

Reflections on my LEAP experience in 2010

Paul Nash

(Principal Oatley West PS)

- Working with an international principal has been a rewarding experience. Professional dialogue with our assigned academic partner and their school/staff and principals at schools visited, has allowed us to delve very deeply into each other's school system and to encourage and explore individual philosophies and approaches to education. This is especially true of the academic partner as it was mostly 'eduspeak 24/7' as we travelled in the car, train to the conferences in Toronto, and even over dinner at home. This was true for me as my partner's husband was also a teacher!
- I was extremely surprised how close our two systems are allied. I came home with a feeling of confidence that our system does very well and that my school is performing at its optimum. This was evident from visiting the following schools I was lucky enough to be invited to.
 - South Lincoln High School (my home school). Attended drama and acting classes, taught in their special unit for students experiencing difficulty, addressed the assembly and conducted a presentation about Australia and much more. Spent a lot of time in the drama theatre coaching students and discussing the finer technical details of staging a performance. The first day both countries National Anthems were played over the PA system and then I read the announcements for the day. You could hear a pin drop as everyone listened to the new accent – I never knew I had one!
 - Central Public School at Grimsby (my host family, children's school – I was 'show and tell') and taught classes about Australia. Worked with the Kindergarten classes especially their early starters (age 3-4).
 - Grimsby Secondary School – spoke in depth with the Principal about transition programs especially Y8 to Y9. Also transition into the community especially programs that assist students for eventual work when they leave school. Many of these students have their work place organised to go to when they leave school due to this program. Their high schools mostly begin at Grade 9. Students remain at the elementary schools until then. Visited Performance lessons, drama, music and dance. This particular high school ran its own television studio and trained technicians and presenters by going out into the community and broadcasting live news from the Grimsby community. I also attended the automotive workshop and sat in on lessons as students pulled down motors, did panel beating and general mechanical repairs to a car that had been donated to the school. I attended a performance in their theatre and advised students about the technical side of creating a production.
 - Westlane Secondary School Niagara Falls – great discussion with the principal about the Ontario school system. Spent time with the ESL teacher and taught students about Australia and assisted with reading. Spent the afternoon with the teacher responsible for running a program of school to work and transition of students from Y8 to Y9. I thoroughly enjoyed this day! Had time to speak with staff over lunch and after school.

- College Street Elementary School – Smithville – similar to Oatley West. Visited classrooms, spoke to students and had a general discussion with the principal and Deputy. This school would be very interested in communicating with my school.
- Laura Secord Secondary School - St Catherines – visited this school in the afternoon. A student had been killed in a car crash the previous evening with a group of other students from the school. Spoke with Principal, Deputy and School Counsellor as to how they had approached the day counselling students and parents. Very sad. We did ring to cancel but they wanted to still have the visit. I think it was good for them to also download to someone outside of the school.
- Connought Elementary School - St Catherines – a disadvantaged school with high NESB and high refugee numbers. Spoke with Principal and Deputy. Both very excited people about their school and education. Very positive learning environment! Toured the school and classes. Very interested in their learning wall where each student is tagged and information added to their file whenever a teacher had new information. The room was private so that only school personnel had access to the information. An interesting way of following a child’s learning career. Enjoyed the discussion with the ESL teachers bringing back my earlier career spent in Met South West Region.
- Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School - St Catherines – Spoke only briefly with the principal and discussed a program called 12 + 12 Early leavers Program. I must confess I am a bit vague about this program (I was extremely tired by this stage) but it involved matching students with careers and community businesses in preparation for the world of work. It ran closely with the school councillor and careers adviser. We toured the school and observed the school orchestra in rehearsal, dance classes, music classes and a play being rehearsed in the theatre. I helped some of the actors with their dialogue and discussed sets and staging with the technical crew. I did a question and answer session with senior students about Australia and stood and watched the many yellow school buses leave when school finished.

I also spent time with the Student Success Consultant Catherine Matheson and the Student Success Teachers at both South Lincoln and Westlane and the organiser at their education office, and attended an Administrative Planning Meeting with the Superintendent in the education office.

The other most powerful experience was spending time with my Canadian family Joanna, Scott and their three boys Cole (13), Jack (11) and Hayden (7). All very lively and the whole family was into ice hockey. The lovely 100+ year old house was shared with a dog, two cats, fish and a hamster! The home was loud and busy and I was immediately made feel a part of their family. They brought Thanksgiving forward so that I could experience this with them and ensured I met their extended family and friends. They arranged an evening at the theatre ‘Shaw Festival’ at Niagara on the Lake, two trips to Niagara Falls, a night out at another show ‘Oh Canada’ which was a theatre restaurant, dinner at an exclusive restaurant at Vinelan Estate winery, a trip to the Buffalo Sabres Hockey Game in Buffalo **and** arranged for **me** to have ice skating lessons. The latter I was really lousy at and it made me appreciate just how skilled the players are! I attended every hockey game the kids played. I wouldn’t dare have missed one! I didn’t attend the early morning (6am) practice sessions though. I

feel we have forged a strong friendship and I'm sure this will continue into the future. Both families have open invitations to visit their respective countries. I feel I might see their eldest son Cole out here before any of them!

The conferences were good but incurred a lot of travel for some of the participants. LEAP is looking into planning just one main conference in the future.

This is only scratching the surface but can I recommend that if the opportunity arises to jump at this. They are planning the UK for 2012 and I am sure I will have my hand up for that one!

Thanks

Paul