

iNet Australia News and Views

Volume 3, No 20
August 20 2007

Visiting Schools in Chile

Michael Quinn, Principal of Caroline Chisholm College, Braybrook, reports on a recent study tour to Chile:

During two weeks of July 2007, I was fortunate to enjoy a remarkable experience – a visit to a range of schools in three cities in Chile. The iNet sponsored initiative provided the opportunity for me to address principals, administrators and teachers in schools in Santiago, Antofagasta (in the north of Chile) and Santa Cruz.

Chilean education is of great interest for a variety of reasons. Consistent with the vision of iNet schools, there is strong commitment to transformation - "systematic, sustained and substantial improvement". Chilean educators understand that networking is important and so are responsive to experiences in other countries – they want to engage and they want to be alert to issues in education that are impacting in other countries.

The organizational structure of Chilean education is also instructive. The majority of Chilean schools are owned by the local municipality (the equivalent of our government schools) and there are interesting variations in this management arrangement. Other schools are privately owned (around 10%). A third group of schools is privately owned but publicly subsidized. I had the opportunity to visit three of these schools in Santiago. The schools were located in poor to very poor areas and, with excellent leadership and dedicated teaching, the morale of the schools was high and effective classroom outcomes were evident.

Despite the often large class sizes (up to 46 students), there is also much classroom teaching to be admired. I visited many classrooms where effective learning was taking place and where innovative teaching occurred. I well remember the primary classroom where English was being taught through music. There is a joyous atmosphere in this class – students are proud of their progress. Every student was engaged in a variety of activities that would inspire any visitor. In another classroom a teacher had undertaken preparation to introduce a commercially produced learning package in language in her classroom. Once again, every student was engaged, enjoying their learning. Part of the commercial package involved the teacher

compiling regular data about each student from week to week. She was confident that the new arrangements, though demanding, were generating effective learning for each student and paradoxically was reducing her workload as a teacher.

In short I believe that visiting teachers and principals from Australia will discover Chile as being an educationally valuable experience.

There are two issues that will be of particular interest to iNet readers.

There is a quite urgent desire on the part of many schools (including all that I visited) to develop links with schools overseas, especially Australia. Our schools are organisationally attractive because of the degree of consistency in the school calendar.

Teachers of English in Chilean schools are anxious to have the opportunity to experience English conversation both for their students and for themselves.

Rewarding possibilities are therefore available for linking with Chilean schools at a variety of levels depending on the interest and commitment of the relationship. Links made might vary from opportunities for emailing between students, right through to exchange and reciprocal visiting.

Further, Chile is an attractive country with a variety of landscapes. Landscapes are in significant contrast to most Australian cities and include the imposing presence of the Andes Mountains. Further north, the desert experience where Antofagasta is located, is an unforgettable one.

iNet is planning to establish a structure whereby effective linking can take place between Australian and Chilean schools, especially with schools which have students of South American origin or who speak Spanish.

iNet is also hoping to arrange a delegation of interested principals and teachers to visit Chile in 2008.

Please contact the iNet office if you are interested in joining these very rewarding initiatives.

Diary Dates

- **August 22**
Futures Vision Forum,
Eltham College of Education
- **August 22**
Learning Walk —
Collingwood College
- **September 4**
Learning Walk —
St Mary's PS, North Sydney
- **September 18-20**
4th iNet International Conference,
Beijing, China
- **October 16**
Flora Hill Secondary College Learning Walk
- **October 17**
RATL Cohort A Network Meeting
- **October 23**
Wooranna Park Primary School Learning Walk
- **November 2007**
SSAT National Conference
Birmingham, UK

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