See Policy

International Travel Report
Proforma for the Minister

Department of Education

(August 2004)

Please complete this form electronically and forward it via e-mail, to the Ministerial and Co-ordination Unit (Ministerial.Coordination.Unit@education.tas.gov.au) within 30 days of your return from overseas.

Please note that the report must be completed in the third person not the first person (e.g., Ms. Jane Smith attended the Education Leaders Conference in Toronto where she met with Professor John James).

Full Name: Fiona Jarvis

Section/School: Springfield Gardens Primary

Contact Phone Number: 0407 142773

Minute Number (Leave blank – will be filled in by MCU):

NB: This Report is to be no more than 3 A4 pages in length.

Location of travel (travel destinations):
Harvard Graduate School of Education, Boston, USA (Hardie Fellowship).

General statement of value of travel:
During the ten months in which she was based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Fiona completed a Masters of Education, which included eight units of study she selected from the core and elective units offered in the MBE (Mind, Brain, and Education) course. The units she selected included: 1) Cognitive Development, Education, and the Brain (yearlong); 2) Introduction to Educational Neuroscience; 3) The Problems Kids Have: Developmental, Cultural, and Contextual Perspectives on Risk and Resilience; 4) The Promotion of Social Development in Students and a Sense of Community in Classrooms; 5) Risk and Resilience across Childhood and Adolescence: Strategies and Systems of Prevention and Intervention (yearlong); and 6) Moral Adults, Moral Children.

Companies/organisations contacted:
Harvard University Graduate School of Education and Project Zero.

Outcomes of study (Fellowship):
The Mind, Brain, and Education course is a relatively new course of study at HGSE and it is the first of its kind to explore education from a number of different perspectives including those of the educator, psychologist, neurologist and geneticist. The differing perspectives are united by the idea of human development occurring ‘in media res’ or ‘in the middle of things’. People’s activities are ‘embodied, contextualised, and socially situated’ (Fischer and Bidell, 2006, p. 315) and their development is ongoing.

Developmental theories such as Kurt Fischer’s Dynamic Skills Theory, which incorporate these ideas and explores development as dynamic and variable, are central to the course and provided Fiona with a solid basis for reflecting on teaching and learning in Tasmanian schools. One pervasive question about which there was much debate among students and teachers in the MBE course, related to how well existing education policies, school structures, and procedures around the world reflect variability in human development as the norm rather than the exception. Specifically, how well do education systems facilitate access to important curriculum information by all students? Barriers to individual student learning are often typically believed by policy makers and educators to emerge from within individual students and are often believed to be largely immutable. However, barriers to comprehension and learning are often created by factors that are external to students. UDL (Universal Design for Learning)

http://www.education.tas.gov.au/admin/hr/forms/travel/intntltravelreport.doc
research focuses on customising information display based on findings related to research into the different ways in which individuals comprehend information from their peers and from one occasion to the next, which potentially has significant implications for the way in which education funds are distributed among education settings, including professional learning for educators aimed at identifying and removing barriers to individual student comprehension in the classroom, including children described as ‘disabled’ children. Indeed, it has been suggested that ‘disabled’ needs to be replaced with ‘differently able’ to reflect the variability in human development. The differences in ‘disabled’ children are no more than the variability than exists among their peers, who aren’t described as disabled. It is possible for educators to offer disabled children access to the same curriculum offered to their peers by identifying potential external barriers to the comprehension and learning of individual children and planning to remove those barriers.

In the course of her Masters study, Fiona designed a number of projects:

1. **Cognitive Development, Education and the Brain**: How could Dynamic Systems theories bridge the gap between what children say about improving their relationships with their peers and how they behave towards their peers?

2. **Introduction to Educational Neuroscience**: Fiona’s project aimed to address the consistent failure of some children to correctly spell a specific group of high frequency English words even though they read and write extensively and engage positively with all aspects of English and literacy in their classrooms. Fiona’s project used extensive research pertaining to the positive effects on learning and memory retention of repeated spaced testing as an adjunct to other spelling strategies to improve children’s spelling of specific high frequency words.

3. **Developing Collaborative Partnerships To Support Abused Children In School**: Fiona designed a targeted, ecological, school-based intervention promoting collaborative discourse and practices aimed at improving the educational experience of children who have been abused and/or neglected.

4. **Emotional Development: Biology, Relationships, and Culture**: Fiona designed a workshop outline for senior staff in schools and school districts entitled How Safe Is Our School For Developing Young People? The workshop engages school staff in research related to the emotional and social development of young people and offers opportunities to reflect on how current school structures and procedures currently promote this development.

5. **The Promotion of Social Development in Students and Supportive Classroom**: Fiona wrote a paper about bullying in middle-school, investigating what bullying communicates about adolescent social development and adolescent social meaning-making.

6. **Risk and Resilience across Childhood and Adolescence: Strategies and Systems of Prevention and Intervention**: Fiona was inspired by one idea in particular, which emerged repeatedly throughout the course; namely that educators and scientists forging classroom-based research partnerships could improve the social, emotional, academic and physical achievements of every child in every school. As neuroscience research continues and educators’ interest in children’s neurological development continues to grow, there is potential for education systems to promote partnerships between educators and neuroscientists that aim to develop classroom-based research that helps teachers solve issues that affect individual children’s social, emotional, physical and academic development. Positions could be created for individuals, who have the capacity to identify information about neuroscience, which is relevant to educators and based on sound research evidence, help educators decode the findings; and promote and assist the development of the research-based partnerships between scientists and classroom teachers. An important role for these individuals or ‘Education Engineers’ could be to help teachers identify the plethora of ‘brain-based’ resources, which are based on partial truths about neuroscience or misleading or inaccurate information.

**Skills obtained:**
Deeper understanding of:
- The potential contributions of neuroscience research to children’s experiences of education;
- Myths related to neuroscience research, which are peddled to enthusiastic teachers by savvy product designers;
- The fundamental differences that often exist between education and schooling;
- The potential contribution of partnerships between teachers and scientists to teacher-driven classroom-based research;
- The potential value to children’s learning of teacher-driven classroom-based research that is supported by science practitioners;
- The potential of reframing disability as ‘differently able’ for enhancing children’s school experiences;
- How UDL tools can refine planning for children’s learning in order to enhance access to important curriculum for all children within the constraints of materials and resources available in schools;
- The potential impact on the classroom experiences of ‘differently able’ children of removing external barriers to their comprehension and improving their access to information rather than always modifying the information to which they have access;
- The impact on children’s school experiences of their early relationships with their primary carers;
- The important role of school leaders in ensuring that the impact on children of abuse and neglect are deeply understood by all school staff, including and especially support staff;
- Specific knowledge and skills are essential in order for school staff to adequately support traumatised children in schools;
- IEPs (individual education plans) for such children need to reflect the differences between them and some other children with IEPs;
- Theories relating to children’s moral development in classrooms; and,
- How to use theory and research to develop a theory of change for community and targeted interventions.

**Benefits to Tasmania:**

Fiona is currently engaged in the Launching into Learning program at Springfield Gardens, which is a new area of interest related directly to her studies on the neural development of very young children and the impact of early relationships with primary carers on ongoing development. She is also undertaking a Graduate Diploma of Rehabilitation Counselling at the University of Tasmania, which will provide her with opportunities to act on her understandings of human development as she assists individuals who need help to return to the workforce.

The benefits to Tasmania of the overseas studies undertaken by individuals under the auspices of the Hardie Fellowship are heavily influenced by the capacity of the Tasmanian Department of Education institutions for embracing the attitudes, knowledge and skills such individuals develop in the course of her studies and planning for their inclusion in the ongoing development of Tasmanian education.

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