



Principal's Sabbatical Report

Term 3, 2010

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St. Oran's College

Conference in Hong Kong

Executive summary

The “17th International Conference on Learning” provided a wonderful opportunity to meet many people from all over the world. A cross-section of education sectors were represented. There were many keynote speakers and then presentations from various attendees. The conference gave a good overall picture of educational issues and trends facing us all. New Zealand is highly regarded for its education. In talking to a university lecturer from Finland I explained that we look to Finland as having one of the best education systems. Her response to me was “Maybe, but we look to New Zealand as having one of the best pre-school education systems”. New Zealand educators and researchers are held in high regard, mention was made of the work of J Hattie and H Timperley. I personally enjoyed the presentations from presenters representing China, Tibet and Turkey. All of these countries are in the process of reforming their education systems and have many barriers to overcome. The passion and enthusiasm for learning exhibited by all at the conference was uplifting (*refer to Appendix 1 for further details on the conference*).

Trip to the United Kingdom including Iona and School Visits

Executive Summary

The trip to Iona was a real highlight. I was accompanied by my Aunty and Uncle who live in York. They were so impressed with Mull and Iona that they are heading back later this year. We spent two nights on Mull and spent a day on Iona. The scenery was simply stunning. It was so special to finally visit St. Oran’s Chapel after seeing many photos of this spiritual link to our school. St. Oran’s Chapel is the oldest intact building within the religious settlement at Iona. It is believed to have been built as a family burial chapel. It stands in a burial ground, Reilig Odhrain, which is the resting place of a number of Scottish and Norse kings including Macbeth and Duncan I. Many of the grave slabs have been moved inside the chapel to protect them from further weathering. The chapel was built by an Irish monk, St. Columba.

St. Oran was a cousin of St. Columba and was, so the story goes, buried alive in the grounds of the cemetery to consecrate it. They pulled him out after a few days and by all accounts he was raving mad. Poor Oran was sealed back up again. What an interesting tale behind our name.

School Visits

As it was the end of the academic year it was not easy to organize school visits in the United Kingdom. However I was able to visit two schools in the North East of England. Both schools have “Investor In People” status. Stuart Burgess, Managing Director of IIPNZ had recommended these two schools to me as they have recently been reviewed and one has gained Bronze Status and the other Silver Status. This was of much interest to me as St. Oran’s College is due to have its IIP status reviewed in 2011. The two schools visited were:

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| i) Astley Community High School – Specialist Status Computing/Information Communication Technology and Mathematics School. | ii) Glendene School and Community Arts College – Specialist Status Visual Arts School. |
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The specialist status is a Government initiative allowing schools to develop expertise in a particular area (not dissimilar to Extending High Standards across schools). Both schools were grappling with large budget cuts. The United Kingdom is still suffering from the recession; it was evident across all sectors of society.

I enjoyed talking to the Principal and members of Senior Management of the schools, particularly with what they have done with school improvement in relation to Investor In People standard. I was very impressed with the work that Glendene College are doing. They are a special needs school and were a beacon of hope in the local community. Both schools are very much “data driven”, students are given “targets” according to their previous year’s results and goals are set in order to attain the targets. Comments are made in the student reports about progress towards the targets. With regards to leadership (staff and students) and professional learning and development; what they had in place is very similar to our structure. Both schools were well equipped with Information Communication Technology but did not seem to have had the professional development support that New Zealand schools have had especially in regards to the clusters established in New Zealand, of which St. Oran’s college was part in 2004-2006. Glendene school is very keen to form an “international link” with St. Oran’s College.

(Refer to Appendix 2 for further details on Astley and Glendene).

The trip to the United Kingdom was special for me as I was able to catch up with many family members including my grandmother who is now in a rest home. It was also special to visit grandparents of a current Year 7 student, Bethany Jones. We spent time discussing the virtues of St. Oran’s College. Bethany rings them every weekend and updates them of all her school happenings. They own a farm (7th generation) and have set up a café/speciality shop. I was treated to lovely home-made scones and can attest that they make the best pork pie and pease pudding in the North East.

Trip to Perth

School Visits

In Perth I visited three very similar Special Character schools:

- St. Hilda’s (Anglican)
- Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC)
- Methodist Ladies College (MLC)

All three schools had a church affiliation and were extremely well resourced. They are all located in a very wealthy area of Perth and are all within walking distance of each other. Each school, although similar, were developing a point of difference. One has introduced the I.B. programme, one is divided into a senior school (Years 7-12) and a junior school (Years 1-6) whereas the other two have junior school (Years 1-6), middle school (Years 7-9) and a senior school (Years 10-12). The resources, both human and physical, were extensive in all schools. The traditional senior management leadership structure with Principal and Deputy Principal is underpinned by Heads of Schools, Heads of Years, Psychologists and Directors of: Human Resources, Corporate Services, Enrolments, Fundraising, Communications, and Outdoor Education, to name a few!

All three schools are currently undergoing major building programmes using “Rudd” money, namely Performing Arts Centres and Sports and Health Centres.

I spoke to the Principal of one school and to the senior management of all three schools regarding leadership opportunities for staff and students and their process of self-review. Their leadership opportunities for students are extensive, mainly due to the fact that they are “schools within schools”. They face similar issues with girls in education as we do, in particular with Information Communication Technology issues e.g. Facebook etc and cyber bullying.

I was privileged to sit in on a presentation given by a Scholar-in-Residence, Dr Leonard Sax, on this very issue. I can highly recommend his latest book “Girls on the Edge” which explores four issues relating to girls and how parents and educators can assist in addressing these issues.

The schools in Australia have National Testing and the results are posted on a website “My School Site”. This was introduced by the last Education Minister, Julia Gillard. It was interesting to see the path that Australia have gone down regarding National Testing compared to the debate on National Standards here in New Zealand (refer to attached website article). They are also in the process of rolling out a National Curriculum for all States. My impression of this was that it appears to be quite prescriptive.

Visiting other schools is a real privilege. You cannot help but make mental comparisons on the style of leadership, school culture, facilities, pupils and programmes. With regards to facilities, in particular of the three Perth schools, it is difficult for us or any other school in New Zealand to compete but I believe we measure up extremely well in many other aspects of school life. Our revised curriculum with the flexibility given to schools is very forward-thinking plus our standards-based assessment system seems much fairer to students. We also appear to offer much more in relation to extra-curricular activities e.g. in Perth and the United Kingdom if you have a particular sporting talent you play for the local club, as limited opportunities exist at school.

(Refer to Appendix 2 for further details on each of the three schools).

Whilst in Perth I caught up with an ex student Ellen Eales (she would currently be in Year 13). Ellen’s dad Chris was a member of our Board of Trustees. Ellen attended Presbyterian Ladies college and is currently doing very well at Curtin University. I was invited to their place to share a meal and watch the All Blacks versus Australia in a Bledisloe Cup Match. Thank goodness the All Blacks won. Chris took me along to his Rotary Club. It was great to see what service projects they are involved in. They are keen to run a “Pinkies 4 Polio” project as our club and school were involved in earlier this year.

Trip to Nepal

My husband Tim was fortunate enough to accompany me on this part of the trip. What a wonderful experience trekking in Nepal is. The scenery is stunning and a particular highlight was reaching Annapurna base camp just over 4,000 metres high.

We had a few nights in Kathmandu – what a chaotic but fascinating place. We then flew to Pokhara from where we began the Annapurna Sanctuary trek. The trek took us through several Gurung villages (the Gurung people are one of the sixty ethnic groups in Nepal).

We trekked through rice fields and bamboo forests, staying in guest houses and experiencing the wonderful hospitality and culture of the Gurung people. Most people live in poverty (compared to Western standards) but they are certainly richer in other areas. They have a strong connection to their faith which was evident in daily life, even the greeting “Namaste” means “I salute the divine in you”. They have strong connections also to their family, the family unit being highly valued and elders are respected. Another strong connection they have is their culture. They have immense pride in their country and were keen to hear that you were enjoying Nepal and would be back.

They also have much respect for education. I was so impressed with the students who went to school in the villages, some walking for up to 2 hours and their uniform was immaculate. One school I visited said that their students were “obedient and honest” – what more could any Principal ask for!

Schools there are grappling with many issues – under-resourced with facilities as well as staff. It is amazing to see what they do with so little.

On the way back to New Zealand we had a stop-over in Singapore. What a delight it was to “bump into” a Year 10 St. Oran’s student, Emma Gibbons, who was on her way to Ireland with her family.

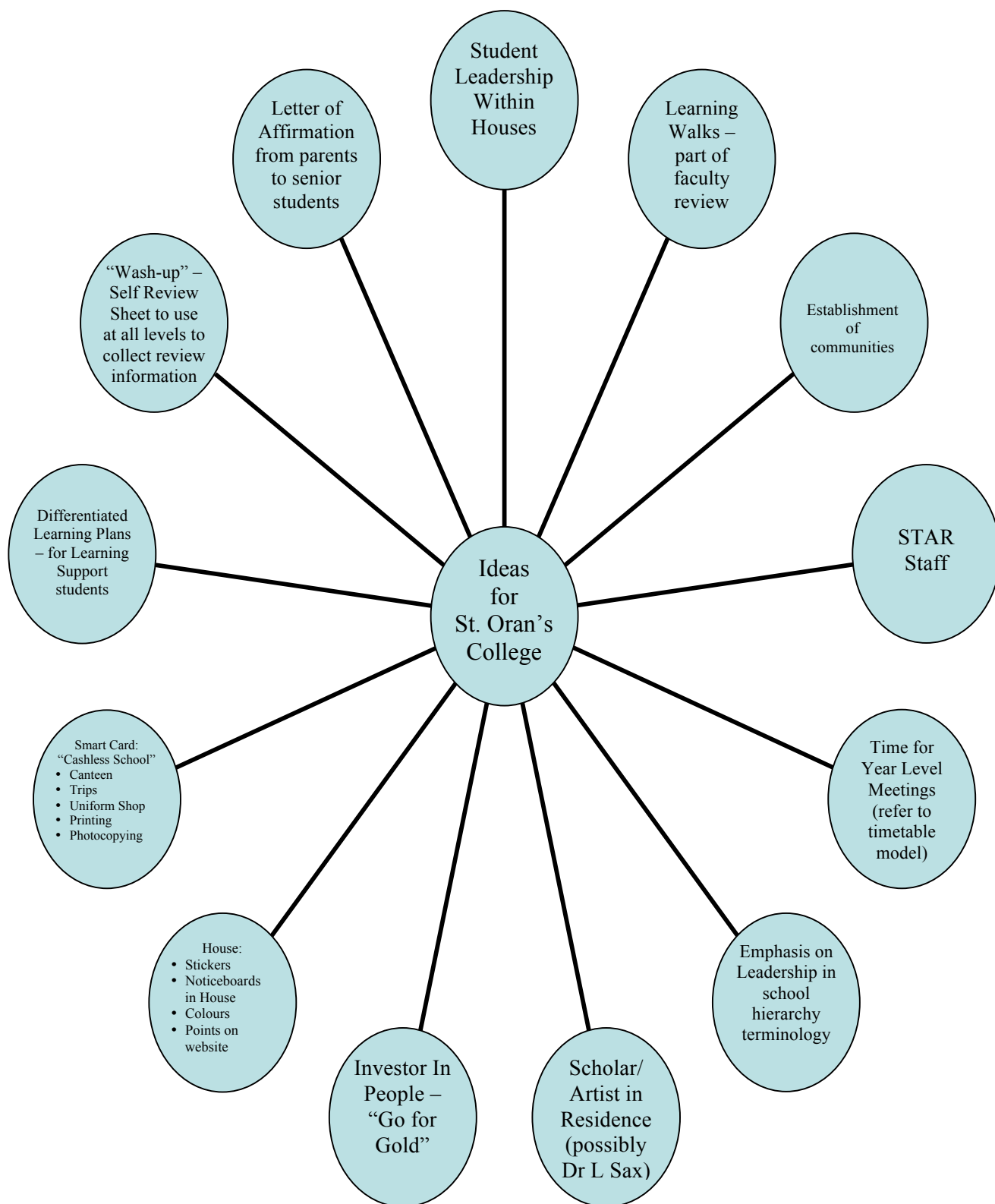
Personal Reading

Professional Reading

During my time out, I was able to read a good variety of books including:

- “The Tipping Point” by *M Gladwell*.
This book is about change. In particular it is a book that presents a new way of understanding why change so often happens as quickly and as unexpectedly as it does e.g. how does a novel written by an unknown author end up as a best seller! Why do teens smoke in great numbers when everyone knows that cigarettes kill? “The Tipping Point” is an examination of the social epidemics that surround us.
- “Leading the Leaders for the Future” by *M Boshe and P Hazlewood*.
This book sets out the challenges for the leadership of schools preparing their students to face a world of rapid change, an uncertain world in which the old approach to education will no longer suffice. The book proposes that a new professionalism will be required to develop leadership within all who share in the educational journey.
- “Girls on the Edge” by *Dr Leonard Sax*
Dr Leonard Sax is a Family Physician and Psychologist with more than 20 years experience. In this book he explores how factors are threatening the mental and physical health of young women today - a culture that sexualizes young girls, the “cyber bubble” of social networking and electronic communication, obsessive behaviours including eating disorders and environmental toxins that disrupt the endocrine system and lead to early onset of puberty. The book offers practical ideas for nurturing girls, offers a holistic and sobering call to help the current generation of young women develop the support and sense of self that will allow them to grow into resilient adults. I highly recommend this book to parents of teenage girls and to all of us who are involved in their education.

Ideas



Conclusion

Not only have I come away from my sabbatical with a number of good ideas that I hope to put into practice at St. Oran's College but I also came away heartened and affirmed by the special and positive features of our own schools and community. It is only when you remove yourself from something that you have the time and opportunity of recognizing truly how good it is and how much you value it.

I must thank and acknowledge the support of the Board of Trustees and the Board of Proprietors. I must also sincerely thank Anne Seabrook who acted as Principal in my absence and did a wonderful job, supported by Tricia Cuttance, Rena Day and Cherie Wildon.