

Reflections on the ICP 10th World Convention at Toronto

Here's the second half of the insights we gleaned from the Convention :

1. Our systemic and process perspectives were challenged with
 - a. Andy Hargreaves' 5 fallacies (or false beliefs)
 - i. that we need fast turn-arounds – instead, to build belief which is the foundation of a turn-around, you need 3-7 years
 - ii. that we can do better by replacing the 'wrong' people, whether teacher or pupil – instead of developing the people we have
 - iii. that we use the wrong numbers – we should measure what we value, not value what we can measure
 - iv. that a standard prescription will fit all – it only gets us to basic adequacy; beyond that, we need to fit the learning to the child
 - v. that competition is better than collaboration – competition in fact should alternate with collaboration

Singapore principals felt that a reasonable time-frame for turn-arounds is very much needed especially when principals get rotated. One also sympathised with KPs who are not able to take on higher leadership positions and wonder how school leaders can help them avoid developing a "frog in the well" syndrome even while we affirm them as an important part of the team, despite their apparent lack of potential.

- b. Michael Fullan's right vs wrong drivers
 - i. Capacity building vs external accountability
 - ii. Group solutions and social capital vs individual solutions
 - iii. Pedagogy vs technology
 - iv. Systemic vs fragmented

Veronica felt that Fullan had aptly highlighted some of the conflicts we balance year-in year-out as school leaders. Pang Hai's attention was drawn to Fullan's statement that "Relentless attention is required on the part of the leadership." We need "proactive, continuous and sustained effort" as well as "deep knowledge with persistent practice". She concluded that leadership is a challenging but very meaningful journey; and is certainly not for the faint-hearted!

2. Our understanding of public service was enhanced by Sir Michael Barber who felt that it was not a matter of less or more government but better government and it was our job to help government succeed in being more effective. He also gave 5 questions to help with our monitoring
 - a. What are you trying to do?
 - b. Are you organised to get it done?
 - c. How do you plan to get it done?
 - d. How, at any time, will you know whether you are on track?

- e. If you're not on track, what are you going to do about it?
- f. How do you create an irreversible culture of delivery?

Veronica has seen Barber's book and says it is worth purchasing as he has broken these questions into steps to delve deeper into each question.

Pang Hai found it especially heartening that Barber included Singapore's government as an example of a 'good' government that is doing its best. It was even more gratifying when he singled out our government as having done particularly well in creating good relations with countries worldwide. This ties in well with "Deliverology" since getting the policy right is only "10%" of the work, and implementing and seeing that things get done constitute the other "90%". I felt that our government has delivered in this area.

3. During the concurrent sessions, Jasbir found it inspiring to meet educators with a strong moral purpose guiding their efforts to provide the best educational opportunities for their pupils. Mrs. Tersia Haussamera, a senior education specialist from South Africa, shared in her break-out session her experiences in transforming a class of pupils from a rural primary school where literacy and numeracy results improved from 0 to 53% between 2004 and 2008. Her approach of showing care and concern, building self-respect and confidence in her pupils as well as mobilising the community and parents transformed the learning environment to one where pupils were motivated and took ownership of their own learning despite coming from poor homes. It was not the abundance of resources that made the difference in this classroom but the desire of one teacher to want to make that positive impact on the lives of her pupils!
4. Overall, delegates like Shanti were attracted by Hargreaves' statement that "Reform is like ripe fruit that rarely travels well." In line with that, she became mindful not to cherry pick and return to Singapore with a list of changes to implement. To her and other delegates, it was more important to have had their minds enriched and their vocation re-affirmed as vital in helping young people make life-changing decisions.