change taking place is shared vision from all school leaders and all had an excellent understanding of the big picture and the direction the school was heading. They could then provide the quality PD opportunities to support staff through the transformation as well as focusing their appointments process on the type of teacher they need to support their pedagogical changes.

The Project X is an innovative way to open up the various areas of the school and create some consistency of practice. It was interesting to note that the teacher who was a student for a day focused on how the teaching happened and what the class environment was like as opposed to what is taught. This is interesting as secondary subject areas tend to focus on content. I believe a project X type programme could be a valuable part of our new Nelson City COS.

The culture of the school was something that stood out to me. The students were articulate and focused on learning. As I walked around the school they were friendly and polite. The school was clean and tidy and both staff and students were very proud of their learning environment. This doesn't happen by accident and, the Community of Learners Schools, at Colorado Academy School values are clearly articulated and reinforced. Students appreciate the level of trust and self-responsibility the staff provide them. This is emphasised from a very early age.

Once again the role of the teacher and the student in the class was a big discussion point. Students talking about student agency and emphasising that they like to drive their own

learning and being given time to delve deep into their topics and get it completed. The teacher stepping off the 'stage,' putting away the text books and being the activator of learning. It is easy to say Colorado Academy can do amazing things because it has heaps of money but the reality is that what it does well doesn't cost money - student engagement, quality teachers, quality professional development in school, and a positive school culture.

Again I saw the importance of providing real opportunities to present to an audience. Not just in topic but while we were there all areas of the school were preparing for a school-wide art exhibition for parents. They also had an art studio where individual senior students run their own Art Exhibitions.

The school facilities were well thought out and very much kept pace with changes in education. Use of devices by students, innovation labs, breakout spaces, whiteboard walls, and robotics all very much embedded in programmes.

The idea of a buddy project that crosses across intermediate and secondary is really innovative. Not a Big Brother Big Sister type project for 'At-Risk' kids that involves dragging kids out of class but an in-class programme that might see a student support a younger child in reading, writing, or maths. Maybe attending a shared trip. Logistically a nightmare but more organic than the 'Intervention' programmes we currently have available to us.



Implications for HSS:

Innovative furnishings in Lower School

The Project X concept needs to be part of our Nelson City Community of schools if we are to really understand each other and work together successfully.

We must continue down the path of student led learning and as a cluster of schools we must look to ensure this model is consistent at all levels.

Once again the presentation of work to an audience is emphasised and as a school we must seek these genuine opportunities to present to an audience.

As part of our cluster we could look at some organic ways to develop buddy programmes across the schools; whether it be in-class, use of students on camp, music or cultural exchanges.

Colorado Academy reinforced the importance of appointments and ensuring we are choosing teachers for our school and our direction not just "Good Teachers." Every teacher should be a literacy or numeracy specialist but if that's what makes you good then you are missing the big picture. We need people who can build relationships with children, engage them, allow students to take the reins and drive their learning and who feel they don't have to be 'in control."

Their emphasis on professional development also goes along with this. Quality PD available to address teacher's needs and the strategic direction of the school. Ensuring staff stay attuned with changes in pedagogy. Also giving financial support and encouraging staff to

extend themselves academically by supporting teachers through their Masters. The school was focused on building the capacity of their staff.

Part Six: Castle Rock Elementary School (CRE)

Background:

This school is a state school in the Douglas County School District. Douglas County is an affluent county but the school has gone through some dramatic changes in recent years with the introduction of the high stake “No Child Left Behind” policy and with a restructure of staffing in the school district, including the abolition of the teachers union. I got the picture from teachers I spoke to morale was not high amongst some teachers.



Maggie outside Castle Rock Elementary

Politics aside, I was keen to visit CRE for two reasons; It is a State school and provides a point of comparison with the independent schools I am visiting and secondly, I worked at CRE 23 years ago as a fourth grade teacher, whilst on a teaching exchange so I was interested to see how the school had changed and evolved.

Castle Rock has 426 students K-6 Grade. Although Douglas County is an affluent area the school still has 35% reduced or free lunches.



School's student Learner Qualities.

My host was Principal, Kelly Ursetta. She has been Principal of CRE for 3 years.

The school has 1:2 ratio of devices in the school. K-2 Grade classes have iPads and the 3-6 Grade classes use Chromebooks.

Innovations:

The school has put a lot of work in to environment education and the feature of this is their Habitat project. This is a joint project with the local community. It involves developing a nature trail in a reserve adjacent to the school. Each class has a time (45mins - 1 hour/week) to go and work on the Habitat and many of the grade levels have special projects within the Habitat they are working on. In the weekend community members also come and help with the Habitat and they also have some financial support from the local council.



A wetland area on the School's Habitat Trail



Students use QR codes as a way for students/ parents/ visitors to link to the Habitat Blog and gain information about each area of the Habitat.

For their efforts developing the Habitat, and their recycling and energy saving measures, the school has been awarded a Green Flag award, similar to our Enviro-schools awards. The only difference is the Green Flag Award is worth \$8000/annually to the school. That money has gone into more environmental projects in the school.

In the States many schools like to flag to the public the particular areas they are good at or specialise in. I saw Elementary schools that specialised in Science and Technology and others that called themselves Schools of the Arts. Castle Rock is very much recognised for it's environmental work and within the school many of the integrated topics studied are on an environmental theme.

The school uses a Project Based Learning approach to topic studies and it was pleasing to see the range of text books that occupied the classrooms in the 90s had disappeared, apart from Mathematics.

The district dictated "reverse" planning method has its merits but it means the students have less ownership of the Learning Outcomes. However the students are getting the opportunity to do their own self-directed Passions projects. Kelly said that their focus for PD had been around big picture pedagogy - Innovation, high engagement, student centred teaching and learning.



Schools Project Based Learning Model.

One innovative idea around PD is similar to HSS ICT workshops last year but takes it a step further. They call it a Cafe Session. It starts with staff getting together for coffee and cakes and the presenters for the day, who are generally staff members, present a preview of what their workshop will be on that day. There are always three choices on offer. From there staff choose the workshop they wish to attend and go off with the presenter to their room. Topics covered could be eLearning, big picture pedagogy, an environment topic or core subjects. The staff don't have to go to all sessions but if there was enough interest the session could be repeated. In a system where PD budgets are limited this is a good use of resources and staff skills and knowledge.

Reflection:

Kelly talked about her challenges and like many schools finds staff Performance management a huge task. This was backed up when talking to some Douglas County Teachers who said the implementation of performance pay has increased work and caused tension in schools. One teacher said it is particularly disappointing when he had achieved to an advanced teachers level and then wasn't paid the incentive promised! Kelly commented that one of her challenges has been maintaining staff and this is possibly an outcome of Douglas County Districts demands and expectations on teachers.

Clearly political interference has had some morale issues and caused some good teachers to feel not as valued. However, despite this I found Castle Rock Elementary a really positive place and the students were focused on their learning, friendly and articulate. I think despite whatever is going on behind the scenes at District level, Kelly and her team have created a warm and friendly learning environment.

Kelly did comment that one of the biggest on-going challenges is ensuring they maintain the momentum around the Habitat. They need passionate teachers to drive the project and ensure it is well maintained and utilised by the school. This is a bit like the HSS radio station, the concept has huge potential but is only as good as we allow it to be. Staff need to believe in it and see it as worthwhile. Saying that, the concept of the Habitat is a good one. Each year our seniors go off and plant trees in our community. It is a nice way for us to give back to the community, however, students have very little ownership of the project and after the planting is done many wouldn't spare another thought for what they have done. It was something they had to do.

If with the council and maybe the Environment Centre we identified an area near the school that we could maintain and develop for the community and all students could have an opportunity to contribute, I think students would feel a greater degree of ownership.

The Cafe Session was a great idea to utilise the skills within your staff and not just in eLearning. It gives staff an opportunity to step up and share and having three groups it means the staff are split into smaller groups which means each workshop will have smaller numbers and staff can really delve into the topic.

Project Based Learning (PBL), like Inquiry learning, is a good concept but the reverse planning means teachers are the ones directing the outcome. The model is one being promoted to the schools by the school district and hasn't been developed by the school. Also like many of the Inquiry models that exist in NZ schools, the PBL model is linear. Children follow it in predetermined steps. This limits flexibility as students often like to start at different places in the process. They may not need the early stages because they may already have that knowledge. They may want to start with a prototype or an outcome and work back to find why they are having issues or challenges with their outcome. A classic Kiwi example of this is the SAUCE model developed in Spotswood School for Spotswood School but then their enterprising Principal went and touted it across the country. Many schools took it on but no-one, I don't think, owned it except Spotswood School. It was flawed in its design as it was linear and because staff had it presented to them as "This is our model," they didn't own it and gradually it died a natural death.

After bagging the School district, I think the district concept reined in and with a non-political agenda is a good one. The district does a lot of the admin and has the buying power and influence of a large organisation. It also has a big picture view of the needs across the district and can provide the quality PD and resourcing needed. It would also ensure better transition and genuine linkage between Primary, Intermediate and Secondary. It would take away a lot of the competition that has developed out of the "Tomorrows Schools" self-governing model. At the moment we are islands and we waste a lot of resources doing things for ourselves that would collectively benefit all schools. With economies of scale there are winner schools (the big ones) and loser schools. The Nelson City COS is a step in the right direction and after reflection on the School District Concept I believe the possibilities are exciting.

Implications for HSS

As mentioned the Habitat idea is a good one and if we could find an area near the school, maybe on the Grampians, that we could develop with Council support that would be a really positive initiative for the school. It would require some passionate staff, students and even parents/ grandparents to drive it and could also be linked with our Enviro-group but not exclusively for them.

The Cafe Session could be something we do with our Inquiry groups. Each Inquiry group has one or two presenters (This could rotate). The group prepares a workshop and the presenter presents it. The other members of the group attend workshops by other inquiry groups. This could be a really effective way of sharing the work of the inquiry teams and getting everyone involved.

We need to look carefully at our student inquiry model - do we all own it? Does it provide students with the flexibility students need? How do we plan for it? These are some good mid-year review questions we can ask ourselves and a good discussion point for Pedagogy Inquiry group.

As a cluster of schools we need to make sure our COS works and we must focus on the collaboration part of the concept, rather than taking the 'what's in it for me?' approach. I believe it is the future direction of our system and most importantly will benefit our students.



Castle Rock from CRE

Part Seven: iZone Project - Bronx District Schools

Background:

The iZone project harnesses today's resources to design schools around the unique strengths, interests and needs of each student. It looked at innovative ways schools could engage 21st Century learners within their context. Al, the AP at Compass High School had worked on the iZone project. He explained that he had worked with 50 schools on 25 distinctly different projects. As I have found on this tour innovation is very contextual. The most innovative ideas have been tailored or designed specifically for the learners at that school/ school district. I was keen to visit schools in New York in a lower socio-economic area to see how the iZone programme had improved outcomes for students in this tough area. It doesn't come any poorer in New York than the Bronx. The Bronx is the poorest district in America. 90% of the students that attend the schools in this area live below the poverty line. Most come from broken homes, some from no homes. Many students' parents are in prison and health care is poor.

The Bronx has the highest rate of Asthma in the US and most student asthmatics have no medication. While we were visiting one of the schools they had a "Code Blue." This is where a student had a severe asthma attack and they had to call 911 for medical assistance. This was the third Code Blue that week.



The reality for many in New York

The teachers escort the students out of Middle School at the end of the day to protect the children from gangs who will try to recruit, sell drugs, or intimidate students.

Entering Compass High School Maggie and I were shocked at the level of security. I had heard about it but to experience it first hand was disturbing. I had to remove my shoes and belt, hand over my wallet, phone, watch etc as did Maggie. This all went through an X-ray Machine, meanwhile, we had to walk through a metal detector. The entrance area had four armed police officers present as well as a number of school staff. It was sobering and quite a contrast from the other schools I had visited.



High security in school Foyer

Both schools I visited were relatively small in US terms. This was not always the case. Both Schools were in buildings which contained several schools. Originally the building would have been one large school but the academic results were so bad and teacher quality and morale so low, the New York School District broke up the schools into smaller, often specialist schools. Compass High School was in the Stevenson High School Building. It was one of 9 schools on the Campus. The Original Stevenson High School had 4000 students (Grades 10-12) and a 10% graduation rate!

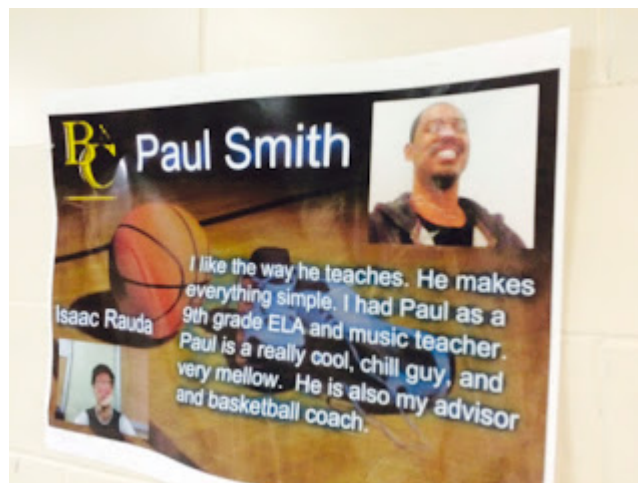
Compass High School:

After the shock of the high security welcome I wasn't sure what I was in for but the moment I entered Compass High Schools fourth floor home you could see things were very different. The relaxed friendly tone extended through both staff and students. As mentioned the school is one of 9 schools in the old Stevenson High School building. The school shares the resources such as the gym, music rooms, labs, and sports facilities with the other schools. Compass High School has the fourth floor and is really just a collection of classes and a couple of offices for staff and interns. The school has been part of the iZone project and they are an internship school. With a roll of 330 students it is a relatively small high school.



Quest, my host at Compass High School

All 11 and 12 Grade students spend two days a week working on their internship. This would be what we call work experience but is more in depth than this type of programme in New Zealand. A number of students have internships within the school. They may be an assistant to the Assistant Principal, and IT maintenance technician or in a clerical role. This idea is to give them a "Real World Experience." Many students had particular projects they were working on within their internship. The students I spoke to enjoy the responsibility of the internship and were focused on going to college or into the workforce. All students need to develop a Learning plan and track their learning and their personal goals on this. The plan belongs to the student and is based on the students' needs both academic and social. Each student has an advisor/ mentor on the staff who helps them stay on track with their plan.



Teacher Profile outside the classroom.

The relationship between staff and students was evident. The environment was relaxed. Students know all the teachers by their christian names and outside the classes is a profile of the teacher, written by the students. While visiting compass my tour guide was a student named Quest. He was an articulate young man who was doing an intern in the IT department. You could see he was the "Go To" guy for IT issues and he showed me where he worked with pride. While talking to Quest he spoke with wisdom beyond his years. He said, "For a long time I felt all the learning should come from the teacher but now I realise I'm the one responsible for my learning and the teachers are there to help guide me." Quest plans to go to college and study computing when he graduates from High school.



Restorative Justice Planning



Quest's Learning Plan

Students all have Google accounts and share their work with staff and peers. AI, the AP said that they are developing a Restorative Justice Model with the students as it fitted well with their student-led philosophy. When I was in the school the school interns were working on their Restorative Justice model and discussing it with staff and each other. It was clear the end product would have true student ownership.

Attendance could be better at Compass but AI felt this was because many students were doing extra work for their internship or were having to stay home to support their mothers with younger siblings. He felt their next big step was to try and capture the learning that goes on outside school.



Masters Academy for Grades 11/12



Explorers academy for Grade 10

When you consider the 10% graduation of the old Stevenson High School, Compass High School's 92% graduation rate is pretty impressive and a strong testament to the work they are doing.

Sound View Academy

Sound View was quite a contrast from the almost laid back environment at Compass High School. With two weeks to go in the school year a middle school in the Bronx in spring can be a lively place. The week had been eventful for Principal, Will Frackleton, with three 'Code Blue' health alerts, and a teacher in jail for assaulting a child. However within the school, there was something special about Sound View. Like Compass High School, Sound View is one of three schools within the building. The 400 student school occupied the fourth floor, with around 40 students in a class. The school has sacrificed some of its in-class student ratio to utilise some more community based positions.



Will Frackleton, a committed and caring Principal

Like the School District on Vancouver Island, Sound View operates a Community of Learners. They invest a great deal of staffing and funds linking and ensuring a finger in the pulse of the community. Not just what is happening in families but also things like what the local gangs are up to, who are they scouting, or in liaising with local law enforcement. They employ a community coordinator, who knows the community and is well respected both in the school and in the community. He was not a counsellor but clearly the students had an excellent relationship with him. As mentioned teachers go out of the school at the end of the day to ensure students get home safely and protect them from gangs.

One of the keys to student engagement at Sound View is the use of eLearning. The School employs a full time IT teacher. The school is well resourced with large pods of Mac Book Airs and iPad. The school has been recognised for its innovation in this area and have recently received an Apple Connected School Award. Their plan is to "Create a Digital Culture within their Physical Culture." All students have Google accounts and students collaborate on projects. The school has also made a big commitment in digital media - visual arts, audio media, and movie making.

Sound View provides a stable, consistent, engaging environment for their students and this is reflected in the lowest suspension rate in the district and 92% attendance. As a school they

have a high expectation of achievement for their students. The staff try hard to instil pride in the school and in student's achievement. This includes having a uniform that creates a school identity. The staff work hard, most work from 7am to 7pm and this has led to a high turnover but in recent years staffing has stabilised and Will, the Principal, was very proud of the committed team he had created.

Each staff member has 10-15 students they support in an advisory role.

Clearly this school is built around strong relationships. This was obvious as we visited classes and saw the way students were responding to their teachers and at the end of the day as I stood with Will and the Community Coordinator it was great to see the interactions between these guys and the students. High fives, jokes and conversations about what they were up to in the weekend.

My Reflections:

Relationships, relationships, relationships! These schools quality, genuine student / teacher relationships are the key. Teachers knew their students not just as learners but as individual people. Without these kind of relationships things would no doubt be chaos and students outcomes poor. By splitting the large impersonal schools up the school district has created schools where teachers can get to know each student well. Employing staff specially to link with community has allowed these schools to understand and monitor their communities. This role is something some of our lower decile schools need to consider as they may be more accepted in homes than a social worker or Principal when it comes to sorting out home/school issues.

The teacher advisor provide someone within the school who is looking out for individual needs and student directed programmes, such as the internship programme to ensure that work is relevant and engaging. ELearning had a strong influence in both schools as a tool to engage learners and as key links with the world outside their tough community.

Visiting the Bronx schools was a rich experience. It reminded me of what we take for granted and the trivial things that we sometimes get ourselves wrapped up with at our school. It left a similar impression on me as did visiting the slum school in Jakarta. Too often we seek the next big thing whether it be an IT tool, a course, or a new teaching model or we complain about extra activities interfering with "teaching time," lack of CRT, or slow networks. These things are trivial compared with what the teachers in the Bronx face every day and when it all breaks down the key is for teachers to really know their students and to take time to build strong relationships with them. They reflect the type of person we want the students to be - positive, problem solvers, who are good communicators and genuinely care for others.

Once again school admin support was of a level that the Principals and their management teams could focus on teaching and learning and pastoral care of students. Full time admin support is a 'given' at these schools.

Implications for HSS:

We have been talking relationships for a number of years and this is vitally important. As a school we must continue to emphasise this and provide opportunities to up-skill staff, particularly new staff on our school ethos around this. Maybe as we review our modern teaching pedagogy we should start with relationships at the core because when you know

your children well we can better provide that self-directed programme they need (demand) and you can ensure your programme is relevant and authentic as you understand what it is that engages and motivates each child.



Once again I am reminded of the importance of having teachers who are advisors / mentors for some of our at-risk students. We have discussed setting this up but never formalised the programme. I feel this is a must-do when I'm back on board.

Maybe we don't have the need for a full time community coordinator but even as a part time position a community coordinator would be useful position at HSS. It could be the role is a combination of sports coordinator, family worker and the community role.

I liked the teacher profiles on the doors. It was a nice friendly way to introduce the teacher and particularly effective having the student voice. This is something teachers could do at the start of the year. What a great idea for High Schools!!

I think it's important for all teachers to take a deep breath and take stock of what we have. Maybe refocus on why we do what we do - the kids!

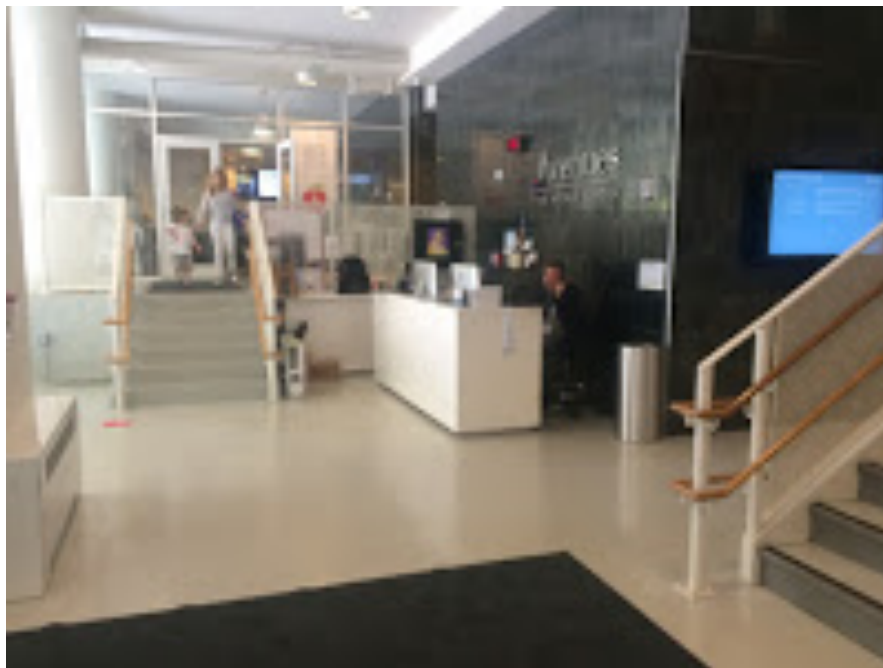
Part Eight: Avenues World School, Manhattan Island, NYC

Background:



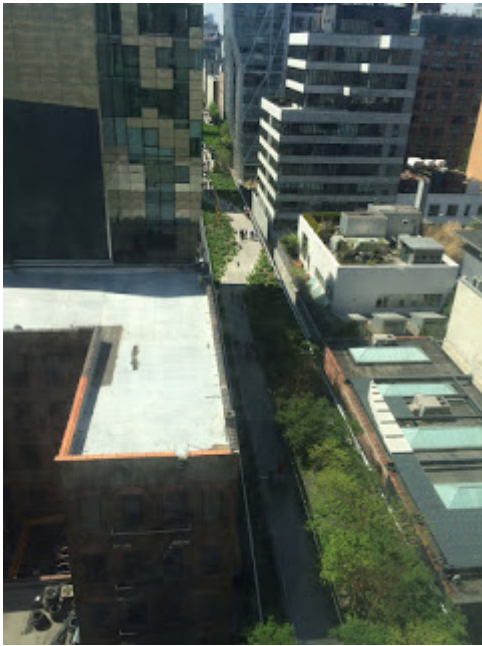
The Avenues World School is situated right in the heart of New York City on 10th Avenue. It is in an area of inner-city renewal and is located in an old factory that has been extensively remodelled. The building sits next to the Highline, an urban park/walkway which is a feature of the area.

It caters for students from 3 to 18 Years old. Being a 'for profit' independent school it has an annual tuition fee of \$46 000 US (That's \$690 000 for the 15 years you would be attending).



The Security and Lobby of the Avenues World School

However, this is all inclusive and includes student's devices, the expected travel, lunches, and all other school materials and expenses. The school currently has 1300 students from 3 year olds to 11th Graders.



The World School is a unique concept with the plan to open other World schools around the globe that students must attend at some stage in their time at the school in order to graduate. The school was close to opening its second school in China and is also considering Miami, Brazil, and Spain. The schools are all about creating bi or multi lingual world citizens.

What was Innovative?

The whole World School concept is very innovative. The idea that students can study a second language in a bilingual setting and then travel to a country to attend another World

The Highline from the Avenues

School where their second language is the first language of that country, is amazing. It provides the student with an authentic immersion experience and to graduate from their school they have to do this. It sort of tops the French classes two weeks in New Caledonia!



Students in Spanish Emersion Class

The school is all about providing a quality bilingual education. The students are predominantly English speaking and on enrolment must choose either Mandarin or Spanish (the two most spoken languages in the world), as a second language. Some of the children have spoken a second language but for most this is new. From K (Year 0) the students begin their language. The language is not taught in isolation but is integrated into class programmes. One day a lesson is taught in English the next day the progression of that lesson is taught in the chosen second language - total immersion! Teachers have language assistants in classes but all language teachers are totally bilingual. The school feels that as most students don't come from homes where a second language is spoken, to ensure the language develops, class lessons have to be in an immersion format.



2nd Grade Students in Mandarin Immersion class.

Both ambitious and innovative, the school if successful will be setting these well connected students up for life. The school along with Harvard University is carrying out on-going research into how their immersion programme is effecting student achievement. As the school is only three years old the research is very much in its infancy so outcomes are inconclusive.

The school curriculum was developed by a Harvard Professor and staying with the global view they have scoured the world for best practice to include in their curriculum. Mathematics at the Elementary level is Singapore Maths and at Middle and Secondary is Exeter Maths. I asked why they chose these programmes and my host, Abby Brody, (Head of the Lower School) replied, "Because they are the best."

ELearning was very important in the school. All students are given a device. From 3 Years to 6th grade they get an iPad and from 7th - 12th they are given a Macbook Air and an iPod. The devices belong to the students. The school is a 1:1 Apple Distinguished School.



Pod of Macbook Airs

As well as personal devices the school has an Innovation Lab in their Middle and Upper Schools and are looking at building one in their Lower School. These labs, like Colorado Academy have 3D printers, Laser Printers, wood and metal craft tools etc.



Innovation Lab

They also have a lot of visual digital display boards showing everything from kids work to daily notices. Abby shared some work on the wall and using an iPad and an augmented reality app we could see the process the students used to make their art works. Another class had poems students had written displayed on the wall, when you hovered the iPad over the top the augmented reality app showed videos of students talking about their art works. Kristen Paino, their tech integrator, introduced me to the many amazing apps they use on iPad to bring the curriculum to life:

- Book Creator - Students can Collaborate together to make a book.
- Aurasma - Augmented Reality App
- Popplet - Food web
- Explain Everything - Well... it explains everything.
- Show B - sharing work with teacher
- Reflector - displaying work/ sharing

Other IT innovations include:

- Sedna - Scheduling system for display boards
- Mac Minis for classroom computers
- Class AV cameras for recording lessons (Appraisal) and for linking up with overseas World Schools.

The school has 2500 devices in the building! They are all leased and will be replaced every two to three years, depending on the device.

The school curriculum dictates the topics of study and all classes and subject areas have the same theme so this can be reflected in the immersion classes. Arts and Music is also taught in both languages.

I got the feeling in the Lower School the curriculum was very much teacher directed but in the Middle and Upper schools students seemed to have greater ownership. The Middle school mastery programme allowed students to choose a passion area to pursue and then along with others collaboratively develop it into something they could showcase.

Upper School classes are taught using the Harkness method. Students work collaboratively around a round tabled area with no "front of the class."



Harkness Learning Space

In the Lower School in a recent Self-expression unit, students could choose one area they covered (Dance, Storytelling, and visual Arts) and explore it at depth. The Arts is important to the school and the school always has an Artist in Residence. They also utilise the unique position of the school in the heart of NYC and visit galleries, have visits from world class dancers, performers and storytellers.

In the Upper School students had participated in a Shark tank/ Dragons Den themed topic, where they pitched business ideas to a panel of local NYC business people and investors. This school is well positioned to utilise a large number of rich experiences in their community but it is something schools could do in most locations, maybe not to the same international degree.

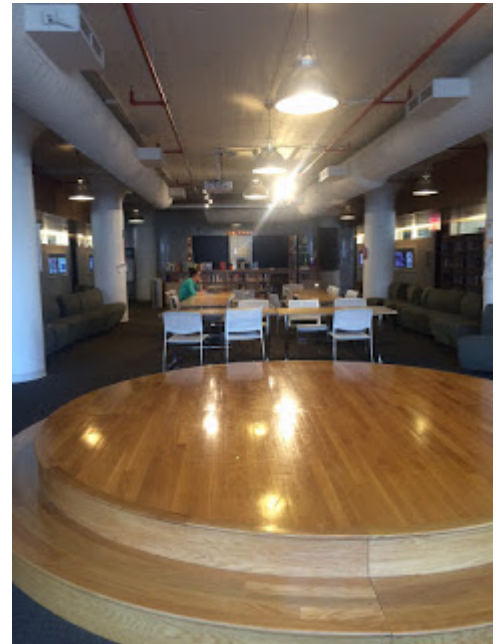
Abby said the staff work hard (most work 7am - 7pm) at Avenues and the immersion teaching is demanding but it is very well resourced. Staff are provided with excellent PD and there are many opportunities within the school including travel. They are encouraged to be innovative and try things out.

Physically it is a well provisioned school. There are attractive and functional shared learning spaces on each floor. The Lower school has a well-equipped gym at their disposal on the 10th floor, while the middle and seniors use a nearby recreation centre. The cafeteria is beautifully set out and the food quality was excellent.

Another shared space that incorporates a library



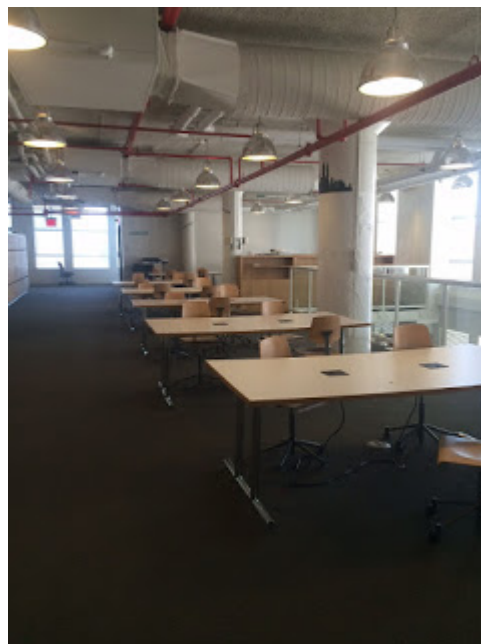
Share space that incorporates a library



Cafeteria at the Avenues



The 10th floor gymnasium

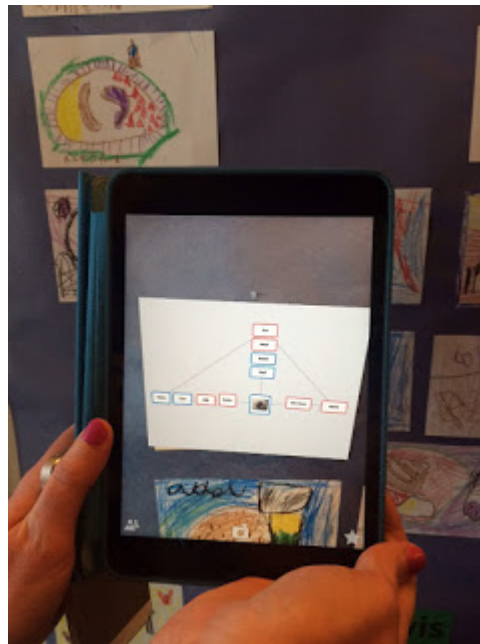


Student Workspace Upper School

My Reflections:

You could say it is amazing what money can buy (and it is) and certainly not many schools could afford to send their students overseas for long periods of time, but if you cut through all of that, what The Avenues World School is trying to achieve is amazing, ambitious and

innovative. Whether it will work remains to be seen. I did witness a couple of young students both distressed and frustrated that they couldn't express what they wanted to say in the immersion class but I guess this is going to happen. The thing it emphasised to me is the importance of schools introducing a second language at primary level. We all know the benefits for students in terms of enhancing their knowledge of English through learning another language but aside from that, we are developing global citizens. To do this properly they need to be bilingual and preferably bilingual with an international language such as Mandarin or Spanish. The opportunity for language programmes are now available for schools through the new MOE funding and schools should take advantage of this.



Augmented reality app brings students art work to life.

The Avenues is clearly well connected with local business and is in an ideal location, however, I think most schools could and should tap into their local resources/ businesses/ artists and performers more than we do. The artist in residence concept was very cool and although we probably couldn't achieve it as a single school, with maybe Arts Council funding and joining with other schools we could rotate an artist in residence around our schools. Our local experts in business and community services would be good sources of knowledge for students and they would provide relevant and authentic context for the student learning.

eLearning was visual in the school but was not dominant. It enhanced their learning landscape. Kirsten the Tech integrator works with students and teachers to assist them to find the right tool/ app for their learning. She also researches what would be good for the school. This role is a bit of luxury but has meant their capacity in IT is huge. Schools need to value the capacity of staff and also the importance eLearning has to bring the curriculum to life.

Implications for HSS:

It is great that Di has initiated Mandarin Language Learning programmes at HSS. In term three our language programme will begin with the help of a Mandarin Language Assistant. This is very exciting for the school and although not on the scale of the Avenues, it a positive start. It will be vital that as a school whatever we do is sustainable. We must also continue to partner with AsiaNZ to give opportunities for teachers and maybe students to visit schools outside NZ as this is a rich experience and supports the concept of global citizenship.

Nelson has so many resources when it comes to business, the arts and sport. As a school we tap into these at times but I believe we could better utilise the skills and knowledge in our community. This would provide a relevant local context for our students. It may be we seek business partnerships to support particular programmes in the school or we invite an artist to work in our school for a period of time. One idea I had was to set up a class in a vacant shop in Trafalgar St and base the class programme around CBD life, integrating maths/ statistics/ Literacy etc into a weeklong project. We could rotate classes in at the end of each week. We could bring in speakers from local businesses, council etc to talk to the students and we could operate an "open" class so shoppers could see what happens in a modern classroom.

We are extremely lucky with the level of skills and knowledge we have around eLearning in our school and how we have grown in our capacity overall has been staggering. Equally, after being at the Avenues it is amazing to see what we could achieve. We need to make sure we always remember that eLearning capacity is a journey and will never have a final destination.

Part Nine: Summary - Pulling it All Together

Introduction

Two countries, 8 cities and 11 schools later I have seen some really innovative ideas, met some really dedicated educators, had a good chance to reflect on what we do at HSS, and considered where we are heading as a school and myself as a school leader.

It is clear innovation is not just about fancy furniture, shared learning spaces and interconnecting classrooms. Truth is I didn't see a lot of them. Each school or school district's innovation addressed their particular need. To allow them as educators to better engage and teach their students in their school communities. Whether that be children from Jet-setting parents developing immersion language programmes so that their children can travel and be little global citizens or small country schools using technology to connect and collaborate their teaching and learning for the academic and social benefit of their schools. Whatever these schools did they had a clear direction, ownership and understanding of why they are doing it and how it fits into their schools vision for learning. They also have given 100% commitment to their project and overcome barriers. Too often when we introduce a new idea or innovation into the school we don't work hard to ensure all stakeholders have ownership (including students). We tend to cut corners so the full benefits of the project can be missed and we give up when barriers come to light. Often our answer is rather than working hard to implement an innovation to its full potential we water it down so it's not too much work for the 'Poor old Teacher.' Clearly, in all the schools I visited commitment and hard work were evident in bucketfuls.

Even though each school innovative Learning Environment was different and based on their needs they did share some factors/ principles that are key to being a true innovative Learning Environment in the 21st Century.

Common Ground

Student agency is the biggest innovation evident in nearly all the schools I visited. Students owning and driving their learning. Students in a number of schools knew the schools learner qualities/ values well and had been given the opportunity to decide what they were and what they looked like in the classroom. This was most evident at the *Ladysmith Nanaimo School District*, *Compass High School* and at the *Colorado Academy* but most others had their values and learner qualities visually displayed around the school. It was impressive to see students tracking their learning, such as at *Compass* with their Learning Plan, and able to articulate and take responsibility for what they needed to do to graduate or complete a particular project. The teacher advisor had an important role in the schools where this was most effective.

I believe that many (dare I say most) NZ schools only pay 'lip service' to the concept of student agency because of two quite diverse reasons; either we are scared to let go of the reins just in case the student goes 'Off Task,' or, when we do attempt to take the student-led / democracy type model we don't spend enough time embedding our model and the necessary skills into the student's learning so the students struggle to drive their learning as there are just too many choices and no structure to hang it on. We need to find something in between these two scenarios.

All schools were doing some form of Inquiry model that involved explicit integration of subjects. Many used a Humanities (English, Social studies) and STEAM (Science, Technology, English, Arts and Maths) model of integration. The big focus was around student ownership and understanding of the inquiry process. In many of the schools the students understood the process well and were able to articulate where they were at.

Relevant, authentic, and with a genuine audience, along with student-led are clearly the key words to engaging the 21st Learner. Understanding 'What's the point,' 'where is this heading?' 'Who is this for?' And 'why are we doing it 'are questions that sit in the front of the mind of our generation Y & Z students.

At a number of schools an important part of their Inquiry process were opportunities for students to present to a genuine audience. Many of the schools had presentation nights, where not just parents but, other educators and members of the community could come along and share the learning with the students. In some schools student's project "Made a difference" whether it be developing a outdoor habitat with the local community or working with International Charity organisation to raise funds for their cause. In most cases students had real ownership of the project and how it was presented as the ideas came from them. Teachers input was around questioning and reinforcing the process.

In most schools I visited the staff had invested a great deal of time getting to know their students. We talk often about the importance of relationships but in some of the schools I visited the school was such a consistent stabilising factor in the students' lives that these very close relationships were vital. The student advisor concept was a great one for the secondary and middle areas and at primary level could be put in place for the 'At-risk' students to provide that extra person to look out for these students' needs and pay attention to their lives.

I wasn't sure how it would be visiting the number of secondary and Middle schools that I did but when you consider I was looking at the big picture of education and with the Nelson Clusters Community of Schools (COS) just getting established it turned out a real highlight of the trip. The first thing that struck me was connections that exist between these areas of schooling. Many teachers had worked across the sectors and there appeared to be a lot of interaction between each sector. One of the reasons this happens in the school district model which is used in both the States and Canada is shown by the following. In Canada in particular the school districts think of education as a whole and look at the shared needs of all students across the district. This big picture, I feel, is more effective than the 'Island' model Tomorrows Schools created in NZ. Sharing resources, professional development, interventions as well as having big buying power as a single organisation. No doubt it would come with its risks as I could see at Douglas County School District and it would be a hard pill to take after 26 years of self-governance. We certainly wouldn't want to see a return to the local Department of Education model we had in the 80s. But managed the right way and governed and owned by the local school communities, I think it would be highly effective and really just the next step down the COS road.

A number of schools utilised the resources and people in their local communities extremely well to the point that they were features of their school. Whether it be local artists working within the schools, Business partnering with the school on a particular project, sharing resources, skilled staff and assisting financially, linking with local councils to improve local environment or drawing on Tribal leaders to share stories of the past. All of these things helped weave the schools into the fabric of their community. I believe we do this sort of thing

in New Zealand but not to the same depth and without the same two way commitment. We can do this better.

E-Learning was as big as I was expecting it to be in the schools I visited. In many schools it didn't dominate the landscape but it did have an important role as a tool for learning. BYOD was surprisingly not a big feature of any of the schools I visited. Most schools provided the equipment. Apple products feature with iPads in the junior areas being popular and Mac Book Airs being a feature of senior primary, middle and secondary school. Many schools also use Chromebooks but I felt we were further down the Google track than most.

The last shared observation is more an administration item but when I think about it I think if I was to implement it at HSS it would free up my time so I could put more energy and commitment into other areas. I'm talking about admin. Office structure. Most schools I visited, (all were a similar or smaller size than HSS, apart from the independent schools but their lower schools were around 300 -400) had full time office managers. They did a lot of the admin. work that I do currently and allowed the Principal and the management teams to get on and worry about Teaching and Learning, particularly around HR, which seems to occupy a great deal of my time.

The Highlights Package

The following are a few individual highlights that stood out. I have only written brief summaries as a more full description is available under that school's post in the Blog:

Connected Schools - the idea of collaborating via AV is not new but the formalised structured approach at the School district in the Rocky Mountains in Canada was amazing and highly effective. This project has brought small vulnerable schools together to create larger cohorts of learners and in doing so impacted positively on these students' lives.

Habitat - The children at Hampden Street enjoy tree planting but the day they finish do they really give those trees and why they planted them another thought? I like how the Habitat at **Castle Rock Elementary** was owned by all the students and had a strong link with the local community. The project was embedded in the school culture and ethos.

Project X - This was a great way to build teachers understanding of what happens at various levels of schooling across the sectors. The 'Bus tours' across subjects proved highly effective at the **Colorado Academy** as did the 'Student for a day' project. These would both be useful ideas as we go about trying to understand what each of us do in the various sectors within our community of schools.

Immersion Programmes - This was a very innovative and ambitious programme but the concept of having all students bilingual by the end of their schooling is amazing. The understanding that it's a school responsibility to develop global citizens in our connected world is an important one and learning a second language is part of that as is connecting genuinely in some way to people/ students from other parts of the world. This is the vision for the **Avenues World School** and as they open schools across the globe I see exciting times ahead.

Student Interns - This concept would work best at Secondary but *Compass High School's* intern programme is successful because it gives relevance to students learning at an important time of their lives. However, relevance of learning is vitally important at all levels.

Community Coordinator - A really innovative use of staffing at *Sound View Academy*. It addressed the real need to connect to their community and to keep a finger on the pulse outside the school in this volatile area. The role is a good one as it covers many bases and wouldn't come with the same stigma as a social worker for many parents.

Links to OECD Principles and ILE Model

I started this journey motivated by the OECD report on Innovative Learning Environments so it's only fitting I return to this. The report identified seven transversal principles that underpin an ILE and also developed a ILE model (tense) of best practice. Below I will use these tools as a form of reflection of my journey.

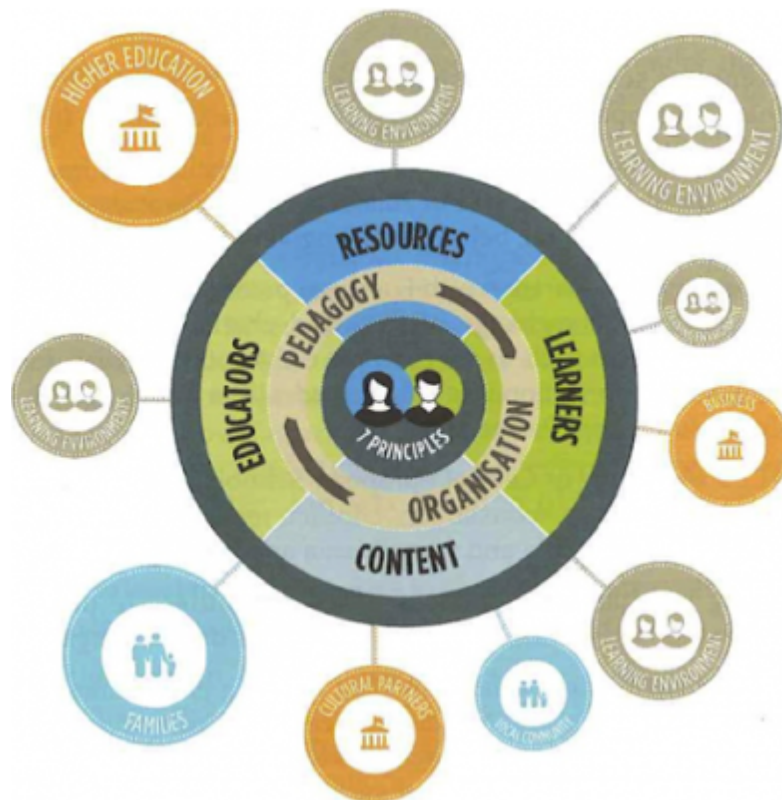
1. **Learners at the Centre** - I felt all the schools I visited put their learners at the centre of what they are doing. The emphasis on student led learning, the importance placed on knowing each student as an individual not a reading group or a behaviour issue, and the emphasis on student's ownership of the learning process such as the inquiry model or the learner qualities showed me that the ILE I visited were student centred. The best example of this principle was the Learner Plans, intern programme and student advisors at *Compass High School*. These initiatives put their student at the centre and focused on the individual needs. They allow students to set challenging personal goals who then, with guidance of their advisor, are motivated to achieve them. The Ladysmith Nanaimo School District Community of Learners Project promotes self-directed and self-regulated learning.
2. **The Social Nature of Learning** - Many of the schools I visited saw collaborative learning as a key part of their programmes. Students worked cooperatively in pairs or small group on in-class inquiry projects and some schools had large groups of students working cooperatively on large long term projects. A good example of this was an integrated technology project at *Colorado Academy* where students were converting an old school bus into a camper. The *Connected Classrooms in the Canadian Rockies* was a great example of how important the social nature of learning can be. With small cohort groups the connected classroom project has allowed students to collaborate with students of the same age from other schools on an almost daily basis via an audio visual connection. They also get the opportunity to get together on field trips or regular school visits to share their learning personally. Both the independent schools, *Colorado Academy* and *Avenues World School* have many spaces around the school that allow students to come together to collaborate. These include innovative seating, wifi, and wall whiteboards and whiteboard tables. They also had quiet areas where students knew they could go to study.
3. **Emotions are Integral to Learning** - In many of the schools I visited student engagement and motivation was high. This was generally achieved through the innovative approach the school or schools were taking to cater for the particular needs of their learners. A great example of this was at *Kumsheen High School* where students were working with *Ashcroft High School* on a photography project. These

students were reviewing photos from a recent joint field trip to Victoria, where they had utilised the skills of a professional photographer as an expert. The students were very proud of their work and were keen to share with the larger group the audio visual link which Ashcroft provided. The teachers very much took a back seat facilitator role. This student-led model was a hallmark of most of the schools I visited. Students were motivated and engaged as they were working on relevant and authentic topics they were interested in and they owned and drove their own learning. They also enjoyed being able to share their project with a genuine audience at Presentation nights.

4. **Recognising Individual Difference** - Individualised learning was a feature of many of the schools I visited. The students were seen as individuals all at different stages of the learning journey and with individual needs created by their unique environment. I didn't see a great deal of students lumped together because they read at about the same level. Once again *Compass High School's* Learner plan was an individualised document designed by the student and the teacher advisor particularly for that student and his/her needs. The *Ladysmith Nanaimo School District* were adapting their Community of Learners project so it better reflected the values and needs of local First Nation People. This school's Inquiry model was not a linear stepped process and students can start where it suits them according to what they bring to the project (Prior knowledge/ understanding/ skills). At Sound View Academy the community coordinator has a key role linking with families and keeping a 'finger on the pulse' of the community. He ensures individuals are safe and barriers that might prevent a student from attending school are avoided.
5. **Stretching all Students** - In a student-led environment the role of the teachers is critical to ensure students are stretching themselves and remain focused on their task. That role is not about cracking the whip but to activate/ motivate and inspire students to stretch themselves. At *Colorado Academy* I attended a Global Awareness Class where very motivated students were working hard on a City Design project. The motivation came from an engaging task and students being given the opportunity to share with peers and seeking their feedback. This school had a well-established buddy programme which saw upper school students buddied with lower school students which included some in-class support and pastoral support around the playground, including a shared Zoo trip at the end of the year. The student also serves as a positive role model.
6. **Assessment to Learning** - Like NZ both the US and Canada are going through a transition when it comes to assessment. In the US the "No Student Left Behind" policy has led to an over-emphasis on the one-off test results and so this has made them quite high stakes. The formal standards testing is part of both countries' assessment programme, as is an emphasis on Grades (A, B, C etc), but this is changing. The *Ladysmith Nanaimo School District* are looking at not sending home grade based reports in Grade K to 9. This is a radical shift and has caused a stir amongst grade obsessed parents. Self and Peer Assessment are popular and effectively used in the Inquiry approach and with more of a student-led programme teachers have time to conference with individuals and so the focus is more on the more effective formative assessment. Many students can articulate where they are at and what their next steps of learning are.
7. **Building Horizontal Connections** - The importance of a relevant authentic curriculum is vital and a hallmark of most schools I visited. Student engagement was high as they drove their learning focusing on topics that were relevant to their world. Students understood and owned their schools inquiry model and this provided a

framework for the students to explore their topics. Genuine integration of subjects was common place and students were given greater time to completing their Inquiry study at depth. Many schools used local community members/ business people/ cultural leaders as experts or guides for students as they worked through their inquiry. *Ladysmith Nanaimo School District* Community of Learners project did this well as did *Castle Rock Elementary's* Habitat project. At *Compass High School* the Internship programme allows students to see how their study can lead to genuine outcomes in the 'real world.' *The Avenue World School* clearly has made the biggest step towards Global connections with their language and World Schools concept.

OECD Innovative Learning Environment Model



Looking at the four key areas in this model it clarifies how most of the schools I visited can be classified an Innovative Learning Environment. Many of the schools are innovative in all four areas and I feel to be true ILE they need to be, ie. The school may have a wonderful modern learning environment but if their teachers are not motivators or your curriculum is not relevant student engagement is not going to be high and learning outcomes will be poor.

On reflecting on my journey I have noted some key considerations for each of the four quadrants of the model:

Learners:

- Leading their own learning
- Has ownership of learning processes and key learner qualities
- Needs access to a variety of ways of learning - collaborative in groups, individually, peer learning, reciprocal learning and teacher directed.
- Ability to set challenging personal goals and track and drive own achievement

Content:

- Integrated subjects
- Relevant and authentic
- Connected to community
- Open ended, engaging and motivating
- A variety of Assessment tools used - self, peer, formative.
- Inquiry based programmes with genuine opportunity to present to a real audience.

Resources:

- eLearning tools to enhance learning
- Local experts and resource people
- Opportunities to engage and collaborate on a project with community.
- Opportunities to participate in projects that "Makes a difference "- locally, nationally or globally.

Educators:

- Build strong relationships with students.
- Ability to adapt to a variety of roles - facilitator, activator, direct teacher, learner.
- Able to collaborate with other educators
- Creative use of staffing to create roles that target needs
- Professional development to share knowledge across the school and wider educational sectors.
- Flexibility and integration across sectors

Implication for Schools:

Learner Qualities:

When the MOE released the revised curriculum in 2007 many schools got busy developing their own school curriculum that interpreted the National document and made it reflect the need of their schools. They developed learner qualities/ learner lights or whatever other creative name they could come up with. Hampden Street was one of them. Like most schools there was nothing wrong with the words we chose and for the most part the process we followed but we made two significant mistakes; We over complicated the process with too many words and complicated rubrics to explain them and secondly and most importantly, we didn't give students ownership. We needed to invest time ensuring students owned and understood the words and knew how they related to them as a learner. In a number of schools I visited, this process has been done well. Students helped decide what word best reflects their learning and place in the school and then students along with staff develop the descriptors that interpret the word. I like the idea of getting maybe syndicate groups and new staff together in the hall and 're-write' the descriptors for the Learner qualities. Then these are displayed in classes and frequently revisited by teachers and students. The Ladysmith Nanaimo School districts qualities were called the "The Four Cs", maybe we should consider making our learner qualities something catchy also.

Inquiry Learning:

So many Schools in New Zealand talk up their Inquiry Learning process but in most cases it is something we do to students. The students don't own it and most can't articulate the steps and where they sit on the process. Students often struggle to see the relevance because they are not sure who the audience is and they feel it is being driven by someone else, the teacher. The Inquiry models I saw were student owned and students could articulate where they were at and where they were heading. The presentation evenings and showcases gave students a genuine audience. Students need to be introduced to the model at a young age and build up a language of inquiry that can develop through their schooling. The teacher needs to step back and allow the students to decide on pathways through their Inquiry that is relevant to them. We need to ensure that the topics we choose to study are authentic and have a relevant context. We also need to ensure students have genuine opportunities to present their work to an audience, whether that is the class, radio station, a showcase, sharing with students at another school or by working with a local, national or global organisation, sharing their work and views. We also need to ensure we allow sufficient time to complete student Inquiries (after all, we are finding it hard to complete our teacher inquiries in our year long timeframes). We should consider three large Inquiries rather than trying to squash in four. With the assessment pressures, sports commitments and so on, dropping to three inquiries makes sense. We would just need to be smart and more explicit when showing our integration.

Sharing the Sector:

It has been great to hear the progress the Nelson Cluster has made on developing our community of schools (COS) in my absence. It sounds very exciting for our schools. However, it is vital that we take the time for teachers to understand what is going on at the various levels of schooling and a "Project X" type approach would be a great way to build understanding across the sectors. This would need to happen before starting to build anything new as a COS. To truly merge the 'islands' that our schools have become I think we need to

live island life at each level before we can make too many judgements about what we need to develop.

Across Sector Collaboration:

The COS is a step in the right direction but I believe the idea of a functional community that has a single board and the power to support schools, provision professional development, assist with management recruitment, and use its size to better leverage bulk purchases etc would be the way forward for our schools. It would breakdown the "islands" and associated competition model created by Tomorrows Schools.

Connecting with the Community:

In Nelson we have so many talented people in so many different sectors of the community. The arts are so strong in our region but how do we draw on this talent. Although a full time 'Artist in Residence' may not be possible it could be something we share with other schools. We could rotate a variety of artists around our schools. This would give them exposure to our parents and school community and give the chance for our students to find inspiration from a genuine working artist. We also have so many innovative and successful businesses in Nelson. Looking for opportunities for public/private partnerships would give the business good exposure in our school community and in wider Nelson and would maybe provide us with the skills, knowledge and funding to aim big for some of our projects; Whether it be funding a programme like our Music programme or assisting with a larger building project. I believe with some commitment and energy we could make this a reality.

A Community Project:

I really like the idea of taking a community project that is a partnership with local community stakeholders that would really make a difference in the local area. A waterway improvement. A wetlands recovery, planting natives are just a few examples. A great way for students to make a genuine contribution to their community. Like any inquiry, students would need to own the concept and be able to feel they have had input into the planning and development.

Administration:

Even the toughest of tough schools in the Bronx of New York had administration support to a level that the Principals were able to focus solely on their roles as Leaders of learning. All personnel, finance, and general admin and most communications were dealt with by full time office staff with the Principal simply over-seeing and rubber stamping this work. I believe schools need to look at their office and, if budget allows, consider a higher degree of admin support. This would also allow for the employment of a highly skilled level of applicant who may be looking for full time work.

No Silver Bullet

Although I learnt a lot on my travels and have gained excellent knowledge of Innovative Learning Environments there were a number of areas where I didn't find the answers I was seeking and in some cases the schools were not as far down the track as HSS in particular areas.

Mathematics - Although I did see a variety of Mathematics programmes I didn't see anything that solved the issue of how do we make maths relevant and engaging whilst still covering the key areas of mathematical fundamentals - basic facts, multiplication tables, fractions etc. Many schools talked about integrating Maths (STEAM) but I never had the opportunity to see this in action. The Avenues had gone down the road of Singapore Maths but I'm not sure this very Asian, almost cultural, approach to maths would work in NZ schools. I'll be keeping an eye on the Avenues. Colorado Academy has revised their Maths programme but again I didn't see it in action. I will be in touch with Eric from CA to find out more. So no Silver bullet in maths.

eLearning - Apart from the Avenues World School, I didn't see any schools that would be as advanced in HSS in using eLearning as an effective tool to help learning. Our school would be better equipped than most (apart from 3D printers!).

Assessment - Most schools felt quite conflicted around assessment. They know the importance of the formative type assessment - feedback and of peer and self-assessment but are hamstrung by the need for National testing and the high stakes associated with this and with the traditional grade system. This is an area most are focused on resolving at the moment. I guess watch this space. So no Silver bullets for assessment.

Final Word

Many of the ideas I have come back with are not necessarily new to NZ and even to schools I have worked in. I imagine there will be teachers who will be saying "We do that at our school." We are very good at saying this but the two biggest differences I saw from many of the schools I visited on my tour compared to many NZ schools are **commitment and student led learning**. We have all done Inquiry Learning with our classes but most of the time it is something we have done to the students. They didn't own it and often didn't even understand it. Whatever these schools have done they have passionately committed to it. They saw it through to fruition and have reviewed and evolved their project. It is a little bit of a hallmark of many schools to move from one education fad to the next without going into any depth. We almost just tick the box.

Many New Zealand schools are dragging their heels when it comes to allowing students to lead their learning. This has been at their peril as we see increased disengagement and poor behaviour. Teachers struggle to understand their role in a student-led environment and often fall back into the mission control mode/sage on the stage. Clearly this has to change and as a school Hampden Street is already down this path, but we need to identify what the student and teacher roles look like at each level.

Teaching can be a challenging job, no doubt about that and having worked in low decile schools in NZ and visiting some pretty tough schools overseas it takes a dedicated passionate person to work in these schools. They put up with a lot, work long hours, and don't receive a lot of thanks but do the job because they want to make their students' lives better. It was interesting to read HSS evaluation of Term two. There was some great stuff in there,

however, when I read the lows from the term I noticed a number of negative things that made me think that at times we really need to take a deep breath and be grateful for what we have. Many of the things were so minor, some were situations that are out of our hands. Our schools are well provisioned, safe environments and although everything isn't perfect, they are a lot better than what many teachers face in some pretty tough schools around NZ and around the globe. It would be great if teachers could consider this before considering something a low. Life is too short to sweat the small stuff. To make a difference we need to focus on the big picture for better or for worse.

This sabbatical has been fantastic both personally as I feel refreshed and relaxed, and professionally as I have a lot of time to reflect on my role and our school. I am now looking forward to getting back to work and leading the staff into an exciting and challenging time in education.

Part Ten: Acknowledgement:

I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity for sabbatical leave and would like to thank TeachNZ, Ministry of Education and the Hampden Street School Board of Trustees for allowing me to take this leave.

Thanks to Diane Webb and the Staff of the School for doing such a great job in my absence. It is great to come back see the ship continuing to be steered in such a positive pathway.

Thank you to all the schools, Principals and teachers that hosted me over my three week tour. You all made Maggie and I so welcome and were all so keen to share your lovely schools with us. You can all be proud of the job you are doing for your students. You will always be welcome to come down and visit us at Hampden Street School in sunny Nelson, New Zealand.

Thank you to the OECD for their inspiring work into Innovative Learning Environments. You definitely inspired me and I will continue to use the principles and your ILE model as our school moves forward in developing our learner's pedagogy.

Thanks to my wife, Katrina and my children for allowing me to head off on my trip at a busy time of the year. I have loved spending extra time with you all over the last 7 weeks since my return from my travels. Special thanks to my daughter, Maggie, my travel companion. You are a star and I enjoyed every minute.