



Dr. Baldev Singh

National Teacher of Year for Innovation in Education (2004)

A journey of discovery

The early days

I grew up in a small town in western Kenya called Kericho. It was a wonderful life growing there as a child running to school, having your own garden patch in school, having lunch by the river, lying on the grass in the sunshine at the end of every day and walking through the tea plantations. My father was a teacher having moved to Kenya in the 1950s, so I grew up seeing what teaching has to offer to family life and am lucky enough to be in a profession which allows my children to share a similar experience.

The journey starts

After having finished my KCE (equivalent to GCSE), I could either study in Kenya or go abroad. Studying in the UK was not possible due to the high financial cost. My father decided that it would be best if I went to India and did my A-level equivalent (called Pre-medical) which would also allow me to meet my Grandmother for the first time in 18 years. I left Kenya and joined a college in a city in northern India called Chandigarh in 1982. It was my first visit to India and I found the heat difficult to deal with but life had to carry on as my father cunningly only purchased a one way air ticket for me! I completed a B.Sc (Hons) in Biophysics from Panjab University. In 1987 applied to study for an M.Sc (radiation biophysics) at University of St. Andrews in Scotland. After completion of my M.Sc, I was lucky to get a scholarship to study for a PhD at St. Andrews. My supervisor Dr. Peter Bryant showed a lot of kindness to me in these early days in this country. I owe a lot of what I have achieved so far to his support. I then carried on doing research in the field of Cancer research and worked both in London and University of Bristol. I was very lucky to work for Prof. Chris Paraskeva at Bristol University. I learnt a lot from him and as a result of his support, I was able to enrol and complete a PGCE in 1998. All these experiences made me into a better teacher.

My First teaching Job

I was lucky to get my first job on my first application at John Cabot City Technology College in Bristol (1998). I was employed as a Science teacher and taught all the three sciences. Teaching A-level Biology was great fun and it was here that I first started developing a website to allow my students to experience the world outside the walls of the classroom and hence create a “borderless” classroom. I started experimenting and teaching myself ICT skills and felt this was an area I could move into. The opportunity arose when one of the IT teachers left in 2001. I moved across and started teaching A-level Computing! (a change from my training but this kept me interested

and every day was a new learning experience). In 2002, I got offered to become head of Computing. This offer was made by the then principal Jim Wynn. Working with Jim was inspirational and he gave me some very special and unique opportunities for which I will always be grateful.

The special educational projects

I started thinking about how to use ICT as a tool to enhance learning and teaching and how it could also help me deal with my workload e.g. through putting lesson notes on the web which could be re-used by students. This then in 2002 led me to develop a new course called E-Citizenship which allowed students to develop ICT skills using a citizenship context. I was delighted when it got made part of the college curriculum and now all students have an 80 minute lesson a week.

I became involved in projects in Jordan, Namibia, Egypt and South Africa. I have in the last 3 years had a chance to work in all these countries. This involved training teachers on the effective use of ICT and was an experience I enjoyed and those trips will always hold special memories. I was able to link up my classes with children in India and South Africa and doing these projects was rewarding for my students. For me, this is the pinnacle of teaching when you are in a classroom and at the same time lucky enough to be involved in all the projects outside the classroom. I would like to think that I was brave enough to take on new challenges which have kept things fresh for me. Working abroad was a great experience as I was able to share ideas and bring them back to my classroom. Setting up an ICT infrastructure and teacher training in a township in South Africa called Alexandra was the most fulfilling of all. I was lucky enough to be invited by Jim Wynn to help in advising on the initial stages in the development of the Jordanian ICT curriculum!! (who would have thought that I would be sitting in Amman in a room with the education minister). The work with other schools abroad would not have been possible without the support of Henry Warren from Gemini Pioneers. Henry provided the link and support which will allowed me to focus on the learning and teaching experience. Henry played a very important role to develop successful international dimensional in my school. Henry nominated me for the teaching award and we will carry on our partnership into more exciting projects in the future.

During the last three years, it has been a privilege to work with Mary Barry from British Airways. If all multinational companies had people like Mary working for them, the world would be a different place. Mary gave me and others opportunities to work in schools in South Africa supported by British airways. Working on a range of different educational projects with Mary allowed me to see the impact one person could have on a global level. Mary made the initial link for the college to work in South Africa and later invited me to be involved in two projects in South Africa where I was asked to deliver citizenship workshops. These workshops were run in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police, Charlton football club and British Airways. In 4 days, I would end up teaching 800 children, an experience I will never forget. I worked with my fellow teacher from the college Lisa Roberts and we both feel very privileged to be given such an opportunity. Being a teacher opened doors for me to work as a consultant/partner for a number of partners who have allowed me to develop my own skills. Working with the British Council in Cairo allowed me work with teachers abroad, the best CPD programme!

The National Teaching Awards

Winning the National Teacher Award for innovation in education 2004 was the “cherry on the cake”. It was a superb weekend in London to receive and celebrate the award with family and friends. The teaching award has given me further opportunities to go and speak at conferences, visit schools and carrying on being inspired and learn from others.

Why come into teaching

I have had the best 6 years of my career to date. I have enjoyed every minute which teaching brings. No two days are the same with every day offering a different challenge. I have been lucky to be in a school which is very open to new ideas and change. Having a realistic belief in what is achievable is important and I believe that if one focuses on the teaching side of things, other opportunities will come. It must all start with teaching. Teaching is full of opportunities and it's the best any career has to offer. Over the last 6 years, the profile of the profession has risen and there are many opportunities and funding to do exciting things as long as you are in the right environment. I stress the word the right “environment”. My wife also a teacher in a school 3 miles from where I teach has a totally different experience. I sometimes feel that she might as well in be teaching in a totally different educational system where there are no opportunities. I feel sad and fear that such a dual educational experience for teachers is the reason many leave after 5 years but this I hope is changing with more schools like mine with a forward thinking management and leadership team.

Being a teacher also allowed me to extend my research background. I was lucky to work with Bristol University on a Best practice research scholarship project looking into the impact of ICT on motivation. For me the teaching profession brought freedom to express and develop myself. My father who was also a teacher in Kenya and later in this country had a very similar experience as me. His advice has always been to focus on the positive things an establishment has to offer and NEVER dwell on the negative. It's the best advice and has helped me in my career.

My favourite poem by Guillaume Apollinaire sums up why I am in teaching: *"Come to the edge," He said. They said, "We are afraid." "Come to the edge," He said. They came. He pushed them...and they flew.*

The future

I would love to be able to combine teaching in the classroom and involve myself in training teachers on the effective use of ICT to enhance learning. I would like to support teachers in international collaborative projects and show how ICT can be used to enhance this experience. I would like to work with teachers to give them a direct experience of how ICT could enhance teaching and learning in their own curriculum area. This would in my view be a method of CPD training where we start giving teachers a “Personalised Training Programme”. I am very passionate and excited about the renewed drive of having a global dimension in the secondary education system and hope I would be able to contribute to this aspect of education in my school and enrich the lives of my students.