Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Science
of

MARK NEUFELD

BEd (University of Victoria, 1993)

“Can I Ask You a Question? On Global Studies and Solutions”

Interdisciplinary Studies

Tuesday, December 1, 2015
1:00PM
Sedgewick Building
Room C179

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Andrew Weaver, School of Earth and Ocean Sciences, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Alison Preece, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Gordon Smith, Centre for Global Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Rick Kool, Department of Environment and Sustainability, Royal Roads Univeristy

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Marc Lapprand, Department of French, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

The Institute for Global Studies (IGS) at Claremont High School in Victoria, Canada is a distinctive local example of “transformative education” that features a transdisciplinary, problem-based and globally oriented program within the public secondary school system. Launched in 2012, and arising from earlier pioneering courses in global studies, the IGS has now graduated two cohorts, and has led the founding educators to raise questions about which aspects of the student’s experience were thought to be most important after graduation and what graduates did with the skills they acquired.

Part 1 is an extensive description of the background experience of the main founding educator that led to the creation of the original global studies course, and eventually the IGS itself. Part 2, the study itself, includes a review of relevant literature. It draws upon a range of writings about transformative education, including reviews of “whole school approaches to sustainability.” Relatively few systematic evaluations of these programs were found. A recent study from Bangladesh evaluated the effect of a climate change curriculum using a randomized cluster design. If demonstrated significant increases in relevant knowledge gain by students using the government recommended curriculum.

The research question in this study was: “What impact has Global Studies/Global Solutions had on students who have taken it and what will they do with the skills they have acquired?” Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight (8) program graduates, using a set of standard questions as a guide. Study participants were selected from a pool of graduates by an independent researcher, to ensure a range of views, taking into account gender diversity, ethnic diversity, experience with both programs (Global Studies and IGS), and post-program experiences.

Research findings about program impact included both expected and unexpected results. Expected impacts included the transformative nature of the learning, the positive (hopeful) experience itself, and the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary, problem-solving approach. Unexpected impacts included the power of collaborative learning, and the value of guest speakers from various backgrounds who served as powerful role models. Regarding how graduates used what they learned, this included, the further application of interdisciplinary learning and problem-solving at a university level, and increased confidence that they could “make a difference”. The experience also guided career directions – for example, in the choice of university study programs. One graduate is volunteering with a non-government organization at a rural school in a low-income setting. Another graduate, while not going on to tertiary education, is using the experience to guide his work vocation.

In summary, the global studies/IGS program has had important impacts on graduates, both expected and unexpected. Graduates use distinctive learning skills in subsequent university studies. For some the experience influenced specific career directions.