

Big Picture Education News from the Network:

from member Bronwyn Harcourt



Hi Big Picture Members and friends,

I travelled to the USA on the Big Picture US Study Tour recently with another senior staff member from Croydon Community School, Mark Heuston, and I wanted to share some of my experiences with you...

Travelling together was the icing on the cake for us. We could reflect together; talk immediately about how to implement changes when we got home; discuss the strengths and weaknesses of practices in our setting; and just enjoy deep, endless conversations with each other about educational philosophy.

Talking to parents, students and mentors were highlights for me. We were encouraged to ask whatever we wanted to and were not stopped from exploring hard questions with these people. This enabled us to not only gather information about their practices but also to explore possibilities for new ideas and application of Big Picture in our own school.

There were so many great things about the trip that picking out just a few is hard. Big Bang was inspiring, particularly as I haven't had the opportunity to meet with so many like-minded educators previously. Within Big Bang the Advisory sessions were most challenging and informative for me. Learning about practice in other schools; sharing ideas; talking; listening; laughing and learning together.

Big Picture Education News from the Network:

from member Bronwyn Harcourt



Since our return we have changed the way we work with teachers in our school. Three afternoons a week we meet together for an hour in our own advisory called “The Village”. We have our graphic descriptor and motto up on the wall. We model what we want to see happening in classrooms by putting teachers into the role of students. We make them squirm with concepts outside their comfort zones and sometimes we squirm ourselves when we put ourselves outside ours. Staff tell us that they like this set up and we have written our local AEU agreement for 2011 to enable this consistency of meeting to continue. We are focused on the Big Picture Distinguishers as our priorities, so teachers prepare individual learning plans, write journals, participate in pick me ups, complete project work, give exhibitions and write narratives. All the tasks we need to work on in preparation for 2011 are presented to staff within this framework so we understand them in greater depth and get better at implementing them.

I knew I would enjoy the experience in the USA well before I left and I have been passionately involved in education with the ‘child at the centre’ for over 20 years – that’s the only way education makes sense to me - but the extent to which the trip challenged me to reflect on my own beliefs and practices was not something I expected. It was twenty-one days of deep learning that has given me even greater clarity on what I need to do in my school and our community to give young people who are at risk of not completing secondary school the chance to thrive.

Bronwyn Harcourt

Principal, Croydon Community School & EMR OPTIONS