

AISNT HONG KONG INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKING STUDY TOUR

SEPTEMBER 2016

A group of seventeen educators – including Principals, Deputy Principals, teachers, school Board members, AISNT staff, academics, and an Independent Schools Council of Australia representative – undertook this study tour from 15-21 September 2016. The International Benchmarking Study program was an initiative of the Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory, supported by Queensland Education Leadership Institute and Asia Education Foundation. It was led by Dr Stephen Brown.

The program provided an opportunity for the development of a comparative understanding of the sector and system similarities, differences, challenges and opportunities between the Northern Territory and Hong Kong contexts. It also provided Northern Territory educators opportunities for the forming and/or enhancing of relationships with schools in Hong Kong.

Understanding the context

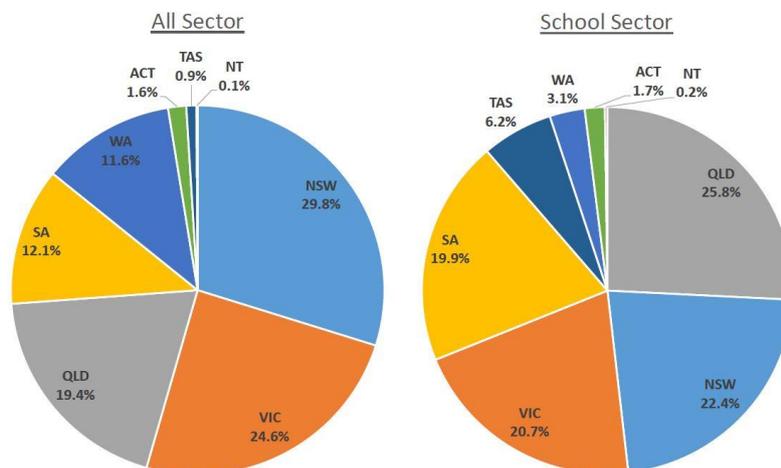
Participants were given many opportunities to gain knowledge and understanding of Hong Kong culture, geography, history, politics, religion and economics. This is a dynamic and unusual location, simultaneously part of thriving modern China while having strong cultural and traditional ties to the West. Guided tours through the business zone of Central, to Wong Tai Sin Temple and Chin Lin Nunnery helped establish baseline understanding of how historical and contemporary forces shape modern Hong Kong.

Education links: Hong Kong and the Northern Territory

A presentation by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission provided background information and data on educational interaction between Australia and Hong Kong. There are fewer than 1000 Hong Kong primary/secondary students enrolled in Australian schools in any given year – and in fact there has been a drop in this figure since 2012. The NT has only 0.2% of HK school sector enrolments (Queensland is first, followed by NSW and Victoria). This means approximately five Hong Kong students are enrolled in NT schools each year.

Messaging to students and parents when marketing Australian schools should emphasise return on investment (demonstrate student outcomes); pathways to future study; specialities and extra-curricular; pastoral care; and English tuition and support.

Overall and Schools Enrolments in HK - by State 2015



Hong Kong education: curriculum, structure and function

A range of presentations were made by senior people at the Hong Kong Education Bureau Curriculum Development Institute. Key points that emerged were the expectation that all HK students will be biliterate and trilingual; the importance of civic awareness and national identity; the challenges of changing the thinking of parents, many of whom tend to focus narrowly on high academic achievement; and the dedication to ongoing renewal of curriculum, guided by the key words 'deepen', 'sustain' and 'focus'. There was also discussion of an issue that arises in a system like Hong Kong, which may not be pertinent in most other education systems: "How can we create extra space for learning when our students are already on the right track and doing well?"

Five high-calibre presenters from the Education University of Hong Kong provided further context and leading-edge information. As ever, the on-the-ground picture is not as uniform as it may seem from afar. Assistant Professor Darren Bryant said that while the goal for students is to be trilingual and biliterate, in Government and Aided schools (around 80% of all schools) the instruction is 80% Cantonese and 20% English. All of the band one (highest)

schools are English speaking. Despite a huge reform initiative that began in about 2000, there is still a lack of equity in HK schooling. Meanwhile there is a highly politicised debate about how national studies fit into the curriculum, something that is supposed to be politically neutral.

Dr James Ko shared his research on teacher effectiveness in HK and China. Individual teaching dimensions are compared across schools to provide a ranking of effectiveness. Teachers typically scored very high for time management and classroom management. The lowest score was for adaptive teaching catering for learner differences.



Looking towards China

Assistant Professor Qian Haiyan presented on Shanghai's rise up the PISA rankings. She said that China is a very centralized society, and schools are an arm of the government. There is centralized administration, and plentiful top-down support. There is an alignment of performance with incentives – principals are ranked on a 'ladder system'. There are huge financial resources, particularly for difficult schools; high-level teacher and leader development opportunities; and identification and 'scaling up' of good practice.

There is also a focus on good leaders and quality teachers. In China, the better teachers are called 'famous teachers'. Part of the role of higher-ranked teachers is to 'diffuse their expertise'. Many appraisals involve classroom observation, with an emphasis on content knowledge and pedagogy. Every teacher must give a public/observed lesson at least once per semester, and the best are encouraged to enter teaching contests.

Five key factors in Shanghai schools:

- Systematic instructional improvement
- Investment in good practices
- Clear standards for selection and performance of school principals
- Clear career advancement for teachers
- Extensive and continuous support of teacher development

Leadership and change

These were important through-themes of the tour, teased out by Dr Stephen Brown and addressed in many presentations. For example, one of Professor Allan Walker's

provocations was, “As a leader, vision and passion is not enough. There are conflicting visions, and passion doesn’t last.” Arnett Edwards, Principal of Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong, trusted the group enough to share candid perceptions on the challenges and struggles of being a leader in a highly innovative school.

Associate Professor Jiafang Lu said that, “Our common state as humans is to be resistant to change.” She led participants through a fascinating and very well-received computer simulated exercise called Make Change Happen.

School visits

Visits were made to three very different schools:

- Diocesan Boys’ School (Primary Division)
- Li Po Chun United World College of Hong Kong
- ESF Kowloon Learning Campus incl King George V School, and Sarah Roe School

These visits afforded opportunities for classroom visits and lesson observation; deep conversations with selected students; presentations by school and faculty leaders; and lively question and answer sessions.



Participant research, and future work

Participants undertook to explore a question of their choice during the study tour. These questions were formulated at a two-day workshop held in Darwin prior to the trip. Participants will convene again approximately one month after the conclusion of the tour to share their learning, provide updates on their personal projects, and discuss further directions they may take with regard to discoveries, leads and provocations on the tour.

