

## **Sabbatical Report:**

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**Sabbatical dates: July – October 2008.**

### **Section 1: Executive Summary**

This sabbatical consisted of two parts: a visit to a Samoan secondary school mainly for the delivery of teacher professional development and support, and a pilgrimage in Northern Spain during which I hoped to collect resources for a Year 10 Religious Education unit.

In Samoa, I was working in a school for which we have fundraised over a period of 10 years or more, and which is also owned by our Proprietors, the Sisters of Mercy in Auckland. My intention was to facilitate discussions about effective pedagogy, which I presumed would include effective literacy strategies across the curriculum. I planned to observe classroom teaching, survey students, and deliver a day of professional development focused primarily on literacy strategies. As events transpired, I was able to complete classroom observations and student surveys as planned, but the professional development session was curtailed and almost certainly not very effective. However, my three weeks in Leulomoega have led me to formulate a proposal for an ongoing professional relationship between the sister schools, which is detailed in this report, and will be presented to the Sisters of Mercy in Auckland for the 2009 school year.

I also spent one month walking 500 of the 800 kilometres which make up the Camino Frances, that part of the Way of St James which begins in St Jean Pied de Port in France, crosses the Pyrenees to Roncesvalles, and ends in Galicia at Santiago de Compostela. This was a huge personal achievement for me, and provided some excellent “thinking time” as I walked between 18 and 31 kms each day. I was able to reflect on my experiences in Samoa, to think strategically about my own school, and gather a wealth of experiences and resources to feed into the Year 10 Religious Education Unit on the Middle Ages, which includes a section on Pilgrimage. This part of the sabbatical is not covered in detail in this report, although I have included a few photographs, but it very much fitted the intention to reflect and revive.

### **Section 2: Purpose of the Sabbatical, as stated in Application.**

#### **Samoa:**

- To assist in teacher formation, encouraging teachers away from the “chalk and talk” methodology which I had heard was prevalent, into more collaborative strategies for teaching and learning, with a particular emphasis on literacy.
- To make links between what I observed in Samoa and the preferred learning methodologies for Pasifika students in New Zealand.

## Spain:

- To gather resources on pilgrimage for Year 10 Religious Education.

## Section 3: Background.

Paul VI College, in Leulumoega, Samoa, is a sister school of Carmel College, and both are owned by Nga Whaea Atawhai, the Sisters of Mercy. It is a Catholic co-educational school. At the time of my visit, the roll of the College was 170 students, from year 7 to 12. The Principal is Sr Fatima Lemisio rsm, who has taught in New Zealand, and the college is staffed by Samoan lay teachers, three of whom had completed teacher training in Samoa. The remaining 6 were untrained. There were also two volunteers working in the school, one from the USA, under the offices of the American Peace Corps, and the other from Japan.

The relationship between the two schools is longstanding, since for more than 10 years the students and the Proprietors Board of Carmel College have participated in annual fundraising for Paul VI. Sometimes these funds have gone towards resources, such as library books, but more consistently they have become part of the teacher salaries budget for the school. The Samoan government only pays a portion of the salaries in non-state schools, and the remainder is raised from student fees or from funds sent from New Zealand.

Collene Roche, the immediate past Principal of Carmel College, had since her retirement been employed as a consultant in governance by Mercy Ministries Auckland, and had visited the school regularly to support the Principal and assist with policy development and implementation. She, and others, had reported to me that rote learning, from “chalk and talk” teaching, was the most common methodology, and student results were poor. The roll was falling rapidly and performance management of teachers was minimal.

During the 7 years (1996 – 2003) I had previously spent at McAuley High School, where the Pasifika student roll was close to 98%, I had undertaken training with Ruth Penton as a literacy leader initially in her Learning through Language (LTL) programme, and then through the AIMHI consortium using the Ministry of Education resource Literacy Leadership in New Zealand Schools Years 9-13 (2002). Content literacy is a passion for me, and it is pleasing to see it used as the basis for cooperative teaching and learning strategies that are useful even in a decile 10 school.

I spent some time in preparation of resources, and would like to acknowledge the assistance of Denise McKay, HOD ESoL at Marist College during this time. With Denise’s help I prepared 8 strategies which I believed would be helpful:

- Word wall/ word of the day or week
- KWL (What do I **K**now already about this topic? What do I **W**ant to know? What have I **L**earned?)
- Jigsaw reading
- Word maps

- Shared Cloze exercises
- Pair definitions
- Structured Overviews
- Three Level guides

All of these activities were prepared within the context of the story of the life of Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, who lived in Ireland in the late 18<sup>th</sup> –early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, since Fatima had asked for some input related to the Mercy order.

## **Section 4: Activities undertaken.**

### **A. Classroom observations**

I spent the first week there just sitting in as many classrooms as I could. Class sizes in years 7 to 10 were similar to New Zealand but in Years 11 and 12 they were much smaller – sometimes as few as 3 students. The methodology used was consistent across all year levels, and relied heavily on reciting sentences from textbooks and copying from the board (often passages that came directly from the text). All of the teaching was whole-class and teacher-directed. There was a high degree of learned helplessness among students; when an individual student was asked a question, s/he did not answer, and unfailingly the teachers supplied the answers! Questions were directed to the whole class and the answers often called out; I saw no attempt to ascertain which students were not “on board”, or any kind of differentiated instruction. It appeared that the teachers were teaching as they themselves had been taught.

The use of English in classrooms was variable. Almost inevitably Samoan was used for explanations without any corresponding checking of the understanding of the original English, despite the fact that the Year 12 external exam is in English. In Home Economics, I asked to see a sample exam paper, which appeared to be mainly multi-choice and short answer. Attached to the back was the answer sheet which the teacher and the Japanese volunteer had completed. At least 50% of the answers were incorrect, arising from a poor understanding on the part of these teachers as to what was being asked in English. Part of the difficulty is the denseness of the texts themselves. Although the curriculum has recently been reviewed, the language of the texts is very complex, even at junior levels, and there is a resounding emphasis on content at the expense of pedagogy.

### **B. Teacher feedback.**

Teachers seemed pleased that they were being observed, and I wrote up each of the observations afterwards and made time to talk teachers through my notes, which I compiled along the lines of a classroom observation I would do in my own school. Some of these notes are attached, and in general teachers were keen to spend the time discussing their performance. It did not appear that there was a recognized performance review cycle in place, and the Principal asked me to leave her some notes regarding the performance management system at Carmel College, which I did. However, with some teachers I found myself discussing

professional behavior, such as arriving on time to classes and not leaving before the bell! The Principal spent a great deal of time in staff meeting stressing similar aspects of professional behavior, including smoking and roll-taking. A fine system had been instigated for teachers who were late to class – 2 tala (approx \$NZ1) each time. When one considers that trained teachers told me they are paid 12,000 tala per annum, and untrained teachers even less, this would seem like an expense best avoided! However, given the lack of professional education and training, such behavior cannot be seen as surprising.

### **C. Student surveys**

With 2 classes, one Year 10 and the other Year 11, I conducted a simple survey along the lines suggested by Ruth Penton at the start of the LTL programme. Students wrote short, confidential answers to 2 questions: What does my teacher do that helps me learn? What does my teacher do that makes it difficult for me to learn? I also asked them what they themselves did that helped or hindered their own learning. Their answers were as follows:

What does my teacher do that helps me learn?

- Explains hard things I don't understand in more than one way.
- Writes sub-headings for the main topic and breaks it up for me.
- Speaks good English
- Gives me ways to work or sort things out so I can understand
- Lets students do practical activities
- Comes to class ready, with lessons prepared

What does my teacher do that makes it difficult for me to learn?

- Talks too fast , not clearly, and doesn't explain
- Uses difficult words
- Gives us too much work
- Beats us when they are angry
- Just writes stuff down without explaining
- Comes late, doesn't prepare or give lessons well.

What do I do that helps me to learn?

- Listen carefully
- Never give up, keep studying hard
- Get involved in the lesson – ask questions and answer them
- Don't talk when the teacher or another student is talking
- Sit with a person who doesn't muck about

What do I do that makes it difficult for me to learn?

- Don't care
- Don't listen
- Talk too much

With the exception of the reference to beatings, these answers are not too different from those I would get from New Zealand students, with the focus on communication, practical activities and “chunking” for explanation. Interestingly, corporal punishment is now illegal in Samoa.

#### **D. Teacher Professional Development Session.**

This session, which originally was proposed as a whole day, ended up being just over two hours. There had been a number of changes to the timetable during this week, partly as a result of the hospitality to be shown to me, which was humbling. The final Assembly and presentation of gifts went on for a considerable time, with each level of the school presenting a performance.

When we gathered, I began by giving the staff the results of the student surveys, and challenging them, in terms of improving their professionalism, to live up to the school motto “Tu’utu’u I le loloto”: Launch out into the deep. As a result of my classroom observations, I had realized that the level of the teachers’ English was much lower than anticipated, so I focused on five of the strategies I had prepared, using the life of Catherine McAuley as a starting point. After treating the teachers as my “class” I asked them to think about where they could incorporate these strategies into their own classes, and challenged them to use at least one in the next few days. However, since this was my last day in the school, I had no chance to observe whether any of them actually did.

### **Section 5: Findings and Implications.**

One of the other visitors to the convent where I was staying was Philip Cortesi, principal of St Anne’s School in Manurewa. He and his school have developed a model which is proving to be highly effective : he and one other teacher come over to Samoa, to St Therese’s primary school for a week, twice a year to actually work in the classrooms with teachers, as well as fundraising to provide them with modern resources. This is much more likely to be effective. It fits the BES models of professional development and all of the most recent research, whereas my effort possibly fits in the category of least effective. However, this was mainly a fact-finding mission for me, and it was very worthwhile in that respect. After long conversations with Philip and the principal of the school they support in Fusi, Sr Paola, I am more than ever am convinced that it needs an ongoing professional relationship between the two schools to move Samoan pedagogy into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This would need the approval and financial support of the Sisters of Mercy in Auckland, and I intend to approach them early in the 2009 school year. I would very much like to continue my involvement with Paul VI College.

A further implication is the need to keep developing cooperative learning strategies for students at Carmel College, where the Pasifika students are very much in “the tail” of achievement. Among other benefits, this kind of pedagogy would guard against the learned helplessness observed in Samoa. Implementation of the Effective Pedagogy section of the New Zealand Curriculum has great potential in this respect.

**References.**

Effective Literacy Strategies in Years 9-13: A guide for teachers. Penton, R. et al. Ministry of Education 2002, Wellington.



Senior school singing practice in one of the new classrooms



A warm Samoan welcome by junior students for the visiting principal.

Pilgrimage to Santiago de  
Compostela



Following the way markers of scallop shells and yellow arrows – hard to get lost, yet I managed that, on one day!





The long and not-so-winding road.



In the queue for a bed in the new albergue in Burgos. Normally one could just leave one's pack to keep a place, but this was pretty close to opening time, hence the queue.



Journey's end – the cathedral where St James is buried in Santiago, Galicia.



A fellow pilgrim takes in the view of the Cathedral from the square!