

LESSONS FROM THE ADRIATIC



**Principal's Sabbatical Report
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IV. Gimnazija Zagreb, Principal Milivoj Miliša and staff.

Srednja Škola "Tin Ujević" Vrgorac, Principal Josip Gašpar and staff.

Srednja Škola Fra Andrije Kačića Miošića Ploče, Principal Ina Žderić and staff.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An experienced Secondary Principal visits Croatia on a New Zealand Ministry of Education Sabbatical for professional refreshment and to take a closer look at the Croatian education system to look for ideas that may be useful to consider in New Zealand.

Formal visits were made to the Ministry of Education and five Secondary schools in Croatia. This report gives a significant amount of information on the secondary school courses available and the workings of the education system of Croatia. The writer gives details of each visit made and then makes overall reflections on points of interest. The benefit of having the chance to gain a more intimate knowledge on the home-country of his grandparents is also acknowledged.

PURPOSE

My proposal for this sabbatical had three main parts:

Firstly, it was time I had a break! I had been Principal of Forest View High School for nearly 11 ½ years, and had put my “heart and soul” into this consuming job.

I had two grandparents, and all four of my wife’s grandparents were Croatian, and we have many relatives living in Croatia. My cultural heritage is a very important part of my life. Even though I had visited Croatia three times before, I had a yearning to spend a greater length of time there, to learn the language more fluently, and “get back to my roots”. I thought this might make me a better leader. This was the second aim of my sabbatical.

Thirdly, I knew that the educational system of Croatia is in many ways different to New Zealand. I wanted to look at it more closely, and glean any ideas that could benefit my school or other secondary schools in New Zealand. I was also interested to see what their current issues and reforms might be, and to compare the conditions of service of New Zealand teachers and Principals with their Croatian counterparts. I had some ideas of particular links I would be looking for. These included links important to my school (including catering for the needs of a wide range of students, the effective inclusion of a range of courses in a medium-sized school, retention of students and developing community links), and links to current secondary sector priorities in New Zealand (including improved outcomes for all students, developing community links and curriculum change for future needs). However I also wanted to remain “open” to any ideas that caught my attention.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: – THE CROATIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Students start Elementary school at age six. They stay at Elementary school for Years 1 to 8. Most then go to Secondary school for a further three or four years. (Only Primary education is compulsory, but about 95% go on to Secondary).

Students have the same teacher for the first four years, although they have some specialised teachers right from the start, eg they start learning English in Year 1, and have a special teacher for this. They start learning yet another language (eg German) in Year 4. In Year 5 the curriculum starts to separate into a wide range of subjects, and they have a specialist teacher for each subject. These include Geography and History at Year 5, and Chemistry, Physics and Biology at Year 7. All assessments are graded 1 to 5. Grade 2 is a pass, and Grade 5 is the best. The grades obtained in Year 8 are particularly important as they determine what course you can take at Secondary school.

The top-level secondary courses are called Gimnazija. Some schools in the bigger cities are purely Gimnazija. Others have some Gimnazija courses as well as other specialised courses. A school is limited to the number of Gimnazija students it can take (in multiples of 30 – the class size), so placement is determined from Grades obtained in Year 8. Most Gimnazija courses are Opća Gimnazija (General), others have a limited amount of specialisation, eg Prirodoslovno-matematička Gimnazija (Science-Maths) or Jezična Gimnazija (Languages). All Gimnazija courses are four years long, and the students are aiming to go to University. A breakdown of the wide range of subjects and the number of periods per week for each at each year is given below for the Opća Gimnazija course. Of particular interest to me were the facts that Latin is taught in the first two years, the importance of languages in general, and the inclusion of subjects like Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, Politics, Ethics and Logic. (Each period is 45 minutes long). All of the courses and the time allocations are prescribed, and are very similar throughout the country. They also have one Tutor or Form Period per week (45 minutes).

OPĆA GIMNAZIJA	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Croatian Language	4	4	4	4
Second Language (English)	3	3	3	3
Third Language (eg German)	2	2	2	2
Latin	2	2		
History of Music	1	1	1	1
History of Art	1	1	1	1
Psychology		1	1	
Logics			1	
Philosophy				2
Sociology			2	
History	2	2	2	3
Geography	2	2	2	2
Mathematics	4	4	3	3
Physics	2	2	2	2
Chemistry	2	2	2	2
Biology	2	2	2	2
Informatics (Computers)	2			
Politics & Conduct				1
Physical Education & Health	2	2	2	2
Religion OR Ethics	1	1	1	1
Optional subject (eg Italian)		2	2	2
TOTAL	32	33	33	33

There are several assessments in all subjects throughout the year, and these are averaged to give a yearly grade on the 1 to 5 scale. At the end of the 4th year the students sit their “Matura”. This comprises of a written assignment on a subject of their choice, a written and oral examination in Croatian language, a written and oral examination in either English or Mathematics, and an oral examination in another subject of the student’s choice. Each of these four components are graded 1 to 5, and then an average grade is given as the final result. If students have obtained good grades throughout secondary school, they do not need to sit these Matura examinations, and pass with Grade 5. Many others pass with Grade 4 or 5 after sitting their Matura. Each school writes and conducts their own assessments. Universities also conduct their own entrance examinations, and combine these with Matura grades to select their students.

At a similar level to the Gimnazija are a small number of Art schools, specialising in Fine Arts, Music or Dance.

Students entering Secondary school (including all of those not selected for Gimnazija courses) can also apply to be accepted for a wide range of vocational courses. Many of these courses are also four years long, some are three. Some schools, especially in cities, only offer a range of these courses. Other schools may offer a Gimnazija course as well as some vocational courses. The particular courses that a school may offer are decided centrally (on application). Some courses are available in all areas, others in only a few, eg the nautical course is only available in five schools. The local setting of the school has an impact, eg agricultural courses in regions where there are jobs in that field. The range is very extensive. Four year courses include mechanical, shipping, metal, electrical, building, optical, graphical, textiles, traffic, nautical, weather, agriculture, food, veterinary, forestry, commercial, tourism and health. Three year courses include engineering, industrial trades, shipbuilding, metal, electronics, building and construction, mining, furniture, glass making, textiles, leather, traffic, agriculture, cooking, waiting, hairdressing, butchery and many others. The breakdown of subjects and time allocations for the Ekonomist (Business) and

Automehaničar (Automotive) courses are given below as examples. The Ekonomist course is quite common in schools, taken by students who do not qualify for Gimnazija.

EKONOMIST	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Croatian Language	3	3	3	3
Business Communication	2			
Business English	3	3	3	3
Geography	2	2	2	2
History	2	2		
Mathematics	3	3	3	3
Informatics (Computers)	2	2	2	
Energetics		1		
Biology	2			
Chemistry	2			
Technology			2	
Management		2	2	2
Enterprise		2	2	2
Book Keeping	3	4	4	4
Financial Management			3	
Marketing				2
Finance	2	2		
Statistics				2
Legal Management				3
Physical Education & Health	2	2	2	2
Religion OR Ethics	1	1	1	1
Option (eg Italian)	2	2	2	2
TOTAL (week)	31	31	31	31
PLUS Practical work (hours per year)		84	84	84

AUTOMEHANIČAR	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Croatian Language	3	3	3
Second Language (English)	2	2	2
Politics & Conduct		2	
History	2		
Applied Mathematics	2	1	1
Technical Drawing	1.5		
Mechanics		2	
Materials	1		
Automechanics			2
Basic Accounting	1.5		
Electronics			1
Engines		2	2
Physical Education & Health	1	1	1
Religion OR Ethics	1	1	1
Option	1	2	2
TOTAL LESSONS (week)	16	16	15
PLUS Practical work at school (hours per year)	680	270	160
PLUS Practical work at Workplace (hours per year)	220	630	640
TOTAL Practical (year)	900	900	800



Some students who do vocational courses go on to Tertiary education, others hope to get jobs (although unemployment is high). About 25% of students do Gimnazija courses, and about 45% of students go on to some form of Tertiary education.

You have a free choice of what school you wish to attend – as long as you obtain a place in one of their courses.

Administratively, the country is divided into 21 regions of variable size. Schools receive their funds from their district, and representatives from the district sit on school boards with parent and staff representatives. The amount of funds that a school receives to

operate varies from district to district. All staff salaries are paid centrally by the national government however, and the number of support staff that a school qualifies for is also decided and paid for centrally.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

To complete this project I first did some research on the Internet to find out what I could about the Croatian educational system, then arranged six formal visits; one to the Ministry of Science, Education & Sport, and the other five to a range of schools. I was lucky to have contacts in Croatia who were able to make these appointments for me, as local knowledge proved to be of immense importance. The schools I chose to visit were ones where we had personal contacts, eg a cousin was a teacher, or a cousin had children that attended that school. This in fact gave a good range of schools. All schools were very welcoming and helpful, arranging translation services if needed and prepared to spend time discussing issues and answering questions. They were also interested to hear about New Zealand schools and the similarities and differences. Apart from the formal visits, a lot of time was spent on informal discussion of the issues and checking the details with relatives and friends.

MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, EDUCATION & SPORT

I visited the Ministarstvo Znanosti, Obrazovanja i Sporta in Zagreb, where Vera Šutalo, the Assistant Minister for Secondary Education was kind enough to grant me an interview. She spoke very highly of Mr Primorac, the Minister of Education, who is very forward-thinking and has managed to gain more funds for education in recent budgets. (There has been a budget increase of 33% with the present government, and there have been 600 new or reorganised schools in the last three years).



I found out a lot of the general information mentioned above during this visit. The country has 200,000 students in Secondary programmes, 70% in four-year programmes (including between 23% and 27% in Gimnazija programmes) and 30% in three-year programmes. Class sizes are similar to New Zealand.

The focus in schools is primarily academic. There is not the emphasis on sports and cultural activities seen in New Zealand. There is also a lot less emphasis on pastoral care and careers advice. Most students pass their courses. Those who fail must change their programme or school, or repeat the year's work.

All teachers in the Secondary system have four-year University degrees, and are qualified to teach one or two subjects. They are known as a "Professor of Mathematics", or "Professor of Croatian Language", etc. There is a minimal career structure. All teachers have the same status, and most have the same salary, which is about NZ\$19200 per annum after tax! (This is slightly below the national average salary). There is no equivalent to Management Units, and no positions like Head of Department, Dean, etc. You are able to be recognised as a "Mentor" or "Adviser" if your students do well in a national academic contest or you write a book (or some other noteworthy achievement). This brings a slightly higher salary, but no extra responsibilities. Despite this, teachers are still respected and it is very difficult to gain a teaching position – once you have one you hold on to it! Once you have completed five years of teaching you are eligible to apply for a Principal's position. These are fixed-term positions for four years, and you must re-apply on the open market if you wish to retain your position. (I have made some comments on conditions of service below).

There are some current issues of interest. Adult education is a current priority, with a special strategy and goals. "Lifelong learning" is seen as a way to permanent employment, a better integration of learning and work, and active citizenship both nationally and in the European community.

Work experience is encouraged, especially with many of the vocational courses, and the Ministry has a joint project with the Ministry of Economics on this. It is hoped that students will be able to go on to apprenticeships with employers that they have had work experience with while at school. This is another reason why different secondary vocational courses are offered in different schools – it depends where those sorts of industries are common and there might be jobs become available.

In two years time a national examination system will be introduced to replace the Matura examinations which are at present organised by individual schools. It has also just been announced that Secondary schooling will become compulsory in two year's time.

PRIRODOSLOVNA ŠKOLA VLADIMIRA PRELOGA ZAGREB



Principal Zlatko Stić is justifiably proud of his school, which has great facilities and must be one of the top schools in Zagreb. The school runs a Gimnazija course specialising in Science, as well as four vocational courses – Geological technician, Chemical technician, Ecological technician and Cosmetic technician (all four-year courses). The Science laboratories were very well-equipped, and the cosmetic course was very interesting to see. As part of their work, the students make many of their own products, as well as soap and some other products for sale. The school had security cameras in all strategic locations, with the Principal having the overview in his office. It seemed to me that the school had very few behaviour problems, however, and the students were very happy and friendly. This school had immaculate toilets, a comprehensive litter recycling scheme, and quite a few cultural and sports clubs compared to most schools. It was interesting to see many students smoking outside the school grounds (smoking is very common in Croatia), as a lot of effort is spent to stop this in New Zealand.



IV. GIMNAZIJA ZAGREB



grounds as the I Gimnazija. One school has the morning shift from 8:00am to 2:00pm, and the other has the afternoon shift from 2:00pm to 8:00pm. They swap shifts in alternate weeks. Each school



Zagreb has several Gimnazija schools (ie they run Gimnazija courses only). Many are known only by their number, from I Gimnazija through to XVIII Gimnazija. Most only offer the Opća Gimnazija course, although the courses with emphasis on Languages, Science-Mathematics, and Classics are offered in various different schools. The IV Gimnazija school specialises in the Jezična Gimnazija (Languages). This was my first indication that schools share premises. The IV Gimnazija uses the same buildings and grounds as the I Gimnazija. Each school has its own separate staff and administration, etc, including having half of the library each. It was interesting to see one lot of students arriving and one leaving when we arrived at 1:45pm. The school was housed all in one building (as most are) on four floors. Principal Milivoj Miliša is very experienced and his staff made us very welcome. We visited several classes and spoke with students, who again were very well-behaved. It seems that student behaviour is of little concern in Gimnazija courses. Students are focused and wanting to do well.

SREDNJA ŠKOLA "TIN UJEVIĆ" VRGORAC



Vrgorac is a small town in the mountainous region of Dalmatia. The town has one Secondary school which offers the Opća Gimnazija course, the Ekonomist course (four years) and three-year vocational courses in Automechanics, Cooking, Waiting and Butchery. The school has about 350 students. This would seem to be a reasonable size for the four years of schooling. (Many of the schools seem to have about 600 students). The town is very close to the border with Bosnia and Hercegovina, and several students come from the Hercegovina region for their schooling (just as they did when they were all in the one country of Yugoslavia). This is because the school has a high standard and good reputation. The school did not have the same standard of facilities that I saw in Zagreb. Principal Josip Gašpar is very popular and was formerly a Mathematics Professor at the school. I returned some time later to an evening in Vrgorac where students from the school recited poetry and sang songs. This was a very pleasant evening, and part of an annual cultural week in which the town

commemorates the famous writer and poet Tin Ujević who was born there. (The school is also named after him; in fact many schools are named after famous Croatian people).



SREDNJA ŠKOLA FRA ANDRIJE KAČIĆA MIOŠIĆA PLOČE



Ploče is a small port town on the Dalmatian coast half way between Split and Dubrovnik. The town has one Secondary school which offers the Opća Gimnazija course, the Ekonomist course (four years), and the ability to run three-year vocational courses for Electrical technician, Central heating and Air-conditioning installation, Automechanics, Electrical installation, Cooking, Waiting, and Port Machinery operation. Not all of these courses are run every year, depending on the number of students. It was interesting to go to a promotional evening where the Cooking and Waiting students put on a demonstration to their peers and prospective students. Principal Ina Žderić was there along with a group of supportive staff. (It reminded me of my loyal staff members who turn up to support all school events). Staff members again made us very welcome and we had the chance to talk to students.



GIMNAZIJA ANTUNA VRANČIĆA ŠIBENIK



Šibenik is a larger coastal town with nine secondary schools. This school is the only one offering Gimnazija courses, and has the Science-Mathematics and Languages Gimnazija courses as well as the Opća Gimnazija. This school actually shares its buildings with two other schools. (The other two schools are smaller and run in concurrent shifts). The Gimnazija takes the opposite shift in the morning/afternoon arrangement. The school has won many national competitions and a good record of results. Principal Ivanica Belamarić and her staff made us very welcome, even though it was the last day of school for the final year students, and they were preparing for their special evening celebration. When I asked, it was interesting to find out that the processes for dealing with non-performing staff are similar to New Zealand, and to hear that the School Board has similar functions to our Boards of Trustees, although the composition is different.



(It includes three teachers, two parent representatives, and two district representatives, although I think the number of district representatives may vary from region to region). This school also had an interesting Student Council which had one student representative and one parent representative from each of the 20 classes in the school. This body met on a regular basis directly with the Principal.

REFLECTIONS

Many of my findings have already been mentioned in the sections above, so in this section I will try to pull some threads together.

The way of life (more relaxed) and “mindset” of the Croatian people is different to New Zealand, and this must be taken into account when considering any similarities and differences, as must the fact that there are differences in the economy (eg more unemployment, no benefits like DPB). These things have their effect on attitudes towards education.

CURRICULUM

Of immediate interest is the large number of subjects in the Gimnazija curriculum. Students really feel that they have a lot to learn. The actual amount of time spent in the classroom is similar to New Zealand, in fact a bit less. There are a lot more subjects, but less time per subject than in our courses. I thought this may mean that the level of difficulty may not be as high. However, because my subject is Mathematics I made an effort to compare final-year Mathematics with Form Seven Mathematics in New Zealand, and they are of similar levels of difficulty. Some people I spoke to in Croatia felt that that they have to learn “a little about a lot” but not really that much about anything. Could we say that we learn a “lot about a little” in New Zealand?

My impression is that for many subjects the style of teaching is more facts-based than in New Zealand, but this was hard to judge. Certainly there is more opportunity in New Zealand lessons for discovery-learning, problem-solving, group-work projects, etc, due to the more generous time allocations given to each subject. Most classes in Croatia tended to have the students sitting in rows of two or three facing the front for what we might call a “teacher-centred” classroom. The inclusion of Psychology, Philosophy, Sociology, Logics, and Politics and Conduct in Croatia provide scope for emphasising wider ways of thinking. It is also interesting that students receive one hour a week of religious instruction. (They have a choice between this and Ethics, however at the Vrgorac school only seven students chose Ethics). New Zealand is far too secular for this.

It is obvious that there is far more opportunity for specialisation in New Zealand in Year 11, 12 and 13. Students hoping to go to University are able to start preparing for their areas of interest while still at school. The Croatian teachers found it hard to believe that a final-year student in New Zealand could only do Physics, Chemistry, Biology and two Maths subjects. An opportunity for pursuit of subject interest is given to some extent when the students sit their Matura, as they can choose between English or Mathematics, and can choose what subjects they like for their written assignment and oral examination. On the other hand, the vocational courses in Croatia provide the opportunity for early specialisation of a sort; this only available to a limited extent in Year 9 and 10 (options) in New Zealand.

The wide range of vocational courses is interesting, and the fact that the particular courses offered in a particular school depends on the local environment and opportunities seems to make good sense. This is from the point of view of work experience opportunities, and also from the point of view of future employment opportunities. Gateway in New Zealand is a great innovation which provides some of these opportunities in New Zealand. However maybe there is more we could do along Croatian lines?

The emphasis on Languages in Croatia is obvious, and clearly an item of great difference from New Zealand. The inclusion of Latin in the Gimnazija courses is also cause for comment. This

philosophy provides Croatian students with far more of a “global” opportunity for communication, especially as Tourism is so important to their country. Tourism is also important to New Zealand, (even though we are far more physically isolated), and maybe we have something to learn from this.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR / CO-CURRICULAR / PASTORAL CARE

The provision of sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities is very important at Forest View High School and at many other New Zealand schools. It appears that there is much less emphasis on this in Croatia. While many schools have a limited number of sports teams and cultural clubs, this did not seem to be a major priority, and most staff were not expected to be involved in such activities. New Zealand students have a great wealth of opportunity at their doorsteps by comparison. The schools I visited did not seem to have Head Students or many formal opportunities for Student Leadership, and this is also a priority at most New Zealand schools.

The provision of pastoral care is of high priority at Forest View and in other New Zealand schools. This includes form or tutor periods every day (often twice a day), a lot of careers advice, and access to specialised counselling. The Deans, Careers Adviser and Guidance Counsellor positions do not exist in Croatia, although the “Pedagog” position fulfils some of these roles (as well as others). (Each school has one Pedagog). In Croatia, there is one period with Form Teachers or Tutors per week.

This is one area where New Zealand students are indeed fortunate in comparison to their Croatian counterparts.

It is my impression that New Zealand schools are far more bogged down by “administrivia”. The comparatively large number of Tutor periods is one example. Although attendance is recorded in Croatia, there seems to be a lot less time spent on chasing down explanations for absences and lateness. It is the student’s responsibility to be where they should be, and it is their downfall if they don’t. They know that education is very important and that a qualification is needed if they are to get any sort of job when they leave school. The lack of benefits means that there is more dependence on parents in such a situation. The students have at least five minutes break between each class (and up to twenty minutes), but there is no lunch-break (you have that later at home). I noticed even primary-aged students leave the school grounds to go for a small walk or get a snack, but they were back in class on time. Smoking is very common in Croatia, and many young people smoke. Students go outside for a smoke between classes without anyone seeming to “get into a tizz” about it. Almost all schools do not have uniforms, so this means the bureaucracy of uniform exemptions and follow-up is non-existent. On reflection, maybe we get “too carried away” with all this, and expect a lot more “supervision and police work” from our teachers.

The student behaviour that I observed was of a good standard. The Gimnazija classes certainly seemed to be full of motivated students. The need to get into University courses and get good qualifications and jobs has already been mentioned. This is particularly important as the level of unemployment is high compared to New Zealand and there is a lack of benefits. The standard of behaviour and student motivation is probably not as high in some vocational classes, and teachers have to work hard on this (as they do in New Zealand in Communication English and Alternative Maths classes for example). However the smaller proportion of classroom lessons and larger emphasis on practical work are probably helpful here.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS



Although I did see some outstanding premises, in general it seems that a lot less emphasis is put on buildings and grounds in Croatia than in New Zealand. I did not see any schools with extensive fields and gardens, which many of our schools pride themselves in. In fact, many schools seemed to have no grounds to speak of. We spend a huge proportion of our budgets in these areas by comparison. The standard of buildings does vary a lot. Some schools are housed in old buildings situated right on the street front and covered with graffiti. Some are absolutely immaculate. As mentioned above, the funds for this come from the districts, and priorities will differ and the amount of funds will differ from district to district.

While our school buildings tend to be generously spread out over a school campus, many Croatian schools are housed in one building of about three levels. Classes stay put, except for specialist rooms, and the teachers move about. This means that a teacher does not have “their own room” (so important in New Zealand). It also means that New Zealand classrooms are in general for more interesting with displays of student work, etc, as teachers take a lot more pride in their working environment as that are in the same room all day and responsible for it.



I found the sharing of premises quite astounding. In a town like Tokoroa, this would involve our two secondary schools sharing the same buildings and grounds, and having alternate morning and afternoon shifts. I can't imagine it! This sharing also happens with some elementary schools, with primary-aged students having to do the afternoon shift! This means late finishes, especially in winter. It would also affect the chance to take part in sport and other pursuits, so important to us New Zealanders!

One thing I did notice was the good state of school toilets, very clean and with a lack of graffiti. A major factor in this was the fact that schools have their own cleaners who are employed during school hours and regularly clean the toilet areas and keep an eye on them.

There is something to be said for having these staff members employed during school hours!

Most secondary schools have between 300 and 600 students, and this seems to be an optimum size. Two schools of this size will share the same premises rather than making one school of 1200 students. Things seem to “tick over” well in a unit of this size. Are we doing our students in New Zealand a dis-service by having such large schools?



Receiving funds from the district seems to favour some schools compared to others in Croatia, however I am not sure how the funding actually works. It probably contributes to the principle of sharing premises. It does mean that representatives from the district sit on the school boards, and can have a greater proportion of seats than parents do, another difference from New Zealand.

EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

Teachers are teachers around the world. The “sense of service” of the dedicated teacher is as strong in Croatia as in New Zealand, and of course this “sense of service” is stronger in some teachers in their support of students in all of their activities. It is great to see.

In some respects, teachers in Croatia have better working conditions than their New Zealand counterparts. Their teaching load is lower. Teachers of Croatian Language have to teach 20 periods of 45 minutes per week, teachers of other languages teach 21 periods, and the rest teach 22 periods of 45 minutes (16.5 hours) per week. New Zealand teachers teach 20 hours per week unless they have extra responsibilities. In Croatia the teachers are only expected to be at school when they have a class to teach. There are no staff meetings every day or requirements to stay on campus during non-contact periods. In fact, timetables are organised as much as possible to enable teachers to have late starts or early finishes. There is no expectation or requirement on the ordinary teacher to be involved in coaching sports teams or looking after some extra-curricular activity. There is also far less “bureaucratic” expectation on teachers, eg minimal writing of reports, fewer planning requirements and parent evenings. I also noticed that teachers were able to dress more casually than my staff at Forest View. I looked like a stuffed penguin turning up in my suit and tie!

However, there is a downside to this. As already mentioned, the teacher’s salary is very low, and even slightly below the average salary in the country. This is despite four years worth of academic training. Teachers are only able to teach the subject they have qualified for, so a greater proportion of them only have part-time positions compared to New Zealand. Despite this, there is a surplus of teachers, and it is hard to get a job. Once you get one, you hold on to it. There is a lot less movement around schools during a teacher’s career. In fact many spend their entire career at one school. This is reinforced by the lack of any career structure. As there are no HODs, Deans, or Deputy Principals there is not much scope for promotion, which is the major contributor of movement between schools in New Zealand. There is also not that much chance for informal professional development in the way that Departments in New Zealand work together as there is probably only one Biology teacher in the school for example. It is quite likely that the teacher will

have to accept “shift work” in alternate weeks, which can also pose some problems with fitting in with personal family arrangements. Every school has a “Plan and Programme of Work” which among many things itemises each teacher’s birth year, the number of years they have been teaching, their qualifications, their teaching load and timetable for every one to see (no secrets). Too bad if you want to pretend you are 10 years younger than you really are! And retirement is compulsory at 65.

And what about the Principal? I really enjoyed talking to my Croatian colleagues, who all made me very welcome. They work hard. However, I think New Zealand Principals have to work more hours per week if they want to do a good job – I certainly do anyway. To counterbalance this, the New Zealand Principal has a higher salary, and a permanent job. Croatian Principals know they may only hold their position for four years and then have to find another teaching job in a tight market. They also do not have a Senior Management Team of Deputy Principals to assist them and to take responsibility for certain areas. SMTs are crucial in the success of New Zealand schools, and provide some support to the Principal which the Croatian Principal doesn’t have.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking back to the “purpose” of this sabbatical, I can say that it has been a very successful and enjoyable experience.

My first aim was to have a “good break”, and I did. I should have done this years ago! I did not realise how much I was “caught up in the rat race” until now. I spent about half of my time “on business” and half of my time “on holiday” (as per instructions), and managed to get some extra months of summer and plenty of time at the beach (Adriatic) into the bargain!

My second aim was also achieved. I have really got to know my “home country” a lot better, and my language competency has improved considerably. I certainly feel that I “belong” in two countries now, and hope that this greater understanding of my cultural heritage will make me a better leader in the future.

My third aim considered issues important to my school and to New Zealand secondary schools in general. These issues and many others have been mentioned in the sections above, providing plenty of “food for thought”.