

## Summary Report for Publication

A full copy of the Sabbatical report can be requested by contacting Pauline Cornwell, Principal Papatoetoe Intermediate School at [paulinec@papint.school.nz](mailto:paulinec@papint.school.nz)

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I am deeply grateful to the Papatoetoe Intermediate School Commissioner, and Advisory Group, for their positive support and active encouragement. The school leaders who attended, and staff members who supported us also must be acknowledged and thanked, for their efforts on behalf of the organisation, preparation, work load and 'dedication to the cause' has been outstanding, particularly those who were acting as Principal in my absence.

### Introduction

I applied for to the Ministry of Education for 'Principal Sabbatical Study Leave'. In the application I outlined my intention was to travel to four pacific islands with four of my school leaders to 'investigate' the following:

1. Student engagement: What do you identify as the indicators that show 'good student engagement'? For your school which are the most important?
2. Parent engagement: How do your parents show that they are supporting the school and their child to be at and progressing in school? What do you do to foster this engagement with your families?
3. Transition: What does your school do to prepare and support your students to go to the next level of schooling? How many do not take the next step? What do you think are the reasons for that?

The primary intent of this research was to develop our school leaders' knowledge within these areas (student and family engagement and transition between settings) and within these contexts: Fiji, Tonga, Samoa and Cook Islands. The purpose being, to develop a bank of information and possibly resources, which school staff members will use when working with parents.

Most importantly, we wish better to understand what we, teachers and school leaders at Papatoetoe Intermediate School, can do to better support particularly our Pasifika Boys and their families because they are the group currently most at risk from underachievement in our school. The underachievement linked to poor student engagement, low family engagement and the impact of transitions from one educational setting to another. Information that is useful to our school and setting may be transferable to other New Zealand Educational contexts however; it was not the primary intent of the research.

It should be noted, that while we visited schools our primary focus was to talk with school leaders and teachers if they were available. We did have the opportunity in many of the places we visited, to visit classrooms and walk around the schools but this was only at the invitation of the principal hosts.

The study was undertaken over Term 2 2018 as follows;

**Fiji:** Wednesday 2 May to Wednesday 9 May, attended with Mrs. Donna Young, Assistant Principal. We spent seven days in Fiji and visited the Nadi and Lautoka areas only. These being the areas from which the majority of our Fijian-Indian students had emigrated. We undertook twelve interviews and visited eight schools.

**Samoa:** Wednesday 16 May to Wednesday 23 May, attended with Mr. Raymond Webb, RTLB Cluster Manager. We spent seven days in Samoa and visited seven schools in total, on both the islands of Upolu and on Savai'i. We participated in eleven interviews in total.

**Tonga:** Saturday 26 May to Friday 1 June 2018, attended with Mr. Innes Jephson, Assistant Principal. We spent six days in Tonga and remained on Tongatapu. We undertook eight interviews and visited five schools.

**Cook Islands:** Tuesday 12 June to Tuesday 19 June, attended with Mr. Jonnie Black, Syndicate Leader. We spent seven days on Rarotonga, visited five schools and undertook eight interviews.

In preparation for each of the trips, we met with ‘advisory groups’ (at our school) and read publicly available educational documentation, from each of the Pacific islands to be visited.

Compiled notes, from each of the interviews form the ‘synthesised summary’ for each of the areas visited. The summaries form the basis of this report. The summaries became a ‘discussion document’ for working groups of teachers at our school during a Teacher Callback Day in the July holiday break. Teachers were first asked to collectively answer the questions we posed to the people we interviewed and then to compare and contrast their answers with those provided in the summaries. Then they made suggestions of actions they could take with parents and students (that might help them better understand the requirements of New Zealand education) based on the information provided which they could then trial in their classes. This work was then linked to ‘Tapasa’ the draft Pasifika Cultural Competencies Framework supporting teachers’ appraisal.

The Sabbatical Report, is presented in eight ‘chapters’

1. Sabbatical Report Introduction
2. Summary 1 – Fiji
3. Summary 2 – Samoa
4. Summary 3 – Tonga
5. Summary 4 – Cook Islands
6. Findings
7. Feedback and Recommendations
8. Summary for publication

The summaries contain quotes and endeavour to give a realistic and ‘overall’ picture of the range of understandings, beliefs and experiences we had when speaking with school leaders and ministry officials in the places we visited. Each summary is between 13 and 18 pages long and supported by extensive notes, gathered at each of the interviews. The notes are not public due to the need to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of those who contributed to the inquiry.

The Chapter 6, ‘Findings’ in the full report brings together common threads we found across the range of places we visited and this Summary Report endeavours to provide insight into that chapter. However, when working with staff at our school they have said that the chapters they were more interested in were those summarizing each of the islands visited.

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Introductions; Understanding the context**

#### **Types of schools**

As in New Zealand, the various governments of the places we visited now fund schools and teachers. This is a recent development and in some places, there is a wide variation in the levels of funding available depending on the ‘type’ of school. All places had schools that classified as

'government schools'. Government schools were the most common type of schools in all of the places we visited. In most places, they received the most money per student capita. Villages, in order to educate the children, established 'village schools'. Governments are negotiating taking over responsibility for these schools, in liaison with the villages. The name 'village school' remains as the school almost exclusively serves the children of that village.

The next most common type of schools were 'mission schools'. These were schools historically established by 'churches'. Religious groups (Catholic, Methodist, Hindu, Latter Day Saints, Jehovah Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, Baha'i, Islamic, Baptist etc.), had built and staffed the schools and resourced them with money donated from outside of the country. As time has passed, the churches are finding it more difficult to continue to afford all aspects funding. In all the countries visited, governments have taken over the payment of teachers. This gives the governments more control of teacher quality and curriculum, as well as ensuring the schools remain viable. Until recently, many churches had been able to provide additional 'voluntary' staffing (e.g., the Catholic churches often provided brothers and nuns to supplement staffing). This is also becoming more difficult and church schools, in the places we visited, are moving to a model similar to that used in New Zealand, which we describe as 'integrated'.

In all of the places we visited, there are 'private schools'. Established (mostly) to provide for the children of diplomats, international businesspersons, professionals (doctors etc.) many of whom were on 'short term contracts' (one to two years). These schools charged higher fees and provided an education that was (generally) significantly different to that of other schools. The differences included curriculum delivery (e.g. use of New Zealand resources), pedagogy (e.g. children working in groups), inclusion (e.g. identification and support of children with special needs), apparent additional funding (e.g. teacher aides) and the numbers of overseas trained teachers (we saw those mainly from New Zealand).

### **Teacher support; resources and Teacher Aides**

Principals all indicated that they receive, from the government, a grant based on a per student formula. All confirmed, central employment (and payment) of teachers by respective Ministries of Education. This is a significant difference to teacher employment in New Zealand (where each school contracts their own teachers). Schools submit the paperwork to central offices for confirmation of teacher salary reimbursements. The use of all other allocated funding pays for all costs for the school, including cleaning and caretaking, power and water, repairs and maintenance, and classroom resources. Schools could not use the money to employ additional teachers. Very few schools could afford Teacher Aides. Those who could paid for them through very active PTA fundraising or business sponsorship.

Many schools did have some administrative staff members, secretaries, drivers etc. These people were often relatives of the principal. In most schools, teachers did the cleaning (including toilets) and minor caretaking with the help of the students although many did mention there was a

recent move away from allowing students to do cleaning. Property and maintenance was the responsibility of the 'village' or community and generally arranged by PTA.

Classroom resources in most of the schools we visited were very meagre (although in Rarotonga furniture etc. was similar to that in New Zealand). Some schools had furniture dating back to the early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century (which we or even our parents had used in New Zealand as children). Many spoke of the need for charts and reading resources to support learning. We observed one teacher using a blackboard to teach reading to new entrants. There were no readers for the children and no 'big books'. We saw no pin board for classroom displays and in most classes, teachers made the rooms inviting by covering the concrete floors and walls with plastic mats and laminated charts. Children's work was not on display. Alphabet and science charts etc. were handmade and often based on bible verses.

### **Schools with more money get 'better results'**

In all of the places we visited, those schools that catered to wealthier families, villages or areas or who received additional funds (from PTA or businesses) achieved better results no matter how those results were measured. The principals of the schools and Ministry officials provided to us the information, about the success of the school and the levels of funding.

The communities they served considered these schools 'better'. The schools had higher levels of enrolment and seemed to report more positively about parent engagement and support. Ministry officials also considered the schools 'better'. Some of these principals spoke of the time they spent applying for 'relief funding' and support projects for their schools. It was apparent that these principals and their schools were also highly considered by their peers and sometimes mentioned in interviews as providing examples of good practice or running schools that were like 'international or private schools'. When other people described these principals, they commonly said they were 'strong', 'dedicated' or 'determined'.

### **School fees and fundraising**

In Fiji, schools were no longer able to charge school fees or donations. Some PTA in Fiji required set payments, which most parents paid. In all other places parents were required to pay either termly or annual fees in addition to Parent and Teacher Associations (PTA) fundraising. In all places, PTA committees ran school fundraising and undertook the management of additional money. These committees seemed quite powerful groups, controlled by governmental legislation. In all places, parents expected to support the PTA however not all parents were compliant and financial support across the various countries, seems to have dwindled in direct proportion with the amount the government pays to schools. Relief and support funding often provide 'governmental funding' for education. In all places the PTA was not managed by the principal but the principal was on the PTA committee and made requests to the committee for money to pay for specific projects such as 'computers', Teacher Aides, caretaker etc.

## **Teacher training, performance management and professional development**

In the places we visited, there has been a significant push towards ensuring all teachers hold qualifications, 'at least a teaching diploma'. The teacher training providers in all of the countries we visited do work in conjunction with other universities throughout the Pacific and many providers work with NZQA and providers in New Zealand. In Rarotonga we were told, there is still ability, particularly for fluent Te Reo Maori speakers, to enter the teaching workforce as 'Teacher Aides' (working with small groups) and to eventually be counted (and paid) as 'teachers' and not participate in any formal training.

Only in Fiji did principals speak of 'teacher registration'. Principals in all places complained of having to work with teachers 'who are only working for their paychecks' and 'those who are not competent' or who continue to rely on aversive methods of behaviour management. Some principals spoke despairingly in the face of having to deal with teachers who simply were not behaving well. Some spoke of 'misuse of the school internet connections' and 'not preparing and planning as required'.

In all of the countries, a central office managed all teacher and principal employment processes. Appointments by 'application' and 'merit' described the new processes in only two of the countries. In the others, the appointments were sometimes governmental or seemed arbitrarily made. 'Corruption' was problem mentioned within all government and education systems. No principals that we spoke to were able to appoint or even have any say in the appointment of teachers to their schools.

In most places the 'best teachers' were teaching the classes where high pass rates at the end of year national examinations. This would affect student placements or acceptance to preferred secondary schools (at around Year 6 and Year 8 depending on the countries and systems) increasing the schools status. In Tonga, we were told, parents 'followed' the best teachers when they were moved by the Ministry from one school to another.

Across all of the countries visited, people spoke of newly established 'appraisal systems for teachers and principals.' A range of 'data' informed the process with the most common source being the achievement levels (pass rates) of the students in the classes and the progress they made. Principals in many of the schools we visited (in all of the countries) had graphs displayed on their walls representing the achievement levels and pass rates of the students in their schools, split into year levels. Most commonly, the display compared the school to local or even national data.

All countries mentioned a teacher shortage and a reduction in the numbers of people training to be teachers. Only in Tonga was there any mention of 'release' or 'relieving' teachers and this was provided by newly graduated teachers who itinerated until appointed to a school. Tonga was the only countries where the Head Teacher was not regularly required to teach. Principals or Head Teachers were responsible for the professional development of their teachers. In all countries, the local ministry or departmental office arranged and often led professional

development. All principals spoke with concern about the amount of change that they and their teachers are required to manage.

Many principals admitted that they do not really know 'how to use computers' and that their teachers 'do not use computers' or information technology in any aspect of teaching. Some principals however were confident, enthusiastic and positive.

### **Inclusion**

This was not an area of investigation; however, many of the people we interviewed mentioned it as an area of challenge for teachers and families in all of the places we visited.

In response to world-wide trends in the recognition of the 'rights of the child' (United Nations Convention ratified in New Zealand in 1993) all of the places we have visited have made two significant changes to expectations for teachers and schools; the cessation of corporal punishment and the rights of all children to have access to education in mainstream schools. The development of 'inclusion' as a common educational practice is a major area of development in all of the places we visited. All of the people we spoke to in all countries agreed that this was 'only in the beginning stages' and needed considerable amounts of development and support. Most indicated that it was newly required (within the last 2-3 years). In all of the places we visited, there were concerns expressed in a range of contexts that is unpacked within the full report.

### **Religion in classrooms**

In all of the countries we visited, religion is apparent in classrooms. Some of the people with whom we spoke were genuinely sorry for teachers in New Zealand, who they knew must maintain a 'secular' stance when talking about any religions. Christianity is the main religion in all of the Pasifika countries we visited. Population statistics indicate the following: Tonga - over 92%, Samoa - 98%, Cook Islands - 92%, in Fiji - 64% Christian, 28% Hindu and 6% Muslim.

Only in Fiji was there requirement that classrooms ensure acceptance of the range of religious beliefs and practices. Fiji also had requirements for schools to be non-discriminatory and instances where schools had faced legal action from dissatisfied parents. Even in Fiji, principals and teachers spoke of the inclusion of religious ceremonies in school and classroom life and described it as 'participating in religious ceremonies'.

In Samoa, in particular, but also in Tonga and the Cook Islands, explicit inclusion of Christian teachings and writings are in classrooms. Christian teachings and cultural expressions remain interwoven with all school processes and the expectation is that all teachers adhere to these teachings and understandings.

### **Village life**

In all four contexts, 'village life' forms the basis of all community structures and organisation. Familial relationships, community living, intergenerational support structures, shared resources and responsibilities contribute to the way people live whether they are native or immigrant.

## **Student Engagement; Understanding the ‘learner’ and ‘learning’**

When we inquired into ‘student engagement,’ it was quickly apparent that the educational ‘jargon’ in New Zealand differs from that in many of the places we visited. We did provide, to all those interviewed, a summary copy of our inquiry and the questions. Only in Rarotonga was there immediate response and understanding of the stated focus and our line of questioning. Our adjustment of the questioning process and did inquire more generally about the descriptions of ‘good learners’.

### **Defining ‘learning’ expectations**

‘Learning’ seemed to be commonly described in Fiji, Samoa and Tonga as the completion of tasks set by the teacher that enable learner to attain the expected levels of achievement.

Learners reflect this in their ability to complete assessments and examinations that test the student’s retention over the course of the year.

In Samoa, Tonga and Fiji descriptions of ‘good learners’ commonly focused on ‘academic’ performance, ‘respect’ and ‘compliance’. In Rarotonga, some described the primary focus on academic attainment as the ‘old way’. Several people there mentioned that the focus on academic focus still evidenced in many schools, ‘particularly those in out-lying islands’. Rarotonga has national assessments at Year 8 as do all the other places we visited.

Many people we interviewed did mention ‘holistic learning’. People generally described this as the ‘spiritual, emotional, academic and physical development of the child’. This is the stated primary purpose of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Cultural Heritage in Samoa and frequently quoted by those we interviewed there.

In Rarotonga, this concept was more extensively unpacked during interviews than in other places. There, they identified this as ‘values’ learning, ‘use of information’, ‘learning about things that were important to their environment’, ‘connected’ and contextual learning.

There were specific differences between (Fijian) iTaukei and Indo-Fijian ‘learner expectations’ that seemed to center around the gap between the ‘holistic’ and ‘academic’ learning foci. Stated there, that iTaukei schools were more concerned about holistic development; the belief that development of a ‘good person’ would lead to academic successes.

### **Understanding the ‘assessment’ context**

‘Assessment’ in most places measures the student’s attainment of academic goals set by teacher, school, and central office.

Summative assessment predominates in all of the places visited and is used to report to parents and the various central offices. The ‘ranking’ of student assessment results and the child’s ‘place’



in class and the school, is a method of reporting many people mentioned. The verification of a child's 'place' is based on their test results and parents can and do challenge these. Schools spend a significant amount of time setting and undertaking assessments with one place admitting they probably spent 10-15 weeks out of 40 weeks each year preparing for (revision and 'practice' testing) and actually assessing students.

In most places, national assessment results, at Year 6 and Year 8, inform placement in preferred secondary schools. Enrolment into 'good' secondary schools, in the places we visited, increases a child's academic chances and therefore their learning and career pathways.

Teachers use assessment results to identify areas they need to 'improve teaching' or on what they need to 'spend more time' (e.g. specific English grammar, specific mathematics or areas of science). They also use assessments to identify the 'bright children' and those 'at risk'. In one school in Samoa and some schools in Rarotonga we were told what schools do to support (or extend) these groups of children. In Samoa, we also met volunteers (Catholic brothers, Peace Corps workers etc.) who worked with children needing learning support.

Parents use the schools assessment results, student rankings and successful student enrolments into preferred secondary schools to base judgements about the quality of a teacher or school. They also make decisions about a child's learning and career pathways based on their assessment results.

### **Learning in English**

In most places we visited there had been a recent shift from all schooling being in English to having the first three years at school in the child's first language, particularly in 'village' schools. There was general agreement that this was in an effort to 'preserve native languages'. People spoke of the lack of resources in indigenous languages.

In all places, learning in English was the expectation at the secondary school level. Many people cited the transition to secondary school being more difficult because of the increased requirement to understand English.

There was also general agreement, in all the places we visited, that many teachers found teaching in English a challenge.

National assessments are all in English and national educational data uses the results of these examinations. All places identified that 'children who speak English at home do better at school'.

### **Learning languages**

In all places, there is growing awareness of the need to 'preserve indigenous languages'. The move to enable learning to Year 3 is in an effort to support this preservation. In all places, teachers use the indigenous languages to 'explain what is to be learned' and 'specifically teach English grammar and vocabulary'. In all places, the indigenous language is an option as a

'language subject' especially at the secondary level. Those assessments are in the indigenous language.

Fiji had the most 'advanced' learning languages systems with all teachers trained to teach a language.

### **Classroom pedagogy**

Classrooms, in all of the places visited, are teacher-centered and learning teacher-led. The places we visited had curriculum (or annual syllabus) centrally set with clearly defined achievement targets assessed at the end of the year. Some places had very strict adherence to a centrally derived syllabus of learning covered over defined periods. Judgements are made of principals, teachers and schools in their ability to cover the learning set and to ensure that students met the specified targets.

The Cook Islands did stand out by being the only place that spoke of curriculum and pedagogical expectations more closely resembling those of New Zealand with the educational focus being on 'holistic development' of a child. However, all principals also spoke of 'teacher capability' and the expectations of students and parents being a barrier to being able to deliver learning within a modern pedagogy.

People in all places spoke of computers and a conceptual understanding of the need to provide computer-based learning. Again, the people in Rarotonga were the only ones able to talk about a larger-scale, centralised, MOE 'connectivity' and student-to-device ratios that were similar to those enjoyed in New Zealand.

### **Respect**

'Respect' in all of the places we visited, was identified as the most highly desirable behaviour for 'good learners'.

Commonly described as the way children behave towards the teacher. In some places, it included the way the children addressed and spoke to the teacher, e.g., 'calling the teacher 'sir' or 'ma'am'. More broadly, all places describe good learners by their ability to 'listen' to the teacher and enact instructions the teacher gives. Further described as 'compliance' and the learner's ability to understand instructions. 'Good learners' in all of the places visited are commonly 'quiet' and 'compliant'.

Principals also spoke of their desire to have pupils who 'asked questions'. Tempered, in all places, by beliefs that the culture in which the schools are situated disallowed the 'questioning of authority' (particularly the teacher). This extended to the relationships between the parents and the teacher. Questioning, highlighted a 'lack of understanding' and seen to be disadvantageous to social standing within the class. This inability for students to ask questions to improve understanding also hampers the ability for classrooms to be 'student centered'.

The high student to teacher ratios in Samoa and Fiji, and the lack of teaching and resources (in Fiji, Samoa and some Tongan schools) make centralised teaching a requirement. Control of large numbers of students so that they can hear the teacher and make attempts to undertake the required tasks also means that the teacher is more likely to require 'strict compliance'. The need for the teacher to be able to 'speak to the class' and for students to 'to understand' and do as the teacher asks requires the children to show 'respect' for the teacher and what they have to say. These factors and the teacher's ability to deliver (effectively communicate 'learning') to larger groups of students make the 'transmission model' more commonly 'successful' in these classrooms.

'Good' teachers cannot allow students to be disruptive or affect the learning opportunities of the other children, especially as this would adversely affect learning opportunities for so many students.

### **Discipline and classroom behaviour**

In all four places we visited, there was considerable discussion, about the move away from the use of corporal punishment. All had legislated against corporal punishment in schools in the past five to ten years. People interviewed stated that many parents, older teachers and some students found it difficult. Many commented on how 'students know their rights now'. Comments indicated this as a possible difficulty for teachers and schools. Particularly in Fiji, but also in other areas, there had been parents who had taken legal action in instances where teachers had resorted to corporal punishment.

It was apparent corporal punishment is still in use in some schools, despite the law changes. In some places, the use of corporal punishment has shifted from the principals and teachers to PTA or parents.

While principals and teachers had, professional development in regards to changes (provided by the various Ministries' of Education) we did not hear of many alternative behavioural management strategies. For instance, we only heard of 'restorative practices' in Rarotonga. Many schools did talk about 'counselling' students, after there had been 'trouble'.

It was apparent in all places that the decision to ban corporal punishment was controversial. The controversy, blamed on the beliefs that children need corporal punishment and the links to Christianity (or 'religion') and culture. Some expressed concerns about the undermining of cultural values, classroom control and an increase in bullying and poor playground behaviour. Some people did indicate that other aversive teacher behaviours had increased such as 'speaking harshly', 'shouting', 'slapping faces', 'leaving children outside of the class' etc.

'Bad behaviour' by students was generally blamed on 'poor parenting' (lazy, disinterested parents), or 'broken homes'. 'Extreme' behaviours included; swearing, theft, vandalism or breaking school property, fighting, smoking, having cell phones and having alcohol. Some spoke

of students 'absconding' or 'being absent'. Some spoke of Facebook and on-line bullying being a pre-cursor for trouble outside of school.

In some places, it was evident that they had heard of some of the behaviours we deal with in New Zealand such as weapons, drugs and 'gangs'. There was consensus that this is 'not yet' happening in the islands we visited. People in all of the places we visited indicated that they 'could see it coming'. Many mentioned the deportation back to the 'islands' of people from New Zealand and especially Australia and the impact these people are having on others and on village life.

### **Parent Engagement**

Every place we visited commented that 'many parents did not come' to the equivalents of 'teacher and parent conferences' and (our own) Community Hui and school events. Many people commented that the 'parents who did not come were the parents of children who did not do well at school'. Some described these parents as 'lazy' or 'disinterested'.

There was a general expectation in all places that 'broken homes' would produce children who did not perform as well at school; or conversely many children who behaved poorly would probably be from 'broken homes'. These homes included those where children were in the care of Grandparents and Aunts who would be 'too busy', 'have not enough resources' or were 'unable to control' the children.

The advantage in the village-based and 'smaller' island communities was that principals and teachers usually knew the parents. This did not increase the percentages of parents attending, which were similar or sometimes significantly less, than we would get attending events at our school. While some schools did mention strategies engage with parents (such as home visits), it was apparent that these were not commonly in place in the schools we visited.

Many schools spoke of grandparents and aunties caring for children while their parents 'were away' some hinted they were earning money others indicated that no one knew what they were doing. Only one person mentioned this as a 'good' or 'traditional' construct. Most others spoke of the practise as being detrimental to the children.

Some secondary schools did not ever meet with parents due to the attending children coming from outlying islands. These children also lived with Aunties and Grandparents and the schools made sure they 'kept an eye on them'.

### **Transitions**

Enrolment into a 'preferred' secondary school is, in Samoa, Fiji and Tonga, a competitive enterprise. There are a limited number of places available that children compete to fill. This competition based on annual ranking order means that students are incentivized to 'do better' than their classmates and friends.

In all of the places we visited, the general transition process was a simple paper-based exercise in which the parents completed the enrolment paperwork. In most places, the process is completed before the end of the previous year.

None of the places we visited had enrolment zones for secondary schools although many of the people we spoke with did want to discuss 'zoning'.

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