

## **The LAS Educational Research Visiting Scholar Programme**

Effective professional development isn't difficult to support. It is, however, often different from the professional development that we are most familiar with.

A teacher attends a conference or workshop over a day or three. They return to their school fired up, with new ideas to share with colleagues. Yet colleagues don't have the same context, colleagues aren't inspired by the conference - they weren't there. How much of what was learned is shared in a way that affects practice? Not much. Did the training itself even meet the specific needs of the individual educator and their school context? It can be a bit hit or miss. As my time as a visiting scholar comes to an end, I've been thinking quite a bit about these questions.

This year I decided to positively engage with new opportunities. I wanted to move outside the stream of Fall starts and Winter job searches in order to discover some new ways of doing things. I wanted to work with some teachers and leaders who had experience in fields beyond education. I always felt they had a refreshing view of the profession, either by bringing with them skills and practices that were new to me or simply through having a more holistic view of the experience of being a teacher.

I began my year knowing that one possible avenue was joining Leysin American School's (LAS) visiting scholar program, part of the menu of professional development opportunities of LAS Educational Research (LASER). As I said to the director, Paul Magnuson, I didn't feel I took advantage of the program during the three years I worked at LAS. I saw the benefits and its positive influence on teachers, but I did not engage as I could have. As such, I was happy to be able to benefit now during my time back at LAS within this year of reflection and exploration.

What I did not appreciate before my time as a visiting scholar was the impact that the experience would have on me, on my future, and on the way I think about professional development. I think it is fair to say that even when professional development is well planned and delivered, it is rare for it to be individualised and for training relationships to extend beyond the session itself. There are of course exceptions: longer term sequential PD, educator groups created during training, facebook groups or mentors who encourage long term engagement. One thing those types of initiatives have in common is a reliance on educators themselves to maintain them and to add value to them.

LASER aims to create opportunities for longer term collaboration through relationship building and networking. The program has involved people from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. A poster in one of the LASER work lounges shows dozens of headshots and names of visiting scholars from 2014 to 2019. Researchers in pedagogy, climate scientists, leadership specialists, DEI, wellness ... the list goes on. And since 2019 there have been nearly 50 additional visiting scholars, despite a COVID year when visits were not possible.

This winter, I have been a visiting scholar with two educators from Taiwan, a wellness and school climate consultant from the USA, and an expert in DEIJ based in Ireland. While here I have been able to discuss with them and LAS faculty not only the findings from my own Masters dissertation, but also educational leadership and pedagogy. I have learnt, shared and taught, and have met fellow educators who were willing to share their own practice while being humble and keen to learn from LAS faculty and students. I personally also gained confidence and understanding from presenting and discussing findings from my Masters dissertation to a group of faculty.

Meeting other visiting scholars has led to mentoring projects and future collaborations. Other LAS faculty have also engaged with projects with the visiting scholars, including writing papers on their practice and developing collaborative groups for discussing practice. These projects are the result of 1-1 conversations and interactions that were only loosely planned. In other words, those working in LASER are going to get the PD they need, at the moment, just in time, because they are able to decide what conversations and projects they will be involved with. The PD is timely, relevant, and based on one's needs and interests.

The LAS Visiting Scholar program benefits from their boarding school facilities to provide accommodation and space for groups of people to visit, collaborate, and work at their school. While most schools do not have such readily accessible accommodations on campus, in most areas schools are of course within reach of a range of expertise and resources. Practical considerations are less important than philosophy, anyway. This PD model is based on trusting individuals to lead their own professional development. Through creating opportunities for people to meet, to discuss their experiences, and to share expertise, creativity is encouraged. I am glad I had a second opportunity.

With thanks to my fellow Visiting Scholars, Paul, everyone supporting LASER, and particularly to Leysin American School for hosting me and supporting the programme.

John Bray  
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