

## **Sabbatical Report April 2006 - June 2006**

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### **Executive summary**

The visit was in term 2, and covered Canada, US and England, following up on professional contacts made through the Canadian Principals Association, the Educational Leadership journal of ASCD, and Louise Stoll who presented in Auckland earlier in 2006. Several schools were visited in Canada and the US, secondary and primary, two Principals conferences were attended, in Vancouver and Quebec, visits were made to the Educational Development Centre in Boston, and schools in Thornbury, South Gloucestershire, England were visited.

### **Purpose**

There were two key aspects I intended to study. In fact, other issues also became of interest along the way.

Firstly, the use of ICT across the conventional curriculum to enhance student learning. Secondly, developing sustainable professional learning communities particularly across different learning areas in a middle school environment.

### **Background**

Orewa College translated in 2005 into a year 7 to 13 school, and developed at that point a middle, year 7 to 10, and senior, year 11 to 13, school programme.

We have an extensive ICT infrastructure, have gradually cut specialist ICT courses (from four teachers some years ago to one now) and have put our resourcing into embedding ICT use within all courses. I was interested in seeing further development of this trend in other school environments. As well as the schools visited, I followed up on an ASCD journal article by Mary Burns of EDC in Boston and spent time with her and her colleagues who work in that field, mainly in a consultative role for states and governments around the world.

In a year 7 to 13 school, it is an important challenge to link the teaching of specialist courses with the holistic home room learning programme. We have made some progress on this but there is a long way to go before we truly attain an integrated learning community from year 7 to 13. The work of Louise Stoll in supporting sustainable effective learning communities is well regarded. She referred me to the South Gloucestershire district, where Tom Whittingham organized school visits for me.

### **Activities**

I organized contacts and visits in advance, and asked to see examples that would benefit my learning in the two fields of interest I chose. I spent at least one full day in each school, speaking to senior staff, teachers, observing classes, and viewing policies and documents.

## **Canada**

Having contacted the Canadian Association of Principals, which includes all levels of schooling, primary through to secondary, and includes all senior administrators, not just principals, I organized the following

- Visits to four school districts in British Columbia, (Richmond, Burnaby, Langley, Vancouver), Elementary and High Schools. One school was applying for accreditation to be an IB middle school, which is based on the programme being taught rather than assessments. I found it interesting and have subsequently done some follow up.
- Schools visited: R.E Mountain Secondary School, Langley Arts School, Richmond County, Mc Nair Secondary, Burnaby Mountain Secondary, and King George Secondary.
- Attendance at the thrice yearly chapter meetings of the British Columbia Administrators Association
- Attendance at a meeting of the British Columbia Professional Development group considering online support for teacher Professional Development
- Attendance at part of the Canadian Association of Principals conference in Quebec city

## **United States**

- Howard County school district, in Maryland on the outskirts on Washington D.C. Visited Hammond High School.
- Educational Development Centre, Boston

## **England**

Schools in Thornbury, South Gloucestershire area

**Castle School** high decile, high achieving, long established secondary school.

**Bradley Stokes School** a brand new school with only year 7 this year.

## **Findings**

Observations only from my limited visits and discussions

## **Canada**

### **Schools are not self managing and relationships between Principals are more collaborative and collegial then here**

Because administrators (Principals and Vice Principals) are moved around within the district every few years there is not the same sense of open competition between schools. The level of professional contribution to the Chapter meeting was measured, knowledgeable and respectful of other points of view. They were discussing a new piece of legislation proposed for BC that would limit the size of classes and the number of Special Ed students allowed in each class, with any breach of this only allowed if the individual affected teacher consented. The administrators could see the benefits and the problems with the legislation which they accepted the politicians were proposing with the

best of intentions... The Minister of Education for BC was at the meeting to hear their viewpoints.

**Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals), are more involved in classroom visits, walking around school, being hands on involved in student behaviour management.**

Because there is not a system of deans and HoDs having significant responsibility for student behaviour, Principals and Vice Principals are the people who see students and parents in this regard. Their work is often dealing with the urgent and the obvious.

**Schools are resourced and staffed in a similar way within the one district and follow similar, even the same, timetable structure.**

This allows courses at senior level to be offered across the district, with each school offering one or more, and students taking that course at set times in the week while staying at their own school for the rest of the time. This applies especially to prevocational trade courses. It also means that the production of course material is done district wide and is not the responsibility of the school. There is a lot of concern in Canada and the US, as there is here, about the lack of school leavers taking up trade employment and training...so this initiative is planned across the district to address that concern.

Physical resourcing is also similar. ICT, textbooks, appeared consistent within the same district

**Standardized testing and national standards in curriculum and assessment are not the norm.**

There is unease at the thought of standardized assessments across the province or country, and schools make decisions about their assessments and criteria for graduation. There is a move towards more standardization but nothing like to across the board national standards and national curriculum we have here, and no acceptance of the importance or validity of that.

## **United States**

### **Maryland**

I visited one school district, Howard County.

There was better resourcing than in Vancouver for ICT, but administration e.g.

Attendance register was still done on paper. Whereas we have specialist and separate counselors for emotional needs and career guidance, and deans for classroom behaviour, their counselors all fill a more diverse role. I believe our more specialized system better serves student needs Student requirements for staying on site were stricter then in BC.

There were extensive district wide policies e.g. for the curriculum and student behaviour.

The overall system however was similar and the conclusions much the same as for Vancouver.

**Boston** Education Development Centre

This as an international organization that has centres across the U.S and internationally, and contracts out to states, governments and other quasi government organization for research and advice on programmes. I had made the contact through the Educational Leadership journal we subscribe to, following up on some interesting articles on ICT usage in schools.

I had the opportunity to meet and discuss programmes with seven of the staff, and as well attended a lecture/ discussion group at MIT discussing creativity and innovation in the curriculum including the use of more advanced robotic projects than we currently do in technology.

### **Particular EDC projects of interest to us;**

#### **Maine**

**Laptops for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in mathematics**, a pilot over several years that schools applied for. The focus was on low achieving schools or districts. It is being evaluated in an ongoing way, and seems to reinforce the motivating power of ICT usage, although they have not been used consistently e.g. Some schools allow the students to take them home, others don't. It also reinforces our experience that it takes some time for teachers to bring about teaching changes and to incorporate ICT into the curriculum. EDC is working with the teachers and schools to support this.

#### **Colorado** (and then some other states)

**Resources for mathematics teaching using online student resource** (ratio and proportion). These resources developed by EDC, EDC staff give workshops to teachers who then give workshops to other teachers to ensure the use of resource is widely understood and available

#### **The IT Pathway pipeline model**

Rethinking Information Technology learning in schools

This developed a set of IT skills for IT world awareness, IT world exploration, IT career preparation, and IT workforce preparation.

#### **Education Employment and Community Partnership programmes**

Working with community partners in strategic planning, systems design, research and evaluation, technical assistance, professional development, programme implementation, technology integration, and curriculum development

#### **MIT media lab**

Mitchell Resnick

He works with robotic / electronic systems for student use. e.g. Lego, cricket ... and is currently working with the Singapore Education Ministry. They are concerned that even though Singapore does very well in international leagues tables, there is not enough innovation and flexibility being displayed by school leavers. The equipment is used in Singapore schools but only as an after school / extra curricular opportunity Generally EDC had done a great deal of well planned and implemented research on the skills of ICT needed in different environments, but little on what I was interested in, namely how to actually embed those skills across a school curriculum.

#### **England**

I visited schools in Thornbury, South Gloucestershire area. This contact had been developed through Louise Stoll regarded highly for her work in developing school

learning communities. I attended a seminar with her earlier in the year, along with a couple of the Red Beach senior management team.

My main purpose in visiting these schools was to see the progress made on learning communities, and peer support and collaboration.

**Castle School** high decile, high achieving, long established secondary school.

- I met the Principal and senior staff,
- viewed the school,
- looked at their staff coaching and peer observation system
- looked at their target setting system ( entry tests through to GCSE)
- attended a Governors meeting

They have made progress over the past few years on improving teaching through structured coaching and analyzing student data. They also work closely with a neighbouring school, and gain feedback from them. They critique systems for each other, visit classes in each others school to confirm (or otherwise) that what happens in the classroom matches the stated goals of the school.

The school is resourced in a similar way to ours, although the buildings and plant are not as good, as property is not self managed in the same way as ours.

**Bradley Stoke School**

A brand new school with only year 7 this year. Good resources. Smart boards in every teaching space, stylish cafeteria, sports fields, courts etc. Labs and workshops of a high standard of design.

I met the principal and senior staff

Looked at the student council set up

Discussed the systems that were similar to Castle School (the Castle School Principal was mentoring the new principal at Bradley Stoke)

## **Implications**

### **Overall impression of US/Canada /England visits**

What I saw was a snapshot of the system. In North America with so many states and provinces, and a mixture of federal and state requirements it is difficult to record an overall picture. I was looking specifically at ICT and professional collaboration, but some other issues seemed relevant and obvious. There was a strong similarity between British Columbia and Maryland in terms of district roles versus school administrators' roles, but more collaboration between Principals and a structure for that to happen in British Columbia. High Schools followed the same physical and organizational structure. The Howard school district in Maryland was better resourced than any of the school districts I saw in British Columbia.

England has more self management than North America and less than us. There is more ability for schools to develop initiatives for organization and learning. Target setting for student achievement is well established, and peer coaching and observations are an important and vibrant part of the school Professional Development structure.

There is little collaboration or contact between different types of schools, e.g.

Independent schools, church schools, state schools, did not appear to have the structure to

meet together, nor their students to participate in the same events e.g. sports leagues. This is a rather special aspect of our New Zealand system.

I did not really gain much regarding ICT in either England or North America but did learn in England about developing peer collaboration and support, as well as target setting for national assessments.

## **Conclusions**

### **Self Management**

A system not common else where. It allows us to be far more involved in planning for our community and our students. It brings with it big responsibilities at all levels; governance, management, middle management, and within the classroom. I don't believe we realize how big that responsibility is, or how unique it is to have that opportunity. In general the Principals I met in North America did not see that enlarging their role towards self management was a good thing. Most felt the school district should continue to take the role it does. One example is with suspensions and enrollments. The district office would decide whether a student should be placed in another school and which school that would be. It would not be up to schools to sort that out among themselves. Enrollments are similar. If parents wish to attend a school they are not zoned for, the decision is not made by schools but by the district.

**ICT** We are doing better than anything I saw in terms of usage across the curriculum, and usage to streamline administration (attendance, reporting, communication etc), and in terms of both hardware and software. I did not see one smartboard in any of the schools I visited, and only saw data projectors in dedicated computer labs. Generally ICT was not used in classes that I observed except for computer classes, or one ICT immersion class I saw. For administration, the first period roll was mostly done on paper, and sent to the office by a student. The rest of the roll keeping for the day was done by the teacher but not kept as a centralized record. The issue we still need to keep working on here is how much do we offer in terms of high level courses in computer science, programming on a specialist basis that would not be part of the conventional curriculum. The ICT resource I saw in the Maryland area was better than in British Columbia but the integration of it into general curriculum course was not significant

### **Collaborative learning and support for teacher professional growth**

Professional development is mostly done as we used to do it, i.e. Whole days for the whole region (school district ours is more ongoing and school based. There is a tendency there to have requirements for an amount of Professional Development to maintain registration and certification. This could be online courses, tertiary courses, school courses etc... There are mixed views on the effectiveness of this... gaining credentials because you have to, that may not actually be of much relevance to your job  
I did not see effective structures for sustainable professional dialogue across different subject areas.

### **Career Education**

There is a similar concern about the lack of trade/ vocational emphasis for school leavers. In both Canada and the US, school districts are providing courses that are open to all students in the district, by attending a block course e.g. one afternoon a week at a school offering the course they want, and continuing the rest of their timetable at the own school. This is possible because the district has a standard timetable e.g. In British Columbia mostly four 80 minute classes each day, in Howard County, Maryland six 50 minute classes per day. Each High School offers one or more technical pre-vocational courses for the district. School Counselors advise all students of course suitability and check all course selections. (On the other hand there are no deans in the role we have, so Counselors do all the personal counseling, careers counseling and much of the follow-up that deans would do here. Our system has this role in three specialist parts, personal counselors, careers advisors, and deans who work closely together.

### **Student engagement**

Schools, teachers and students around the world have similarities and human nature is the same everywhere. I saw outstanding lessons and mediocre lessons; highly motivated students and those trying to sleep in the back row. However, the lack of school uniforms, lack of immediate consequences e.g. detentions, seemed to encourage a less confrontational relationship with the more challenging students. In the more litigious system, the responsibility of the school and the parent is more legally defined.

### **Quality Management of Assessment**

We are far more likely to use assessments that are across the cohort (within the school) and national, like NCEA, AsTTle, and are not concerned about consistent marking, strip marking, standardized results etc. This seemed to be a newer concept in schools visited, where there was more reliance on class marking. Statewide or province wide criteria for graduation are developed or being phased in, as is more standardized testing. I saw lots of 'catch up tests' being done on statewide assessments, without the security of testing we would expect. I believe our parents get a much more realistic assessment of their child's achievement because it is nationally linked. The system of quality management we have for assessments, late or missed assessments, appeals etc is much more objective and consistent than any I saw.

### **Graduation**

This is a big part of the system and is expected after four years of High School i.e. grade 12. The standards required are statewide and school based, and these standards are based on what the average citizen would be expected to know to function positively within their democratic society. The standards (e.g. in Maryland) are in English, Algebra, biology and US History/ government. In Canada there was a trend to developing a career / life skills portfolio. Much thought going in to what makes for a good education.

### **International Education**

As an income generator, not a part of the US public school system. In Canada, it is done across the district. Individual schools don't market, the district does this, and students may apply to their school of choice which receives part of the fees, the rest goes to the

district. Quite different from ours which follows our self managing pattern and allows schools to promote themselves and their programme individually.

**Overall, the main outcome of the sabbatical was a great sense of the responsibility that goes with self management, and enough time out to come back here able to look with fresh eyes at our own system. Issues that might have seemed too hard or too awkward don't seem so any more.**

## **References**

### **Canada**

Tom Hierck, President, B.C Principals and Vice Principals Association

Stanley French, Executive Director, ditto

Chrissie Whitley, Manager of Professional Programmes , ditto

Angelo Ferraro, Manager, International Education, Burnaby School District, BC

Doreen Redmond, Vice Principal, Burnaby Mountain High School, Burnaby School District, B.C

Dave Michel, Principal, R.E Mountain Secondary School, Langley School District, B.C

Rose Sebellin, Principal, Matthew Mc Nair Secondary School, Richmond School District, B.C

Susan Johnsen, Principal, Jesse Kwok Elementary Richmond School District, B.C

Terry Howe, Principal, King George Secondary, School, Vancouver School District, B.C

### **U.S**

Dr Sylvia Patillo, Principal, Hammond High School, Howard County

Mary Burns, Senior Technology Specialist, Education Development Centre (EDC)

Heidi Larsen, research Associate, EDC

Dr Joyce Malyn Smith, Strategic Director, Workforce and Human Development, EDC

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Perna Sood, Technology Assistant, EDC

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### **England**

Tom Whittington South Gloucester Local Education Authority

Melanie Warnes, Head, Castle School, Thornbury

Iestyn Davies, Assistant Head teacher, Castle School, Thornbury

Dave Baker, Head, Bradley Stoke School, Bradley Stoke