



PRIMARY PRINCIPALS' SABBATICAL REPORT

John Armstrong

Term 3 2013

1. Title and focus of the sabbatical:

To develop Henley School as an Asia Aware school by visiting Asian educational institutes and implementing and increasing cultural awareness in the school

2. About the author:

I commenced working at Henley School in Term 1, 2009. Prior to this I was principal of Sumner School in Christchurch for over 3 years. I have also been a principal of other schools in the region including Foxhill (1998-1999) and Upper Moutere (2000-2005). I also worked as a full time school reviewer for the Education Review Office in 2005 and continue to work for them on short term contracts.

Henley School is a decile 9 contributing primary school and is the largest primary school in the Top of the South with a roll of around 600. The school was opened in 1962 and currently has an enrolment scheme in place.

Henley School, Henley Kindergarten, Waimea Intermediate and Waimea College make up a unique educational complex that is sited on an extensive area of unfenced land. All schools co-operate to share facilities.

3. Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge first and foremost the Henley School Board of Trustees for supporting my application for sabbatical leave and contributing to the travel associated with the study.

I also acknowledge my experienced deputy principals Eric Gardner and Jan Ferens for the great job they did in keeping the 'ship on course' in my absence. I also recognise that a sabbatical gives many staff an opportunity to 'step up' and it tests the succession planning in a school – thanks to those of you who took on additional responsibilities for the term. Special thanks to the Office Manager, Tracey Aindow and her staff, for ensuring the school administrative side kept moving forward and for helping with the logistics.

I acknowledge the Ministry of Education for making sabbatical leave available to principals. The opportunity to be able to take time out and look in depth at an aspect of

our practice, to indulge in uninterrupted reflection and to have a period of refreshment is invaluable.

A huge thanks to the schools I visited with the principals and teachers giving me a large amount of their time in a generous and open manner. They took the opportunity to share what their schools were doing with passion and pride.

Thanks to Peter Campbell and family (Japan), Jody Bloomfield (Thailand) and Melanie Ryan (China) for hosting me and making me welcome.

Finally, thanks to my wife Rebecca, for keeping things ticking along at home while I was backpacking my way around Asia.

4. Executive summary

Rationale

The New Zealand Curriculum places considerable emphasis on developing school based programmes that have an Asian and Pacific Rim context (page 39). The Nelson region is particularly isolated and it is even more important for our teachers, students and wider community to embrace Asian cultures as many of our students here will end up working in Asia and working with Asians.

Asia has a diverse culture and has worked hard to ensure that the students are fully prepared for the knowledge economy. Given the success of their educational systems (Singapore, Korea for example) the sabbatical provided an excellent opportunity to analyse what makes their systems so effective and compare and contrast it to the New Zealand context.

Our school strategic plan clearly articulates the need for our teachers and students to be exposed to other cultures due to the isolated nature of Nelson and also the relatively homogenous, albeit changing, nature of our wider community. Our School Strategic Plan for 2013/14/15 specifies the development of a link with schools in Asia.

In addition our school Strategic Plan makes specific reference to Information and Communications Technology. This sabbatical would present the opportunity to also look at recent developments in this field while visiting schools and talking to colleagues.

Embedding Asian cultural awareness at Henley School

Henley School places a significant weighting on teaching social sciences through a school wide approach and theme. Our school looks closely at other cultures including the challenges that migrants to Nelson face as well as the support networks that are available to them. In addition, the New Zealand Curriculum places considerable emphasis on developing school based programmes that have an Asian and Pacific Rim context (page 39). At Henley School we use this context to explore the cultural backgrounds of children within the school. We have a cultural awareness day annually when we explore and celebrate other cultures. This has been building over the last few years and is now firmly part of our annual calendar.

5. Purpose

Specifically this sabbatical looked to further develop our school here in Nelson as an Asia Aware school by:

- Adapting our school based curriculum has policies so that it reflects the importance of learning about Asia
- Supporting other teachers to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence to teach students about Asia
- Encouraging greater communication with Asian parents and families in our community
- Creating appropriate networks within our community and region to support Asian students and families
- Supporting and encouraging Asian students to share their cultures and languages
- Developing a clear link with a school in Singapore for interactions to occur

Furthermore, our school has also recently invested in up-skilling our staff through a professional development programme on second language learning as we are increasingly finding that Asian students are becoming a feature of our community.

6. Background Information:

I. Asia: Aware 'Why Asia matters to New Zealand' Asia:NZ Foundation, March 2009

There is a wealth of information contained in this publication that directly relates to the developing an Asia: Aware school. The role of the school leader is seen as critical in any developments with positive outcomes for students.

II. Asia:NZ website

The Asia:NZ website has a whole section dedicated to developing and implementing an Asia Aware school culture and vision. It includes building a collective vision, building a committed team, establishing collaboratives and partnerships, creating high achieving learning environments, and leading and managing change and improvement. All of these readings help provide further insight into the successful implementation of a teacher exchange programme.

III. Articles

A literature search on articles relating to Asian culture in New Zealand and specifically to the Nelson region highlights the need for a greater appreciation and understanding by New Zealanders to the Asian region.

7. Methodology:

To achieve the purpose of the sabbatical I visited schools and/or other educational institutions in countries where I had already established contacts: Singapore, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, China, Thailand and India. I already had strong links with professional colleagues in some of these places. For example: principals, teachers and educational consultants who I have hosted or have communicated with from schools in the Asian region.

In addition to the visits I conducted a literature search of relevant material and reading on Asia I also met with representatives of the Asia:NZ Foundation, Confucius Institute and the Ministry of Education. I met with education officials in the various countries along with the Principals' Academy of Singapore.

Finally, I concluded the trip with some volunteer work in a Mumbai slum school for girls through a contact at the Daya Trust www.dayatrust.com/

8. Findings:

I have grouped the findings and my general observations under the specific countries I visited where applicable:

China

The Chinese government have nine years compulsory education for all. Students are required to complete primary and junior middle school education. Thereafter, students who pass the appropriate entrance examinations go on to senior middle schools or middle-level vocational schools. Primary education is a six year course in which pupils study core subjects such as Chinese, Maths, History, Geography, Science etc. There is also a certain level of basic political and moral education. A strong emphasis is also placed on Physical Education. Schools start around 8 am and classes go on into the evenings.

The education system is divided into 'key' schools and 'ordinary' schools. The formation of key schools was needed to accomplish two purposes, the first was to 'quicken' the pace of modernization in the country and the second was to 'set up exemplary schools to improve teaching in all schools.' In contrast with these schools, ordinary schools, have problems in lack of funding, teacher education and student selection.

Teachers in China focus on the group as opposed to on the individual. If one student is lagging behind, the class will stop and help the student, and bring him as quickly as possible to the level of the rest of the group. It is believed that every student has the ability to achieve in every subject, although some students need to work harder than others to achieve the same results.

Because Chinese teachers and parents expect that all students have the ability to succeed in all subjects, students themselves tend to believe that they can succeed as well. Because Chinese teachers and parents expect more from their students, students succeed more. Teachers are held in high regard in China – the status of the profession is high. Chinese parents and students place a high value on overseas education, especially at top American and European institutions. International schools cater for the large population of ex-pat students in the main cities.

India

For Indian schools, there are often waiting lists and strict entrance requirements, with mathematics usually at a higher level for the age than in Western countries. Sometimes these are waived for foreign children. For younger children, there are numerous private playschools and kindergartens. Some of them are run according to the Montessori method, which emphasizes playful, natural learning.

New Delhi and Mumbai have international schools. The spacious, well-equipped American school in Delhi has a swimming pool and a range of facilities. There are also smaller schools for the children of other nationalities; a German school, a British school, a French school and a Japanese school.

All the big cities have Indian private Indian schools offering an English-medium education, to which foreigners can admit their children. But one local told me that there is a saying in Mumbai; ‘Three things are hard to get in Mumbai; a job for your husband, a place to live, and hardest of all, a school for the children.’ People who had experience of this spoke of a basic difference in attitude - you need the school; the school doesn’t need you. Parents are often unable to check out the school conversely the school will check you out to see whether them. It is not usually possible to see the classes, find out about the syllabus, get an idea of the teaching methods and philosophy from the principal and staff, so that parents can make an informed decision.

Japan

Japanese primary school lasts for six years. For enrolment in primary school, the age-grade system was adopted to enroll children according to their date of birth. Under this system, children enroll in primary school as first-graders on the 1st of April, immediately following their 6th birthday. Compared to the kindergarten enrolment rate of 60 percent, the primary school enrolment rate exceeds 99 percent, proving primary schools to be the essential institutions responsible for the fundamental education of all Japanese citizens.

A school year is divided into three terms spaced with these long recesses. In certain areas, flexible measures are taken to cope with circumstances specific to the regions, such as shorter summer holiday and longer winter vacation for schools in cold regions, etc.



A classroom teacher is in charge of each classroom will teach all subjects. Team teaching, however, has been increasingly introduced these days in an attempt to lessen the teachers’ workload and to improve teaching. Also, specific subjects for upper grades, such as science, music, and home economics, are often led by specific subject-based teachers. The abacus is a feature of mathematics education.

Pupils’ performances on subjects and record of day-to-day life are kept in the teaching-learning record (Shido-Yoroku) for each term. Most schools compile a grade report card for each pupil including their academic

performance, record of special activities and integrated studies, attendance record, observations of daily life, classroom teacher remarks, etc., and send it to their guardians once every term.

Most primary schools provide school lunch. School lunches are either prepared at a at school lunch preparation room attached to individual schools. Usually, pupils alternately take charge of serving meals. School lunch is an integral part of school life as well as a part of the educational activities. School lunch menus are supervised by nutrition teachers, and all children are served the same menu unless they have allergies or other special conditions.

While the majority of schools allow children to wear plain clothes at school, some regions impose uniforms or dress codes. Sports days are often organized as community events and scheduled on weekends to enable families and guardians to participate in the event.

Improvement of education in linguistic ability, math and science education, education in traditions and cultures, hands-on activities, moral education, and foreign language education are the target themes of the recent education reforms. English teaching has been introduced for 1 hour per week to primary schools with the purpose being to deepen understanding of languages and cultures, and to foster fundamental communication skills in a foreign language.

As a result of the dwindling birth rate in recent years, the total number of schools has declined.

Singapore

Singapore places a huge emphasis on education as the only natural resource available to it is people. Like New Zealand, Singapore has a British colonial background, and as a consequence it has adopted a British-based education system. The number of Singaporean students seeking a university qualification remains high. The local education system in Singapore is rigorous and highly streamed. Singaporean students sit primary school leaving exams when they are about 12 years old, from which they will be streamed before entering secondary school. The streams are express (more able students), normal-academic and normal-technical (being the least academic).

It became clear that the education system in Singapore is largely successful due to the investment and selection of the teachers. Bilingualism is also a key feature of the Singapore system (with students learning English and their official Mother Tongue language) along with an investment in ICT.

One advantage of the Singapore system is it is not as geographically dispersed as New Zealand. I think this enables them to have greater consistency in their policy initiatives and implementation. They invest heavily in the selection, recruitment and retention of their teachers. Those with potential for leadership are identified and put on the pathway to management with appropriate support. Likewise those with potential in the classroom are also supported on a career pathway for Master Teachers. Only the top third of secondary-school graduates in Singapore can apply for teacher training. Each year, teachers take an additional 100 hours of paid professional development and they spend substantial time outside the classroom to plan with colleagues. Teaching is seen as an honoured profession in Singapore.

However parents will also tell you that tuition has become a non-optional part of getting an education in Singapore, school alone is no longer enough. In Singapore, there are tough examinations at the end of primary education and it also streams students largely according to academic ability. Such a system adds to parent's anxiety and they turn to the tuition market to give their children the extra push in mathematics, science and languages. Many children attend these after school and evening lessons to supplement learning at school. In the state system classes are often large and the syllabus too unrealistic, parents say, that it is impossible for teachers to possibly get through the whole thing.

South Korea

Education in South Korea is largely state-funded, and compulsory between ages six and fourteen. South Korea benefits from heavy state investment in education, as well as an extremely rigorous school day, particularly for those in high school. It is widely believed that the government's desire to

invest in “human capital” through concentrating on education has led to the economic success of the nation in recent years, as well as extremely high literacy rates.

The first six years of a Korean student’s education takes place in Elementary school. The curriculum is nationally standardised, and includes a basic grounding in Mathematics, the Korean language, Science, Music and Art. In third grade (age 8), children begin to learn English, usually in a laid-back manner through informal conversation rather than detailed study of grammatical structures. Although specialised teachers often teach English, students usually remain in the same classroom with the same teacher for this stage of their educational development.

The school day in South Korea is unusually long, beginning at 8:00am and finishing at 4:30 pm and students often enhance this through independent study before and after these times. High School students usually visit the school library for further study, or attend private tuition sessions between 10:00 pm and midnight. It is also important to note that very few institutions past primary level are co-educational, and those that are remain internally divided between the sexes.

Parents’ status in the society depends importantly on which high schools and colleges their children are able to get into. Children’s failure to achieve high education goals reflects not just on the child, but on their parents as well. In this society, children are obligated by law and custom to provide for their parents in their old age, and so, when parents look at their children, they are also looking at their retirement fund, and the ability of that retirement fund to take care of them in their old age depends more than in any other country on success on their high school and college entrance exams. For all these reasons, parents work very hard to assure their children’s success in school and children work hard in school to please their parents.

The pressure on students to perform is greater. The number of hours spent by students studying every day and every week is longer (longer, in fact, than in any other OECD country). It is said that students who do not meet parents’ expectations in school are often severely punished. Not only do students study longer than students anywhere else, but parents are willing to pay more for the education of their students than parents anywhere else. Though the South Korean government’s support for education is about average, parents pay enough in school fees to bring the total school spending up to 15 percent of gross national product, and that is without counting the enormous sums that parents also spend on private tutoring. Some observers believe that this willingness of Koreans to dig very deeply into their pockets for the education of their children accounts in large measure for the remarkable rise of the South Korean economy.

Summary

The after school tuition problem is particularly acute in East Asian countries and territories that have strong Confucian traditions for learning, diligence and effort. These territories include South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore. China is swiftly joining these ranks as well. All of these East Asian territories are highly globalized and competitive. They stress a need for workers to remain ahead in skills and for students to acquire skills relevant to the global economy. Some publicise their performance in global education rankings. Noticeably, tuition is prevalent in systems which are examination-based. In emerging market economies like China and India, poor salaries drive some teachers to deliberately teach less in class. They then deliver the rest of the curriculum after school in private tuition classes – for a fee.

Leaving private tuition to market forces is creating problems in Singapore too. Many of the top quality teachers are being head hunted by after school providers to deliver lessons. This further

exacerbates inequalities in the society as wealthier families are in a position to pay for good-quality tuition. It also creates recruitment and retention problems for schools.

The status of the teaching profession in Asia is one in which teachers and investment in education is highly valued.

9. Conclusion:

The opportunity to visit a range of Asian schools, engage with other principals and educators in discussions about innovative practices, share and reflect on my own experiences and view programmes in action has enhanced my own professional leadership practice. The opportunity to meet with a number of our educators from Asia was incredibly valuable. Despite the cultural and geographical differences we face many of the same challenges in our education systems.

Personally, I found it extremely valuable to mix with colleagues from both the primary and secondary sector and across a diverse range of schools. I am convinced that many of the contacts made whilst on the forum will be sustained longer term. Hopefully this sabbatical will also benefit my leadership team and the staff and students at Henley school. There are a number of initiatives and ideas that I intend to explore the potential of, including:

- Training for our ‘front of house staff’ in dealing with Asian families at enrolment
- Introduction of basic Asian language
- Hosting an annual ‘Asia Awareness’ day that includes a range of activities from various countries
- Regularly reminding teachers and parents about the importance of Asia through our newsletters
- Support the use of the abacus as a tool for maths
- Promoting some basic strategies for teachers on the inclusion of an Asian perspective into their classroom programme
- Allocation of a management unit in 2014 dedicated to the promotion of Asia Awareness
- Offering a teacher exchange to Singapore to broaden classroom teachers experience

Furthermore I intend to investigate:

- Use of solar power to offset power usage and promote renewable energy
- Greater use of specialist teachers to support the classroom teacher

I plan to share the outcomes of this sabbatical report with the following audiences:

- Sabbatical Award Committee / Educational Leaders website
- Henley School Board of Trustees/Community/Staff
- Waimea Campus of schools (Waimea Intermediate and Waimea College)
- Local Principals’ Cluster and
- Asia:New Zealand Foundation

I would also consider sharing with a wider audience or presenting at a conference (eg NZEI principals conference, U Learn, Nelson Principals’ Association) if appropriate.

Finally, as a country we face the challenge of ensuring our students gain sufficient knowledge about Asia to take up the opportunities it presents and to ultimately enable New Zealand to remain competitive in the global economy.

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