

Principal Sabbatical Report: Term 1 2006
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St Hilda's Collegiate School

Overview

As I reflect upon the term's leave I have had from my position as Principal at St Hilda's, I realise what a privilege it has been to have had this opportunity. I have no doubt that the benefits are many, some immediate, but that there will be others that will come to light as I settle back into the rigours and demands of the new term. Before I attempt to share some of my reflections and thoughts, I must firstly acknowledge the support of the Board of Trustees, Board of Proprietors and Endowment Society for the time off and for the financial support for my overseas travel and study. I must also sincerely thank Geraldine Corkery, who acted as Principal in my absence and by all accounts did a wonderful job. Of course she was supported by Chris Gold, Pauline Duthie, Alison Jory and all other staff who got on with business as usual.

I have decided it best to structure my report in the following way:

- Hockey Trip to Great Britain
(including schools visited, observations of schools and possible action points)
- Personal research at TASIS, Cove School and the University of London Education Institute.
- Marketing in Germany
- Reflective Thoughts, Personal Reading and "Time Out".
- 110th Celebration for St Hilda's
- Action List
- Conclusion

HOCKEY

Accompanying the sixteen members of the school hockey team was a wonderful opportunity to observe and experience a variety of schools in the English education system.



Altogether I visited seven schools and spent a couple of hours with each principal, discussing the type of school and its key issues, educational direction in England and viewing a variety of facilities. I was struck by the variety of schools – most of those visited on the hockey trip were Independent Day/Boarding Schools with significant fees attached.

The schools visited were:

Bablake School

Head: Dr Stuart Nuttall – Coventry Independent co-ed school, years 11-13

900 students – a selective school with excellent academic results - £7,000 per year (day) = \$21,000NZ.

Earlston High School

State School in Scottish Borders – about 1 hour south of Edinburgh

800 students – no fees

semi-rural – co-educational

I didn't meet the Principal of this school but was homestayd with Don Ledingham who is the Head of a Local Education Authority (like a Head and advisor to a school cluster). Don had done some really interesting work on a self-review ICT resource for schools which I am interested in looking into further. He also introduced me into the "art" of BLOGGING which he is a great fan of and which has interesting possibilities for reflective learning.

I was impressed with many of the initiatives which Don talked about in the Scottish education system and I intend to keep in contact with him.

St George's School

Head: Dr Judith McClure – Edinburgh
Girls' Independent School
600 Girls in Upper School
Not academically selective

This school was not visited by the Hockey Team but Don recommended that I try to get an appointment with Judith McClure because she is a very impressive educational leader. I was delighted that she made time to see me at short notice. Judith is very involved with Scottish leadership development for Principals and St George's runs its own professional learning centre. I brought home some interesting material from the Scottish Education Authority.

Mary Erskine's School

Head: David Gray - Edinburgh
Independent Girls' School –
1000 pupils (linked with Stuart Melville School for Boys)
Small boarding facility – only about 50 students
Day fees £10,000 (\$30,000NZ) per year

Mary Erskine's and Stuart Melville is where Jane Spencer is doing a GAP year. The Head, David Gray, was very much a product of the Independent School System (he had been to school with Tony Blair!). The school had impressive facilities and grounds with two hockey turfs and Performing Arts Suite. The students were obviously from privileged backgrounds but were very pleasant and welcoming.

Altrincham Girls' Grammar School – Manchester

Head Teacher: Dana Ross-Wawrzynski
State school – no fees
Girls have to sit entrance exam for selection
About 1200 girls

Altrincham Girls' Grammar School is one of the few grammar schools left in England (there are only about 150 still remaining). Immediate impressions were that the buildings were very old, the student population a real ethnic mix, the uniform was worn badly by the girls but there was a positive atmosphere. Obviously a big part of the Head's job was battling for funding. Dana had set up links with a school in China and there was an impressive cultural exchange which happened every year. Dana had also achieved significant facility enhancements but said she spent a great deal of her time raising funds – often through building links with the business community and securing substantial grants.

Bromsgrove – Outer Birmingham

Head: Chris Edwards
Co-educational Independent
800 in Senior School (half are boarders)

Very International student population – a lot of marketing is done for overseas students.

Day fees £10,000

Boarding extra £7,000

= Boarding \$51,000NZ for one year!



The grounds and facilities of this school were amazing. The campus was huge with buildings around a central grassed area. Buildings ranged from very old historic gracious homes to a purpose built Visual Arts Centre and new Social Sciences block. There were also two hockey turfs and wonderful expansive fields – I think there may even have been a golf course!

The students at this school worked incredibly hard. School day 8:00am - 6:00pm and students and staff worked on Saturdays (there was time-tabled school on Saturday). The school had to work hard to feature well on the League Tables so they continued to attract students to the school which is not considered one of the more prestigious independent schools.

Students were very smartly turned out – senior students in “corporate mufti” i.e. boys in jacket and tie and girls in business-type clothes.

Millfield - “Street” Somerset (about 50 mins from Bath)

Head: Peter Johnson

1200 students – 900 boarders

Independent – co-educational

Established 70 years ago



This was a very interesting school – we were hosted and played our hockey game on the Saturday and so didn't see “classes in action” although many staff and students were around and actively engaged in school activities. Millfield is obviously a very wealthy school. Its grounds were extensive and facilities amazing – Olympic Pool, several hockey turfs, golf course, equestrian centre. This school also draws a lot of students internationally. The school has impressive GCSE and A Level results, although they do not select students on an academic basis and claim to focus on all-round performance. I gained the impression that the students and staff were expected to work very hard but staff had some good conditions and extra remuneration as a result. I spent a couple of hours with the Deputy Principal, Sue Langford, who gave me much interesting material for the school. It is obviously a high performing, effectively managed school which has access to excellent resources.

Ideas for St Hilda's

- St Hilda's signage
- Annual framed photo representation of key events
- Easel and student artwork each work in foyer (to be changed by HOD Art)
- Setting up of BLOGGING
- Use of self-review material from Don Ledingham, Scotland
- Ongoing dialogue with Don Ledingham and Judith McClure

There were considerable other benefits from travelling with the Hockey Team. The girls' behaviour was exemplary and there were many occasions on which I was extremely proud of them.

The visit to Whitby and Sneaton Castle was a highlight of the trip and it was wonderful to see the girls' interest and excitement at the historical connections with our school. They cut quite a sight walking through Whitby in full dress uniform en-route to our “Mayoral Fish and Chip Lunch”.



The Sisters of the St Hilda's Order at Sneaton Castle were delighted to welcome our group and the girls sang some Maori Waiata to them and learned a lot about the history of St Hilda.



It was also very enjoyable to spend time with the nine parents who accompanied the team. Everyone got on so well and there was a great team spirit that developed during the course of the trip. Full marks to Kathryn Fletcher for her superb organisation and attention to detail that ensured everything went so well.

It was interesting to note that overseas travel is quite “the norm” in a number of schools we visited.....sports trips, music trips, subject trips such as Art excursions, Language trips and often trips organised to experience another place or another culture.

This tour has certainly been far more than a chance to play hockey....the chance for the girls (and the adults) to visit historical sites and learn more about their place in the world was a wonderful part in the learning of life.

PERSONAL RESEARCH

Visit to TASIS England

TASIS (The American School in England) is an independent school of around 350 students (upper school) – co-educational. It has around 150 boarders, a large number of International Students, and many of the day pupils are from American families on business in the United Kingdom. There are around 800 students in total at the school including a Kindergarten and Primary School Division. TASIS is a very exclusive school housed on a gorgeous historical site in the village of Thorpe (Surrey) about 40 minutes from the centre of London by train. The fees for a boarder are around £24,000 = \$72,000NZ per year! Gavin and I had taught at TASIS in 1987-88 for a year and still had several friends at the school.

“Mel Levine” American Researcher – Key Text “The Myth of Laziness”

While at TASIS I had the opportunity to attend a staff professional development session with this renowned researcher. His work is based upon the premise that all students can achieve and it is the job of schools and educators to ensure student learning taps into individual capability. I found that what he had to say wasn't particularly new or “earth shattering” but it was good to be reminded of these things which are fundamental to meeting student needs.

Some of his key thoughts were:

- High school should be preparation for life and not preparation for University
- We should emphasise pattern recognition and transfer more in schools
- We need greater emphasis on building oral language skills i.e. teaching other people to understand something
- The importance of perceiving the application of things
- It is important for kids to fail – resilience must be built. Having conflicts, experiencing mismatching is great experience for life

At TASIS I spoke to the Director of Sport about their compulsory sports programme – a four semester programme which expects involvement from every staff member and student. It is important to note here that the school funds a full-time Director of Sport who holds equivalent status of a school's senior manager. Another area of note was the fabulous school fitness centre which has become a full school community facility and is available to all parents of students at any time of the day or evening.

I met with Fernando Gonzalez who is the Chairman of the TASIS England Board. We discussed the School's strategic direction, international programmes and governance issues. Fernando gave me a useful book on Governance and Management in Independent Schools which has some useful material and templates.

In the afternoon I met up with a number of teachers and went into several classrooms. One of the teachers who had arrived since I left is an Art Teacher who trained at the Dunedin College of Education!!

The only other New Zealander in the school was the Director of Admissions who, when I met her, found out that we had both been to the same High School!

At the end of the day I met with Carmen Armstead who is Head of the Upper School and we discussed how Learning Support Information is shared amongst all teachers. She gave me some documentation which is worth looking into as a way of sharing information with relevant staff.

The Cove School

Another school I visited was The Cove School which is a state school in Buckinghamshire. This is a school of around 800 students and was a stark contrast to TASIS. As what would have been a fairly low decile school in New Zealand, The Cove School had a difficult student population and fairly low student expectation.

However, a new Head, Megan James, was working hard to turn the school around and was introducing a number of interesting initiatives. She was very generous in giving

me her time and showed me around the school. It was interesting that the whole time we were talking she had her “walkie talkie” on ‘alert’ and a couple of times had to rush out to an emergency – a fight in the playground!

Megan and her Senior Management Team were working on the analysis of student data and school improvement. There are obviously some well supported initiatives in England in these areas and the data provided by the Education Authority of GCSE’s and other national benchmarking assessments is very comprehensive. I was able to bring a copy of the information home with me and will make it available to Andrea Knowles who is working on developments for us in this area.

Megan Jones also provided me with a copy of her School’s Strategic Plan, Self-Review and Annual Targets which will make for useful reference.

The Cove School has just been awarded “Specialist Status” as a Technology School which is a Government initiative allowing schools to develop expertise in a particular area (not dissimilar to Extending High Standards Across Schools) which St Hilda’s has just been successful in winning a contract for.

Visit to the Community of the Sisters of the Church

Whilst in London, I was keen to visit the CSC which is the Order the Sisters came from who established St Hilda’s in the 1890s. I managed to track down the address of St Michael’s Convent in Richmond (the original Convent has been in Kilburn but had moved to Richmond around the 1960s).

Kathryn Fletcher came with me on the expedition and we were delighted to meet up with the Mother Superior, Sister Anita, and several of the Sisters still in the community. They live in an impressive walled Convent on Ham Common, Richmond and there are 16 Sisters left in the Order – some of whom are now aged in their 90s!



Their Order was established in the early 1800s by Emily Ayckbowm and in the 1890s several Sisters were dispatched to various parts of the “colonies” for missionary work and to set up schools. Two schools were established in New Zealand and about six in Australia of which there are four remaining - St Michael’s Collegiate (Tasmania), St

Michael's (Melbourne), St Peter's (Adelaide) and the Perth School (Perth). There are also two "sister schools" in England, located in Liverpool and Croyden.

It was wonderful to make the connection with the Sisters in the community and I have promised to keep in touch and send them regular material about our school.

Visit to the University of London – Institute of Education

I had managed to make a connection with Louise Stoll, a researcher at the Education Institute, who had agreed to see me while I was in London. Louise suggested that I attend a couple of her Masters' Lectures at the University, which I did.

These lectures were about the development of Professional Learning Communities which is an area I had heard Louise speak on at the 2005 SPANZ Conference and I thought had a lot of merit.

Her presentation focused on building and sustaining professional learning communities and there is good food for thought about how to further enhance the St Hilda's Learning Community. I was interested that she referred to the Four Pillars of Learning - (Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Be, Learning to Live Together) – which is what we have based St Hilda's learning structure on for the last 3-4 years.

Another interesting connection made was that I happened to sit next to a teacher (one of the Masters' students) who has advanced specialist teacher status in thinking skills.

It seems that British Teachers are able to apply for Special Teacher Status. They are usually subject specialists and are part-funded by the LEA (Local Education Authority). These specialists work in their own schools but are also expected to go into other schools one day a week. This teacher (Adrian Blake) had been appointed as a Specialist Teacher in Thinking Skills.

Once again there were strong connections and similarities to our EHSAS project. A worthwhile contact could be Richard Kestral – Thinking Skills Consultancy richard@thinking.co.uk

I resolved to read the book, "It's About Learning (and It's About Time)" - Stoll, Fink and Earl, on my return home.

Ideas for St Hilda's and Action to Take

- Send material to Sister Anita as promised
- Good coffee and biscuits two afternoons per week after school (to encourage staffroom gathering and discussion)
- Helium balloons with Helen Keller's quote on for Leavers' Dinner

“One cannot consent to creep
When one feels the impulse to soar”

Helen Keller

- Learning quotes displayed prominently around school
- Staff discussion on promoting and supporting a professional learning community
- Put Chris Gold in contact with Richard Kestral
- Get and read the book of Mel Levine “ The Myth of Laziness”
- Contact Mary Sinclair (Multiserve) and investigate ways of being involved with Professional Learning Communities.
- Get Andrea Knowles to look at PANDA data and investigate ways of using St Hilda’s data to enhance student achievement.

MARKETING IN GERMANY

In Germany I visited two ex-students and their families – Ann-Kathrin Koshlick, and Katharina Schuh and had appointments with six agents.



Agents visited were:

Bettina at Eurovacancies – Hamburg

Jens and Hans at Camps – Hamburg

Kristine Hausch at Hausch and Partners – Hamburg

Jan Helsen at Camp – Berlin

David Madden – Arnsberg

Herman Oberdink – Muenster

I also had a meeting with Johannes (cousin of Mike Hanff) in Kleve and he took me to look around a local High School where I met with an English teacher, Thomas Harper, who is a potential future contact.

The German market looks very promising – present students are giving great reports of their time at St Hilda’s and there seems to be positive interest for the future.

SINGAPORE

On the way home I had a two night stopover in Singapore. This gave me an opportunity to visit the United World College in South East Asia UWCSEA. Here I spent a couple of days including a tour with the Principal, and two hours with him plus time with the Academic Director.

This United World College in Singapore was the second one to be established in the early 1970s – set up by Lord Louis Mountbatten and Lee Kwan Yu as a school to enhance international co-operation and understanding. It is a truly international school with students from over 30 nationalities. Unlike other United World Colleges (of which there are ten worldwide usually with about 200 students in Grades 11 and 12 all doing the International Baccalaureate Programme) UWCSEA has become a huge school of 3,000 students. It caters for Kindergarten through to Grade 12 and all students in the Senior School study for the IB programme.



Some of the impressions I gained were how organised everything seemed, - the purposeful nature of all the students – the articulate way all the students spoke – the incredible racial mix of students – the absence of full school assemblies or staff meetings – the rotation of lunchtimes and breaktime – the seriousness with which the seniors approached their lessons – the importance to students of assessment results – the professional business-like attitude of the staff.

It was a great place for students to get an education and such an introduction to the global community!! (I'm sure the students would not be without their problems – they seemed pretty worldly and sophisticated!)

So! That was the educational learning over seven weeks. It was pretty full on and there was plenty to think about.

No wonder I needed a bit of time to recover when I got back to Dunedin!

REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS, PERSONAL READING & TIME OUT

Once back in Dunedin, I took some “time out” and caught up with family time and family responsibilities. I discovered how quickly a day can pass and how much time one can spend worrying and “fussing” about one’s own children. I also discovered how much time in a day housework can occupy if you let it! But most importantly I enjoyed social coffees (Rhubarb will have a significant loss of business this term!) and I discovered the enjoyment of runs through Ross Creek at a respectable mid-morning hour!! It was really nice to spend time off with many members of our school community in a more relaxed way and discuss things other than school business.

The Professional Reading I set myself was to read the text – “It’s About Learning (and It’s About Time)” by Louise Stoll, Dean Fink and Lorna Earl.

This is a fantastic book which explores and gives practical suggestions about developing schools as learning communities. It was gratifying to realise that we at St Hilda’s have made significant steps along this pathway but there are things we can do to further improve learning for our students, teachers, and parent community. The critical message is that it all takes time and that is the commodity that is hardest to find or create....therein lies our greatest challenge....

time to read
time to reflect
time to discuss
time to share
time to dream
time to enjoy
time to be.....

(The greatest gift of my Sabbatical was to have some of this “time”)

*Some ideas related to this professional reading are detailed in the following action list.

110th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

Of course another significant event during Term One was the organisation of the 110th Birthday for St Hilda’s. I had made a commitment to this event and along with the organising committee, had a busy time ensuring that the reunion weekend was an enjoyable, well run and stimulating occasion for the 230 people who attended, and that the 110th Birthday was an opportunity for the whole St Hilda’s community to celebrate together.



This is not an appropriate place to comment upon the occasion in detail but I think it is important to note the importance of such celebration in the life of our School. As I visited many other schools during my Sabbatical, I was reminded of the importance of a school having a “heart” – a “culture” and an enduring tradition. It is only through linking our past, present, and future that we can truly appreciate who we are and make connections with those who are important to us.



“Successful leaders must also learn how to connect the past, the present and the future... from text “ It’s About Learning (and It’s About Time). ”

Based on work with and studies of a number of national and multi-national businesses Linda Gratton (2000) concludes:

“When it comes to time, there is something very special about people....The past, the present and the future are vital aspects of how we see the world, and the timescales for human capital are measured in years, rather than minutes, hours or months.”

For our students it is important to know and appreciate their past so as to give them confidence in facing their future. Celebrations such as the 110th Reunion give us an opportunity to make these vital connections.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

I have already identified a number of action points throughout this report. These are to serve me with reminders of things I would like to see achieved so I do not lose sight of them in the inevitably busy life of a school.

Other possible actions include

- Further staff professional reading and discussion (particularly “The Knowledge Wave” and “It’s About Learning (and It’s About Time)”)
- Staff professional groups focused on “learning” for form groupings – exploring more integrated approaches to learning in the junior school.
- Exploration of developing the wider school learning community
- More focus and promotion on the four Pillars of Learning
- Further development of Thinking Skills and focus on Metacognition (Knowledge of the Learning Process) through the Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) contract.
- Seeking ways to support staff on their personal and collective learning journeys.

CONCLUSION

There really is not much more to say other than thank you to all those involved with making this opportunity possible for me. I am re-energised and excited by future possibilities.

'The Door'

Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

Miroslav Holub
(Trans. Ian Milner and
George Theiner)

CHRISTINE LEIGHTON
April 2006