

FOCUS: Various Professional Activities

SABBATICAL REPORT

2006

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply appreciative of this sabbatical leave opportunity and commend the Ministry of Education for the initiative. I acknowledge the ongoing support from the Long Bay College Board of Trustees whose enthusiastic endorsement of my leave combined with the generous provision of resources made my travel to North America possible and added significantly to the value of my experiences. I am also very thankful for the work of the Senior Management Team at the College who ensured that school ran smoothly in my absence.

PURPOSE

The professional activities undertaken centred on attendance at the 61st Annual Conference of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in Chicago, USA, visits to schools in Houston Texas, Edmonton Canada and Seattle Washington, related reading and reflection on the following focus questions:

- How do successful schools use data to inform curriculum delivery leading to improved student outcomes?
- What are the links between school organisational structures (especially student groupings for learning), student engagement and learning outcomes?
- How do successful schools differentiate to meet the needs of gifted and talented students and students with remedial learning needs?
- What are some effective strategies to improve the quality of formal writing across the curriculum?
- What are some models for effective professional development to strengthen teacher/student relationships?
- What are some cutting edge American schools doing from an “entrepreneurial” point of view?
- How do professional associations of principals work to strengthen the effectiveness of the secondary sector?

BACKGROUND

A number of threads in my personal and professional life came together in a satisfying way to provide a most refreshing and valuable travel and learning opportunity. The trip provided the occasion for a reunion with my elder son who is working in Canada as well as meeting with other extended family members in Calgary and San Francisco. This was my first significant travel experience in North America and my itinerary enabled me to experience a wide variety of peoples and places across the continent.

Having been principal of Long Bay College for six years during a period of huge growth and development, I welcomed the impetus to look beyond my immediate school and re-energise for the next few years in terms of sustaining improvement. As a member of ASCD for a number of years I value their research and writings and was pleased that the timing of my trip would coincide with one of their international conferences. In discussion with Chris France, former School Trustees Association National President, at an NZEALS dinner, he suggested I read a stimulating book by William G Ouchi which he felt would provide the framework for a most useful insight into different educational districts in America. Ouchi's book *"Making Schools Work – A Revolutionary Plan To Get Your Children The Education They Need"* describes a 2001 to 2002 study comparing the three largest traditional school systems in North America, New York, Los Angeles and Chicago, with the three that had the most decentralised management systems, namely Seattle, Washington, Houston Texas and Edmonton Canada. Ouchi's research measures were around budgets, achievement data on standardised tests, student engagement and community satisfaction. His conclusions were that too many North American schools were failing, not because of poor teachers, poor students or insufficient funding, but because of inappropriate management structures at the District and School level. Ouchi's book outlines his seven keys to success for schools:

- Every principal is an entrepreneur.
- Every school controls its own budget.
- Everyone is accountable for student performance and for budgets.
- Everyone delegates authority to those below.
- There is a burning focus on student achievement.
- Every school is a community of learners.
- Families have real choices among a variety of unique schools.

I based my school visits on Ouchi's recommended successful school districts. These school observations, the experiences at Conference and the related discussion and readings have formed the impetus for a heightened awareness of the developmental needs of my own school including some innovative strategies. I found the philosophies and practices in the school districts I visited to be close to those of a self managed New Zealand school and found ideas that would easily translate into our New Zealand context.

61st ANNUAL ASCD CONFERENCE - CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Constructing the Future, Challenging the Past - Excellence in Learning, Teaching and Leadership

Sessions of Significance

Growing a Mind – What we are learning about learning should influence what we are teaching about teaching. Presenter Dr Mel Levine, Professor of Paediatrics at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and Director of the Clinical Centre for the Study of the Development of Learning, working with students with learning difficulties and their teachers..

Dr Levine's presentation gave an overview of recent discoveries about the "wiring" of children's minds. He described new advances in the understanding of ingredients critical for learning such as memory, language, attention and higher thinking abilities. He examined typical patterns of development as well as giving examples of variations in performance. He considered how some students possess minds that are highly specialised for specific forms of learning and production. He explored the risks involved in labelling such individuals and in placing them into categories to imply they are deviant. He looked at all these issues in terms of their implications for curriculum planning, for the design of educational pathways and for pedagogy that keeps pace with what we are learning about learning. He advocated a coalition between educators and medical practitioners in terms of enhancing understanding of how to best meet students' learning needs.

Data Driven Decision Making – Looking at Classroom Implementation. Presented by Will Jarrell and Sebastian Cagnetta of Action Learning Systems, Sacramento California.

These presenters outlined a model for providing useful data from classroom observation to enhance school improvement processes. Their model is based on the premise that the collection and use of meaningful data is a characteristic of successful schools. The model proposes that teams of people, teachers, faculty leaders and managers are involved in systematic classroom observations or "action walks" which provide information on what is happening across the school on a particular day in relation to school goals. Teacher buy in to this process requires professional development to get school-wide agreement on what the evidence looks like for effective teaching as played out in classrooms.

Inter-Disciplinary Professional Development in High Schools – Teachers Talking to Teachers. This workshop was presented by Stephen Duch, Principal of Hillcrest High School in Queens, New York.

This was a professional learning community model where traditional staff and departmental meetings were eliminated and were replaced by cross-curricular seminar groups which meet twice a month to talk about teaching and learning. It was argued that this model strengthens teachers as professionals in recognising the ongoing need for teachers to change and adapt their practice as there is increasing knowledge of how students learn. The model affirms the professional obligation that teachers should share in the interests of improving professional practice. This model also has “action walks” as an element.

The Importance of Building Students’ Academic Background Knowledge – “An idea whose time has come”. Presented by Robert Marzano of Marzano and Associates.

This presentation made the case that academic background knowledge is one of the most important variables typically associated with students’ experiences outside of school that is amenable to enhancement via school-wide intervention. A specific approach involving direct instruction in academic vocabulary and wide reading was described. It was argued that students’ vocabulary levels have long been associated with academic achievement and research shows a 33% gain in vocabulary knowledge with specific subject based vocabulary instruction. When all the teachers in a school focus on academic vocabulary and all teachers in departments in the same way, this powerful approach will significantly raise student achievement.

Powerful Schools, Powerful Purpose: Assumptions, Struggles and Promises to Keep. Presented by Carl Glickman, Institute for Schools, Education and Democracy, Athens, University of Georgia.

This address was a provocative analysis of the real achievement, economic and citizenship gap in the USA in relation to public education. The presentation was illuminated with statistics about the USA as a democracy in that it scores 140th out of 163 countries in the level of voting. The majority of USA citizens have no involvement in any neighbourhood issue and two thirds of educated youth are totally uninvolved in civic life. Glickman believes this lack of engagement with other people and different ideas is contributing to an unhealthy society. Glickman also addressed the issue of how much to focus on high stakes testing versus an engaging curriculum. He challenged the assumptions of increasing computer technology and its educative value and he cautioned against society compelling schools to accept responsibility for student outcomes when two thirds of student achievement can be attributed to outside school factors to do with poverty, race and quality of life.

Changing the Paradigm of Extended Learning: Summer Programmes That Work. Presented by Randi Smith, McDonald County School, Missouri.

American Summer School programmes have traditionally involved remediation, credit recovery, rushed planning, poor funding, stigmatised students and poor results. This new model was designed to be preparation for the following school year with a focus on future needs, fun and learning rather than remediation or credit makeup. In this district, Summer School attendance had climbed from 10% to 50% of the school population. Summer School models such as these may well be features of New Zealand schools in the future and indeed the embryonic beginnings of such programmes have been in place in some schools for a number of years.

Implementing Single Gender Classes in a Public School. Presented by Dr Barbara McCool and Dr Myra Gills, Mississippi.

This presentation involved a discussion of the rationale for choosing a single gender grouping structure, the strategies used to ease the transition involving the community and the school district administration, the administrative benefits and the resulting academic effects. The motivation for this instructional strategy had come from concern over gender differential test scores and poor discipline/engagement of students in learning. The presenters provided a reference list for literature related to the topic of single gender education and provided evidence of very positive outcomes in terms of stakeholder reaction, attendance, discipline and achievement for both boys and girls.

Moving From a Promising to a Proven School. Presenters Raymond McNulty and Tim Ott, Successful Practices Network, New York.

Many schools are working towards improvement but are they developing sustainable models or will there be improvement for a year or two and then a drift back to the old ways? This session provided a review of the research results of 25 proven and promising high schools. The four criteria used to evaluate proven schools were explained, as were the specific characteristics that appear to be commonly found in high performing schools. The four criteria involved core academic learning, “stretch learning”, i.e., a variety of optional learning opportunities, student engagement and personal skill development. The characteristics identified were to do with:

- personalised learning (in a large school, ways are found to humanise with groupings, physical spaces, relationships);
- culture of high expectations, especially in literacy and support;
- accountability;
- articulated curriculum;
- data driven decisions;
- rigorous and relevant instruction;
- partnerships;
- professional learning communities;
- school climate;

- leadership.

Other stimulating addresses at the Conference were from Paralympian Bonnie St John entitled *Keeping The Winning Spirit*, from Dr Nell Noddings *Why Do We Educate?* and from Kirk and Caroline Guidry *Walk This Way*, another classroom observation model.

The themes which emerged from Conference topics were to do with:

- Tensions between the constraints of social issues of race and poverty and accountability demands on teachers in terms of performance in high stakes tests.
- Increasing knowledge of brain development and learning processes providing an impetus for individualised teaching in mixed ability classes.
- The implications of gender differences.
- What does professionalism mean in a climate of agreed school goals requiring greater supervision?
- How do schools educate for citizenship with multi ethnic, multi religious populations?

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOLS VISITED IN HOUSTON, SEATTLE AND EDMONTON DISTRICTS

- Reforms started in Edmonton with a new superintendent, Mike Strembitsky, in the 1970's following a serious lack of confidence in public education.
- Districts have turned from failure to success.
- Graduation rates are a significant measure of school success.
- School based decision making over staffing, budget and programmes.
- Formal opportunities for feedback on schools, principals and districts, usually comprising questionnaires for students, families, teachers and principals.
- Publication of all feedback data.
- Public systems are improving with fewer families choosing private schools.
- The district co-ordinates and oversees arrangements where most schools offer unique (magnet) programmes in addition to regular programmes.
- Not uncommon for magnet programmes for gifted and talented, for IB and for severely disabled students to be in the same neighbourhood school.
- A number of public funded special character charter schools and alternative schools exist.
- Strong union protections remain for teachers.
- Rigorous state and district-wide high stakes testing and publication of results.
- District led on-line database about individual student and school progress on standardised tests is available to teachers and schools.

- School boards administer a group of schools.
- Principals tending to opt for more money and annual contracts rather than guaranteed tenure.
- Strong district led procedures for recruiting, selecting, training and overseeing principals.
- District led centralised curriculum development.
- District co-ordinated professional development including required programmes for principals.
- School choice means choosing from a variety of good schools with different strengths and emphases, not from a choice of schools all trying to do the same things, some more successfully than others.
- Each district has adopted the “weighted student formula” for funding.
- Schools have a very strong focus on academic achievement, test often, resist distractions, have a sense of urgency, give honest reliable feedback often, exude pride and positive expectations of success.
- Schools working so that all stakeholders are in agreement on what they are trying to achieve.
- Vouchers becoming more significant element of the systems, though at present are mainly used for the Catholic schools.
- Significant influence from the Small Schools Movement which exists to better personalise learning.

Schools Visited in Houston District

I was privileged in the itinerary prepared for me by the Information Manager in the Houston District Office. She organised a presentation from managers running various aspects from the work being done from the District Office and then spent two days escorting me to schools where I was able to meet with senior staff and observe classes in action. I met with District Managers working on curriculum projects, advanced academics, magnet programmes, reforms, student engagement, curriculum and instructional training and character education.

Houston schools are all graded – Exemplary, Recognised, Satisfactory, Acceptable, Unacceptable.

Oak Forest Elementary School

Has Recognised status.

Provides Elementary Vanguard and Neighbourhood Gifted and Talented programmes. Has a specialist writing teacher and teaches writing process from six year olds up. There are school and district-wide writing competitions and all corridors are used as publishing walls. There is an impressive variety of learning opportunities, both inside and outside the classroom and 300 (a

large proportion) students are involved in after-school programmes with paid high school student supervisors until 6pm.

T.H. Rogers Elementary/Middle School

An Exemplary school.

Has a Gifted and Talented programme, a centre for students with multiple disabilities, a centre for hearing impaired students as well as regular programmes for neighbourhood students. Clever combinations and separations of students enhance learning, both academic and social for all groups.

Lee High School “Where The World Comes To Learn”

The school has a district initiative appointed learning co-ordinator who is an extra staff member to work across the curriculum to create and foster ten small learning communities within the school. These communities are thematic, 210 to 240 students in each and a four year programme which is semi-autonomous and self-contained sees them have a reduced number of teachers, ten to twelve during that whole period. The faculty of each small learning community meets for 90 minutes weekly to focus on relationships, quality teaching and learning, to align resources with goals and provide continuity of care by keeping groups of professional students and families together during the day and across multiple years. The arrangement also increases instructional time, lowers student/teacher ratios and ensures collective responsibility through incentives and consequences for teaching teams. There is an increasing expectation on staff to implement effective, evidence-based, instructional practices. Evaluation measures used are for student achievement, attendance and conduct. The school promotes student engagement through Kagan Co-operative Learning Strategies. EAR equals Engagement (are students actively engaged in learning?), Alignment (are teachers teaching and students learning the right stuff?), Rigour (are the tasks and is the content at the right level of difficulty?)

Newcomer Charter School

Newly set up and offering a free five-year college credit programme to local students between 17 and 21 years of age who have been in the USA for three years or less and who have fewer than six high school credits. It offers early morning, evening and Saturday classes designed to suit working students. It concentrates on intensive English and a limited range of subjects. It has a full-time social worker and a range of support programmes and offers evening meals.

Challenge Early College High School

Opened in 2003 as a partnership initiative between the school district, the community college system and the Carnegie Foundation, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. A unique school designed to provide students the opportunity to begin college after the tenth grade. It has a small school setting and is housed on a community college (New Zealand polytech) campus. It enables students to complete from ninth grade to the first two years of college in five years, earning transferable college credits and provides a seamless pathway for 400 students who gradually integrate into college course work interwoven with a traditional high school programme. The school is specially designed to improve outcomes for students under-represented in higher education, including low income, ESOL African American students. It makes higher education more accessible, more affordable and attractive by bridging the divide between high school and college. It also suits a range of students who for a variety of reasons are alienated or don't fit into traditional high schools as the programme has challenge without some of the restrictions of traditional schools and it has been seen to attract the "bright eccentrics".

Welch Middle School

In the fifth year of a reform process, opened 27 years ago as a suburban junior high, with a majority white middle-class population, it is now an urban middle school with a majority poor African American population. It has eight self-contained special education classes - one for profoundly disabled with extreme high needs, two for autistic students most of whom are non-verbal, two life-skills classes whose students have very limited intellectual ability and three behaviour service classes for students who cannot function in mainstream classes. Another 150 students need remedial work in basic skills. It also has a magnet programme for physically gifted students and 300 attend this programme from all over the district. There are many new immigrants from Latin America, Asia and Africa and a new-comers class for students recently arrived from Africa who are illiterate in their native language as well as in English. It uses the EAR classroom visit protocol and has five thematically based small learning communities, each with its own assistant principal and counsellor. It also has a district funded school improvement facilitator.

Schools Visited in the Edmonton School District

Note: Alberta is the wealthiest state in Canada. There are significant employment opportunities and a “frontier feel”.

Crestwood Elementary/Junior High School

The entrance features wall charts showing the school’s achievement data, mission statement, goals and motivational messages (a common feature of all schools visited.) The elementary programme has an academically advanced course and the junior high gifted and talented programme draws students from many other elementary schools. It has an academic orientation and markets itself as a school for students who enjoy rigorous academic challenge and who plan to enrol in a post-secondary programme when they have completed high school. The school has an annual instructional focus. In 2006 it is to enhance critical thinking skills. The principal operates a walk through observation protocol to provide data on school practice and answers to critical questions about teaching and learning. All teachers do annual growth plans with a mentor. There is a peer coaching model. The principal meets monthly with his support group of principals for professional development and the district superintendent has the responsibility for setting annual development plans for principals.

Westminster Junior High School

One of the few public schools to offer the middle years international baccalaureate programme which is their enrichment programme. Fifty percent of their 500 students are in this programme. Their instructional focus this year is strategic reading to enhance critical thinking. The community service element of the international baccalaureate programme has expanded into the regular programme as well. Senior managers conduct walk throughs to assess coherence of school wide pedagogy.

Laurier Heights Elementary/Junior School

A dual track school with 50:50 French and English Medium instruction. Note: All students in Edmonton must study a language other than English from Grade 4. The 2006 instructional focus is higher level thinking through self assessment. There are cross curricular instructional leadership teams and a policy of shared leadership.

Ross Sheppard High School

2000 students, including approximately 500 mild to severe special needs. Students come from 35 junior high schools, 60% from out of zone and 64% of the students are Asian. The school promotes a number of programmes: the international baccalaureate, elite athletics, Canadian Hockey Association Skills Academy, fine and performing arts, five international languages, French immersion, golf academy, an off-campus programme including work experience and a registered apprenticeship programme. The 2006 instructional focus is an improvement in strategic reading skills and a related focus is the teaching of note taking skills across all subjects. The principal regularly conducts walk through observations. There are impressive school handbooks and very heavy promotion of extra curricular opportunities and achievements.

Schools Visited in Seattle

West Seattle High School

The principal, Susan Derse, is celebrated in Ouchi's book because of her record of lifting schools from "failing" to "achieving" status. Most students in the school have low socio economic status and this is a blue collar, multi racial area with a large proportion of African American students and approximately 50% white students. The school has a federal grant to create small learning communities. Students are arranged for core subjects in Grades 9 and 10 into sub groups, taught by fewer teachers who remain with them for more than one year. The school is promoting a transformation vision for a more rigorous programme where learning is highly valued. Students are active learners and their classes are challenging. It describes itself as a "new American high school" with the following features:

- A setting where teachers and students can know each other well.
- Students have opportunities to learn of the world beyond school.
- The context is integrated and reflective.
- There is a common intellectual mission articulated.
- School, family and community work closely together.
- The teacher is designer, enquirer and clinician.

Nathan Hale High School

A member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a movement dedicated to school reform where the elements of smallness are seen to create conditions for success. It was a failing school ten years ago and now has a graduation rate of 91%. Ninth Graders are split into three Academies of mixed ability, each staffed by four teachers who are specialists in one of the core. Students

spend the first half of the day in Academy classes, though mathematics classes are grouped on ability. Staff attribute the improvements to:

- Year 9 academies.
- Year 9 class sizes of 24 to 25.
- Increased expectations.
- Increased graduation requirements.
- Focus on critical thinking skills as the basis for work across all subjects.
- Longer periods in Year 9.
- Differentiated instruction – advanced placement and honours courses.
- Common vision.
- Consistency of teacher practice.

Standardised student log books are a key. Students do all their core work in the same exercise book, with the same setting out. Each lesson is started with beginning tasks, goals from the lesson, reminders of assignment deadlines. Log books have to be checked and stamped each day by the class teacher. Critical friends groups of staff from across grades and across disciplines follow structured meeting protocols and topics (coalition of essential schools feature), meet three hours per month and have of their professional development in these groups. Staff facilitators for these groups are trained over the summer. A multi paragraph essay approach to formal writing is a template style model taught successfully from Grade 9. The “book chat” is very important, offering credits towards graduation and also a strategy for connecting individual students with a mentor teacher figure.

COMMON FEATURES OF ALL SCHOOLS VISITED ACROSS THREE STATES

- Formal acknowledgement of outstanding teachers, administrators and schools at district level.
- Schools graded for quality and public dissemination of each school’s achievement data by the district.
- High levels of security (guards, walkie talkies, phones in every room).
- All schools described being involved in school reform movements, e.g., Coalition of Essential Schools, The Learning First Alliance, The Small Schools Movement.
- Simple instructional focus each year, e.g., note taking skills across the curriculum.
- Concern for best balance between preparation for high stakes tests and breadth and depth of learning.
- Credits towards graduation all important but a question of standards?
- All had strong literacy/numeracy strategies.
- Most had a huge range of co-curricular opportunities.
- All were well maintained with good facilities, though perhaps not to the “high-tech” level now common in many New Zealand schools.

- All had special programmes which attracted students from other areas and there were often fascinating combinations of groups with different needs within a school.
- Grades 9 and 10 (Years 10 and 11) were broken up into smaller structures within schools to personalise learning.
- High level of interest in issues of cognitive development.
- Issues around teacher professionalism and the supervisory roles of principals and managers.
- Increasing consistency of pedagogical practice and student management routines within schools.
- Attendance and punctuality regarded very seriously.
- Districts produce data for individual and groups of schools.
- Issues around differentiation, especially for academic ability and gender.
- Schools make heavy use of data for diagnostic and developmental purposes.
- Schools becoming more deliberate about their work, i.e., informed increasingly by research and data and advocating small but solid steps in continuous improvement.
- Big after-school programmes, especially in elementary schools.
- Interest in student advocacy/mentoring to personalise learning.
- Foyers and corridors full of goals, affirming messages, achievements in district tests, student and teacher celebrations, examples of work.
- Teacher professional development across the curriculum in small teams for agreed shared practice and for monitoring student progress.
- Many schools opting for early closing or late arriving, for teacher professional development.
- Moving towards shared leadership models.
- International baccalaureate programmes in a significant number of schools - the middle school programme apparently very successful.
- “Habits of Mind” a favourite critical thinking framework for much student learning in many schools.

ISSUES OF INTEREST IN THE NORTH AMERICAN MEDIA DURING MY VISIT

Protests at proposed hard line towards illegal immigrants. “Tens of thousands of California students from first graders to young adults boycotted classes to protest Federal Immigration proposals celebrate the contributions of newcomers and trade a day of school for a raucous street party.”

The Darfur Crisis in Sudan. “High school students staged rallies to draw attention to the plight of child victims, the night walkers.”

CNN News. Publication of a list of the country’s best schools in terms of preparation for College and later life.

In Newsweek Magazine, 8 May. “What makes a great high school?” The top 100 schools were identified by dividing the number of advanced placement in

international baccalaureate tests taken at school by the number of graduating seniors. This was seen as a measure of how committed the school is to helping students take College level courses. The article comments on the trend towards a more individualised experience with schools offering a range of programmes and each school having a different focus from its neighbour. "Critics argue that it is playing around with the issue of improving learning in a risky way because without a strong degree of commonality, standards may be compromised and students will lose out by not sharing common experiences."

Californian teachers accepted a pay rise of 8.5% over three years.

Time Magazine special report. "Drop out nation. 30% of America's high school students will leave without graduating. Here is what one town tells us about the crisis."

Education was regularly featured as being in crisis in the media following on from the previous major report "A nation in crisis."

Serious concerns over Inuit education statistics in Canada. Very high drop out rates. Only 25 % graduate. Very few enter teaching to be role models. Unemployment at 70% in some communities. Low rates of literacy in both native and English languages. Attention is very focussed on the new territory of NUNAVUT, where 85% of the population is Inuit.

Edmonton Education District publishes a newspaper which details summer school programmes on offer across the district.

San Francisco Chronicle, 28 April. "Police patrol high school after fights. Campus placed on lock down. Two youths, ten students arrested over fights which appear to be racially motivated. Police describe the situation as becoming an annual event at the school at the end of the school year."

"Soft drinks fall from scholastic favour. Beverage firms and anti obesity groups agree to drop non-diet sodas from public schools."

Proposal to provide free pre-school to all California four year olds. Some fears that some current programmes would not be seen to comply with the inevitable requirements for funding and compliance issues that would follow, leading to a lessening of choice for families and pre-school operators.

The Duke University Lacrosse Scandal.

An ongoing debate "Evolution versus Intelligent Design."

Public education is the theme in most state campaigns. The San Francisco Chronicle noted Democratic politicians running for jobs in California are using education to lobby for support.

The only mentions of New Zealand in the media included:

- Shrek, the sheep who escaped the shearer.
- Tiger Woods driving stock cars in Huntly while in New Zealand for his caddy's wedding.
- The Fisher and Paykel dish drawer dish washer.

CONCLUSION

My five weeks in North America provided a fresh perspective on the needs of my school at this point in its ongoing development.

In many respects this took the form of confirmation of the value of some improvements already under way, especially in relation to the importance of gathering good data/evidence as the basis for assessing needs and evaluating effectiveness. However, I was reminded often both at the Conference and in visits to schools, of the need to carefully balance a focus on testing with providing a broad ethical and transformational education for citizenship in its widest sense.

The value of small cross-curriculum teaching teams (learning circles) working together for professional development over time was heightened as was the benefit of a simple, school-wide, sharply focussed annual objective for instructional improvement.

I learned about a variety of models for “walk through” observational practice to provide a “lens” through which educators in schools can assess the consistency of quality teaching and learning.

I now have a heightened awareness of the emerging knowledge about adolescent cognitive and social development which is proving helpful in designing strategies to better meet individual and group learning needs in my school.

Above all else I was reminded often of the need for my school to sustain a personalised approach in order to provide the best possible environment for quality teaching and learning. It was often the systematic and responsive attention to the needs of individual teachers or students that marked out the effective schools I was privileged to visit during my sabbatical experience.

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