Report on the ICP International Dialogue

August 16-18, 2011
Introduction

This report summarizes the discussions held during the International Dialogue Sessions at the ICP Convention between August 16 and August 18, 2011. Participants engaged in round table conversations in five subject areas. They also completed a brief survey that is referenced in this report, which included demographic information. The participants in the sessions were from many countries and with varied responsibilities in their educational systems. This report identifies nationalities where possible.

Each of the topics was discussed at several tables with a table facilitator and each conversation was framed by several pre-determined questions. The reporters for each topic arranged their notes differently (i.e. by question or by nationality of the speaker), and this is reflected in the report. Where possible, the most common responses are listed first.

The five topics and the dates of the discussions were:

1. Gender-Based Literacy Issues – Tuesday, August 16 (a.m.)
2. Leadership Void: Getting the Right People on the Bus – Tuesday, August 16 (p.m.)
3. To Test Or Not To Test – Wednesday, August 17 (a.m.)
4. Accommodating Special Needs – Wednesday, August 17 (p.m.)
5. Governance and Funding – Thursday, August 18 (a.m.)
Gender-Based Literacy Issues – Tuesday, August 16 (a.m.)

**Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>% School Leaders</th>
<th>% Public Funded</th>
<th>% Age 41-60</th>
<th>Experience in Education</th>
<th>Years in Role</th>
<th>Co-Ed School</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Very broad</td>
<td>Most</td>
<td>&gt;90%</td>
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**Topic Questions**

- What challenges are faced in regards to gender based literacy in your jurisdiction?
- What is being done in your jurisdiction to address these challenges?
- What else should be done?

**Response Summary**

**What challenges?**

Girls are more literate universally, but cultural norms limit their potential. (Noted especially in Uganda and India which also faces an urban/rural discrepancy)

There are too few male literacy role models in all cultures. In most places mothers are better models because they are more likely to be present and more likely to read.

There are very few examples of special funding alone making a difference to this issue, and one jurisdiction (New Zealand) where it did not.

Experiences with gender-specific classes were extremely mixed. In some cases these classes simply created new problems, in other cases gender-specific classes are already the cultural norm and yet the problem persists.

“Outside of the developed world the culture of reading does not exist.”

Teacher expertise regarding the learning style of the opposite gender was questioned.
### What is being done?

In some areas (South Africa, Ireland, Ontario) resources are put into early education so that literacy can be achieved while “learning equality” exists.

“Active education” for boys.

Increase the use of technology where resources exist. (Assuming that boys favour this learning style.)

Change materials used to teach boys.

Professional development for instructional strategies based upon gender.

Legislative changes to keep girls in school. (India, Africa)

### What else should be done?

Change the definition of literacy.

Attack poverty first.

Educate and motivate parents, Teach parents to read.

Make materials more relevant.

Develop experiential learning programs.

Open more gender specific schools.

Make programs flexible to reduce dropout rates.
Leadership Void: Getting the Right People on the Bus – Tuesday
August 16 (p.m.)

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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>All &gt;10</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>&gt;90%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Topic Questions

➢ What is being done in your own context to address this challenge?
➢ What else should be done?

Response Summary

What is being done?

Extremely varied current practices were cited. For example, no degree is required in New Zealand and the candidate must be a member of the Church of England in Uganda.

In most jurisdictions a candidate must have been a teacher, but there are exceptions.

Training is also varied: from graduate degree programs to specific school administrator courses, to short ad hoc training sessions (New Zealand and Australia for example).

The group identified job satisfaction as a serious morale issue. Components of this problem are long hours, increasing responsibility, undervaluing by supervisors, and the burden of being a “CEO” in some jurisdictions (human resource, plant and budget responsibilities for example).

Note: Rather than focus on the actual question, the group’s comments suggest a greater interest in identifying components of the problem.
What else should be done?

This is a job for those who can create and will value good relationships with others. A more positive outlook is required.

Specific suggestions were: Increase pay; improve mentoring; and the offer the freedom to return to teaching.

Some jurisdictions have relaxed rules regarding a “teacher in charge” role. This allows for many to sample administrative life.
To Test Or Not To Test – Wednesday, August 17 (a.m.)

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<th>Experience in Education</th>
<th>Years in Role</th>
<th>Testing Done?</th>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>72% &gt;26</td>
<td>63% &lt;10</td>
<td>100%</td>
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Topic Questions

- What is your personal opinion on standardized testing?
- How are standardized test results used in your jurisdiction?
- What are some of the benefits of standardized testing?
- What are some of the challenges of standardized testing?

Response Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal opinion?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is far too much emphasis on testing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing leads to parents shopping schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing is wrongly used for political purposes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>School administrators are secretly penalized.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How are tests used?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess students for University admission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measure curriculum effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assess teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Provide evidence of school improvement
Provide data for school plans
Plan for professional development
Give or withhold resources
Provide principal accountability
Assess personal employment choices

What are some of the benefits?

Reduces school complacency
Provides common language for educators
Provides common assessment techniques for educators
Provides clear proficiency levels
Is a criterion for fair University admission
Targets resources
Focuses curriculum
Provides better data for planning
Identifies better practices
Compels teacher collaboration

What are some of the challenges?

The quality of tests
Teacher resistance
Equating what’s taught with what’s tested
Narrowing our understanding of learning
Comparisons of incomparable schools
Media oversimplification of results

“Good” teachers avoid “bad” schools

Differentiated instruction is not connected to testing

Some teachers cheat

Unclear communication with parents

Staff morale

A single test for a diverse population

The place of special needs children in a testing world

Drives a narrow curriculum
Accommodating Special Needs – Wednesday, August 17 (p.m.)

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**Topic Questions**

- How are students with special needs identified in your jurisdiction?
- What are the challenges of accommodating students with special needs?
- What is being done to address these challenges?
- What else should be done?
- What is being done to include all stakeholders in your school to support special needs learners?
- What successes have you had in ensuring a culture where special needs students are provided equal opportunities?
- What barriers are there to reaching these goals?

**Response Summary**

**How are special needs students identified?**

Students are identified by testing (example IPRC in Ontario and the Netherlands).

By teacher observation (South Africa, Australia) or by a team.

At the Principal’s discretion (New Zealand).

By parent referral.

**What are the accommodation challenges?**

Remote and rural locations (South Africa, Australia)

Indigenous populations everywhere lack service.

Lack of teacher specialists.
Severely handicapped require more resources than are available
Mixed jurisdictions with mental health professionals
Length of time for identification
Availability of educational assistants

**What’s being done?**

Improved inclusion policies
Improved community supports
Technical improvements (teaching aids, FM systems etc.)
Hiring more youth/social workers

**What else could be done?**

Smaller class sizes
Crisis intervention
Better protocols for behaviour issues for special needs students
Exempt special needs students from standardized testing
Improve training for regular classroom teachers

**What is done to include all stakeholders?**

Differentiated graduation
IPRC arrangements are widely inclusive
Note: Very few responses to this question were on topic.
What evidence is there regarding equality of opportunity?

Australia reports a community of compassion with teachers and peers taking responsibility.

As staff becomes educated in differentiated instruction, teachers change their beliefs regarding students with special needs.

There is evidence of more technology being directed towards this area.

There have been policy and legislative changes in many jurisdictions.

Students with special needs have been increasingly offered co-op opportunities.

These students have shown improved participation rates in school activities.

The number of resource teachers has increase.

What are the barriers to equality?

In some jurisdictions there is only one curriculum, and all students must find their place in it. (South Africa)

Class sizes are often too large.

The elementary to secondary transition is too wide and there is little cross panel cooperation.

There is weak teacher training in special education in many jurisdictions.

Parent attitudes of mainstream students can be a problem.

Union issues can interfere with programming.

Lack of funds can hold programs back.

The inclusion vs. exclusion debate is not universally resolved.
Governance and Funding – Thursday, August 18 (a.m.)

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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td>Prov. or State</td>
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Topic Questions

- What challenges are faced in regards to governance and funding in your jurisdiction?
- What is being done in your jurisdiction to address these challenges?
- What else should be done?

Response Summary

What are the governance and funding challenges?
What is being done?
What else?

Australia: Education is very centralized at the state level. The only “push back” is from school principals to the central government. Principals are continually asked to do more with less.

Kenya: The user pays and the government’s contribution is small. The system is of a non-homogeneous collection of schools divided by money and class, though the government is seeking a one-solution arrangement. Students are streamed at age 13. One challenge is for principals to find funding for bright but poor students, who may be excluded from school. More parental contribution is not an option.

USA: The system is mostly state funded through property taxes. Parents undertake massive fundraising efforts, and this money is often then shared (there is no choice) with poorer schools. The user pays for some programs, and the federal government assists also, but federal funding inevitably has strings. Teacher pay can be at the “whim of the local taxpayer.”

United Arab Emirates: The central government generously funds all public schools but there are many private options. Principals face hiring challenges on
account of interference. There is no parental contribution to school funding. Classes are small so per pupil costs are high. The overall system is becoming increasingly structured.

South Africa: The government divides the money into envelopes, but there are lots of delays (teachers often wait to be paid) and shortfalls. Since there are no other sources of funds, Principals often run lines of credit to keep their schools open. Principals must justify expenses on an annual basis and often run 2 sets of books, of which the government sees only one. Parents fundraise extensively.

Ireland: The unionized workforce is facing difficult times. The IMF has specified cuts to education in Ireland. Generally funding is on a per pupil basis. Governance difficulties have arisen over the attempt to move away from Catholic controlled schools and to increase general community involvement.

Ontario: Ontario has a per-pupil funding system with money coming from central sources, but with some local control. Declining enrollment is a challenge; there are too many small schools and it is too hard to close schools. A consolidation of resources is required as are creative programs like distance education and on-line learning. Exact school governance varies from one local jurisdiction to another.

New Zealand: There is talk of tying funding to performance in New Zealand. The system is similar to that of Australia. Each school gets money from the central source and is given strong directives regarding improvement. There is no intermediate body between the school and the central government, and the latter may impose harsh penalties on the former for poor outcomes.

China: China has nine years of mandatory schooling. Resources are not equitably distributed or even with regard to need. The situation varies widely throughout the country, and some schools are able to arrange additional local support where others can’t.