

James Mistruzzi was employed by Ontario's Scarborough Board of Education back in 1988 when he spotted an advertisement recruiting staff for a Canadian school in Hong Kong. He applied, thinking it would be interesting to take a two-year leave of absence to see what Hong Kong was like.

More than four years later, Mistruzzi is still here. He found his position as one of three principals at Tai Koo Shing's Delia School of Canada so enriching that he sent his resignation letter back to the Board long ago so that he could continue his involvement in Canadian schooling in Hong Kong.

In fact, last September, Mistruzzi helped launch one of Hong Kong's newest Canadian schools when he became principal at Seaker Chan International School, formerly known as the Sham Shui Po College.

Down the road a few kilometres at Hong Kong's original Canadian school, the Canadian Overseas Secondary School (COSS), Alvin Gillies acquired his position as a retirement project after years as a director of education in Ontario.

The two men, like a large percentage of staff at the five schools offering the Canadian curriculum in Hong Kong, have been recruited from Canada to provide an authentic framework for the thousands of students here studying at Canadian schools.

"The only difference between our school and one in Canada is the location," says Lam Tin Chor, deputy principal at Delia, a five-year-old school named for Sister Delia Tetreault, a Catholic missionary active in Hong Kong and China earlier this century. "We use the same books, the same teachers, the same curriculum."

But as for the students, that's a different story. All five schools have a very heavy percentage of local Chinese students either being groomed for future study in Canada, or returning from the West and wanting to continue with an English language education. Especially now that Canada's economy has slowed, schools are reporting a rise in the number of returnees.



The Hong Kong government is seen to be favouring

Canadian institutes lately in its encouragement of more

international schools. Such a strategy is meant to help

the territory keep its doors open to the international

business commu-

nity while offer-

ing a highly

skilled and

cosmopolitan

workforce.

"Our expatriate numbers are growing, but generally, they tend to go to the other international schools," says Ian Robertson, principal at the small, but rapidly growing Canadian International School in Causeway Bay. "About 85 percent of our students are Chinese, many returning from Canada or Australia."

For those students who have never had exposure to any foreign education, adjusting to the more liberal Canadian system with its emphasis on creative problem solving and original thought can be difficult. Often times, it contradicts the rote memorization techniques to which Hong Kong students are accustomed.

"Our students fit in fairly quickly, but some come with funny ideas about Canadian education," explains Gillies from the principal's office at COSS, a school which was established 10 years ago by three professors from Toronto's Ryerson Institute of Technology. "We stress group work and creative thinking, and plagiarism is sometimes a problem before students catch on to our style."

Teachers have also reported being surprised at the mechanical reactions that local children demonstrate to problem solving, especially if they have only jumped into a Canadian institute for their final years of schooling.

Delia, Seaker Chan, and especially COSS,

which has 400 of its 528 students at the Grade 12 and OAC (formerly Grade 13) levels, tend to attract students who are planning on graduating from a Canadian university or tertiary institute. There are hundreds in that category (see sidebar) and many of Hong Kong's Canadian schools are bursting at their seams as a result.

But Canadian schools aren't the only ones with booming enrolments. Surging demand has ignited an explosion of so many new institutes over the last decade ranging from German-Swiss to Japanese, that the nationalities represented in Hong Kong schools now closely rival those at the United Nations. Despite the high fees that these much aspired to institutes charge, the Hong Kong government is forecasting that enrolment will continue unabated, leaping fivefold over the next five years.

But make no mistake. Not everyone has the option to attend. International schools, including the Canadian ones, are a privilege for those who can afford the tuition. Yet compared with the most prestigious international schools in the territory, such as the Hong Kong International School with its tuition ranging from HK\$33,000 to nearly \$90,000 with a \$110,000 debenture and \$15,000 entry fee and American curriculum; the Canadian schools, which average around HK\$30,000, seem like real bargains.

