New technologies to combat youth depression

Charter Schools: Is more choice going to make a difference to student achievement?

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What's in this Issue

- Combating youth depression 4
- Charting new waters? 7
- Thoughts on charter schools 11
- Kids’ Lit Quiz: NZ team champions in the sport of reading 10
- News in brief 11
- Teaching for Tonga 12
- Tribute to Peter Smith: Creator of a legacy 13
- Alumni news 14
- Be inspired, be inspiring: Heather Peters moves on from leadership at Tai Tokerau Campus 16
- Finding solidarity on shaky ground: How have refugee communities coped through the Christchurch earthquakes? 18
- Breaking the barriers between home and school 20
- A closer look at father parenting of boys with ADHD 22
- Putting physical education back in the picture 24
- New books 26
- Our students 27

Te Kuaka

Te Kuaka is a publication of the Faculty of Education at The University of Auckland that is published three times each year.

The magazine title relates to the migrating Kuaka, or godwit. In this context, the Kuaka’s journey is used as a metaphor for our own students’ journeys and the hope that they may return to the University from time to time to gain new knowledge and understanding in their profession.

Te Kuaka was the name of a newsletter first published in 1990 by the former Auckland College of Education (prior to its amalgamation with the University). We retain this title for our faculty magazine in recognition of our proud history and heritage of excellence in teacher and social services education.

We are pleased to be able to keep our wider community up to date with news of the work the faculty is engaged in and to share our successes with you. We hope you enjoy reading this issue of Te Kuaka.

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Parents expect that their children will learn at school to read and write, to be numerate and, in secondary schools, to achieve qualifications that will expand their options beyond school. So there is no question that schools should be accountable to their parents and students for enabling this achievement; there is no question that teachers and school leaders should be constantly challenged and supported to enable this achievement; and there is no question that schools should communicate each student’s progress, achievement and strategies for improving achievement to students and their parents.

League tables do none of these things.

For a start, all that league tables can do is to offer averaged data. They provide no indication of how achievement varies by student or between teachers and yet we know that within schools achievement differences can be as significant as between schools – in other words, they do not take account of the difference individual teachers make to individual students. Second, where they are benchmarked, they are usually benchmarked to other (similar decile) schools, not to each school’s starting point with the students they teach – in other words they tell us little about progress.

But even if league tables could give an accurate generalised reflection of ‘value added’ by the school they omit much of what matters to parents. They tell us, for example, nothing about the extent to which students:

- feel safe and happy at school
- feel that their teachers are approachable and helpful
- enjoy learning (and by this I don’t just mean enjoy “school” – many students enjoy school because of the peer relationships they establish. I mean enjoy schoolwork and enjoy it for its own sake.)
- are helped to think critically, creatively and reflectively
- became more confident learners, especially in areas where their anxiety levels are high
- learn how to improve their learning
- and, where the rankings are based on literacy and numeracy, nothing about student learning in science, the arts, technology, social studies, and health and physical education.

And yet all of this matter to parents.

League tables unnecessarily polarise debate and distract us from what matters – the achievement of each student benchmarked to challenging and rigorous standards; each student’s sense of belonging to the school community; each student’s enjoyment of school and learning; and each student’s learning interests, strengths and weaknesses. All of this demands high quality longitudinal data to which schools and teachers should be held to account by their communities and by the Education Review Office. To be opposed to league tables is not to be opposed to high expectations, to evidence and to accountability. But it is to be opposed to accountability by restricted, generalised, public rankings.

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR GRAEME AITKEN
Dean, Faculty of Education
The University of Auckland
Imagine flying on the back of a mythical giant eagle through a land of blazing volcanoes as you attempt to rid the virtual world of gloomy negative automatic thoughts (GNATS). This is just one example of the storylines woven through a new interactive fantasy computer game that is revolutionising the way youth depression is treated in New Zealand.

SPARX or “Smart, Positive, Active, Realistic, X-factor thoughts”, is a computerised self-help programme that uses cognitive behavioural therapy to help young people combat symptoms of depression. Faculty of Education staff member Dr Matt Shepherd is part of this innovative project and has investigated how it can specifically be used as a treatment for young Māori with symptoms of depression.

Developed over the past four years in The University of Auckland’s Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, the project led by Associate Professor Sally Merry involved a unique collaboration between a team of cognitive behavioural specialists, researchers, game developers, e-learning theorists and young people to test whether SPARX was as effective as traditional treatments, such as counselling and therapy, for youth depression.

Dr Matt Shepherd, of Ngāti Tama descent, is a professional teaching fellow in the Faculty of Education’s School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work and co-investigator and research fellow for the project. “Depression is a major health issue amongst adolescents in New Zealand, but many are reluctant to seek professional help,” says Matt, who developed his interest in using computers to treat patients during his earlier work as a paediatric and mental health social worker at Auckland’s Starship Children’s Hospital.

As part of his role in the project, Matt completed his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology to specifically investigate the design, applicability and effectiveness of SPARX for taitamariki (Māori young people). Up to a quarter of young people in New Zealand will have
experienced a depressive disorder by the age of 19, which is a major cause of disability. Fewer than a fifth of these receive treatment. “These rates are higher for our taitamariki,” says Matt. Latest figures reveal that 16.4% of young Māori females report depression in the clinical range compared with 12.7% of New Zealand European females. Young Māori male students are also less likely (4.9%) to report depressive symptoms than New Zealand European males (6.5%).

“Cognitive behavioural therapy is recommended as the preferred treatment for mild to moderate depression,” he says. “SPARX has huge potential to increase access to help, particularly for those young people who are reluctant or feel unable to access traditional services offered by school counsellors and therapists. There have been very few projects in New Zealand that have looked at the effects of cognitive behavioural therapy with Māori youth so to be able to take this focus in conjunction with the main clinical trial was unique,” reflects Matt.

The detail in the design

To ensure the game had good adherence rates with young people it was important to design and develop it in such a way that was both enjoyable to play and had wide appeal to young people in New Zealand.

Matt was heavily involved with the initial design of SPARX and worked closely with Maru Nihoniho from software design company Metia Interactive and the project’s cultural advisory team to develop a visual design that reinforced and validated the identity of Māori young people. “We wanted to make sure that the designs and prescription of the content in the game was applicable to taitamariki,” says Matt, who describes the design as a hybrid approach incorporating Māori motifs into a 3D fantasy gaming environment.

“It was critical that we used designs that were appropriate and purposeful,” reflects Maru, who used her personal knowledge and experience of tikanga Māori to develop the initial ideas for the visual look and feel of the game, and worked together with kaumatua Rawiri Wharemata and the cultural advisory team to ensure they had the correct Māori designs for the purpose. “There was always meaning behind the design to ensure it promoted positive elements within the game,” she explains.

When selecting their SPARX avatar (their player in the game), taitamariki are able to customise their look to create their own unique identity. Māori design and language is woven throughout the seven stages of the game. The hokioi, a giant eagle used in the volcano province, represents strength and mana as players learn to negotiate with angry “fire spirits” of intense emotion and save the world from the GNATS. Using a staff, which resembles a taiaha or traditional Māori weapon, they shoot fireballs to make the GNATS disappear or turn them into positive thoughts.

“Each level of the game represents a different group of cognitive behavioural therapy skills such as problem solving or communication skills,” says Matt. “For example, as players travel through the swamp province they learn how to recognise unhelpful thoughts. They learn to challenge these thoughts in the bridgeland province, and in the cave province they discover ways to become more active.” The cognitive behavioural therapy strategies and techniques that players learn throughout their journey are brought together in the canyoning province as the New Zealand native Tui bird flutters beside the player, representing spirit and hope.

After the initial design concept for the first two modules was complete, Matt ran a series of focus groups with taitamariki and their whānau to demonstrate the programme and obtain feedback on the applicability of the design. “In general, whānau and taitamariki thought the designs were applicable and appropriate to them,” reflects Matt of their feedback. “They felt that SPARX was able to teach them skills and that the SPARX characters should include their whakapapa. Some of the whānau found it difficult to grasp the relevance of the technology and what we call ‘contemporary tikanga’ but young people definitely understood the purpose and aims of the programme.”

Matt’s research provided the essential feedback that Metia Interactive needed for the ongoing design of the modules. “He really understood the structural elements of the game, he knew about game play and how it all worked together. Matt’s understanding of technology was integral to us being able to refine the design,” said Maru.

Critically, the findings of Matt’s research reinforced that the development of the game was visually on the right track. “It provided the thumbs up that we needed to continue to use Māori language, designs and icons in the game design,” says Matt. “This ensured there was kaupapa (principles) and meaning in the visual design of the programme that validated their Māori identity.”
Putting SPARX to the test

Phase two of Matt’s research was a pilot study to analyse the effectiveness of SPARX for taitamariki who had symptoms of mild to moderate depression. A selection of students from two Auckland secondary schools took part in his study, which was conducted alongside the main clinical trial. Using a series of psychometric tests including the Child Depression Rating Scale-Revised (CDRS-R) and a number of secondary rating scales that were completed by taitamariki, he measured their levels of depression, anxiety and quality of life before and after they completed the SPARX programme over a period of four to seven weeks. Three months later he measured them again to test whether any improvements in mood, anxiety and quality of life had been maintained.

He found that the CDRS-R dropped substantially to within the normal range after taitamariki had completed SPARX. “This was a significant improvement that was maintained after completing the programme,” says Matt. The self-rating scales completed by taitamariki revealed that they experienced an improvement in anxiety and quality of life. This was confirmed when tested again three months later and participants reported that they were highly satisfied with the results.

“These findings were consistent with the main clinical trial,” says Matt. “By running the two trials, I was able to conduct a smaller scale study myself for the research component of my doctoral study. I had to get separate ethics and conduct it on the ‘smell of an oily rag’. For me, there was a lot of learning involved in conducting my research alongside a full-scale clinical trial and it also provided us with additional comparative data for the main study.”

Phase three of Matt’s study involved conducting a series of structured interviews with participants in his pilot study to identify what worked well and what didn’t work for them. He found that the cultural elements of the design enhanced taitamariki’s identity. “It was something they really identified with and liked about the programme,” says Matt. “Participants reinforced the psychometric findings in phase two by reporting that they found SPARX to be helpful because it taught relaxation and cognitive restructuring skills and helped to improve their mood.”

Matt’s final phase was the analysis of Māori participant data from the main study of SPARX. “It was a number crunching exercise,” he says. “We took the Māori participants from the main study and compared their results with those participants who received treatment from counsellors and therapists. Under the guidance of biostatistician, Associate Professor Chris Frampton, he analysed the numbers and, in conjunction with his supervisor Associate Professor Sally Merry, made sense of what the numbers meant.

Matt’s results for Māori youth were consistent with the main SPARX clinical trial, which confirmed that SPARX was as effective as traditional treatment in treating depressive symptoms in young people. “What this means is that SPARX has huge potential to become a valuable alternative treatment for young people suffering from depression, especially for those who may be reluctant to access support or help, especially our taitamariki,” says Matt who is excited about future developments for SPARX and the government’s recent commitment to support the mental health of young New Zealanders.

A brighter future

In a speech at The University of Auckland’s Health and Wellbeing Symposium in April, Prime Minister John Key discussed the government’s intention to significantly modernise its approach to supporting youth mental health. He noted: “As a government we need to lift our game and keep up with these kids if we are going to reach the ones who need help”.

Among the initiatives he discussed, which included Facebook, Twitter and Smartphones to provide information and support for youth, $2.7 million has been allocated to provide e-therapy specifically tailored for young people. “It has been shown to be an effective treatment option and offers real potential to reach isolated young people with mental health issues,” he said.

Last year SPARX received international acclaim when it received a World Summit Award for innovation in e-health and environment. In its evaluation of SPARX, the World Summit Award praised SPARX for its ability to encourage young people to analyse and compare their traditional behaviour and apply the skills they learn in real life situations.

“We are hoping that the results of the clinical trial and the international recognition we have received will mean the government may consider possibilities for developing SPARX further. If SPARX could be made accessible in schools and for young people throughout New Zealand it has the potential to make a real difference to our current rates of youth depression,” says Matt, who is currently investigating additional funding to develop a series of SPARX resources for whānau. “Having something like an extra module in SPARX that whānau could access would further enhance the programme for taitamariki and help whānau to support their child.”
Bringing back the community

Patrick Drumm
Principal, Aorere College, Papatoetoe, Auckland

Every successful school principal understands the power of working alongside their community as they strive to improve the learning and achievement of each student in their school.

The primacy and autonomy of that community was to be guaranteed under Tomorrow’s Schools reforms. School charters were to reflect the unique vision, character and aspirations of parents and students. Boards of Trustees were ‘entrusted’ with charting the direction for their school, ultimately creating a school tailored to the learning needs of their (and other parents’) children.

However, those who govern and lead schools in today’s environment will undoubtedly be experiencing a different reality. Successive low-trust policy changes in education have seen the self-governance model all but evaporate. Far from an expression of community ownership, current charters are now emphasised by compliance demands couched within narrow parameters.

It is no surprise that many schools are welcoming (albeit cautiously) discussion around the proposed charter schools. While there remains some uncertainty surrounding the structure of these schools, the principles of the model are worthy of further investigation and there may well be pressure on the government to broaden the targeted demographic beyond the stated “areas of educational underperformance”.

In many ways it is the return to the original intentions of Tomorrow’s Schools that carries most appeal. With the proposed model encouraging authentic decision-making at a local level, the potential for greater community engagement and student success will be greatly enhanced - a school created by community, for community!

One need not look any further than a model of charter schools already operating successfully in New Zealand. Kura Kaupapa Māori and state-integrated schools enjoy greater autonomy in the design of their charter documents. These schools exist purely through community demand and are provided the autonomy to tailor curriculum and protect their ‘special character’.

So the charter schools trial will be followed with much interest. It must draw on current good practice in New Zealand schools. But more importantly, this model must push boundaries in terms of flexible staffing, extended learning hours for students and re-establish the principles of self-management and self-governance from a community perspective.

All schools deserve the opportunity to benefit from the low-compliance context that has been promised. Maybe charter schools will show the way here.
The introduction of charter schools is not predicated on an overwhelming evidence of international success, but on a set of ideas, values and principles about the nature of society and schooling. Charter school proponents share an active distrust of government, and a belief that the private sector is superior in delivering results.

The basic idea behind charter schools is failing schools are not producing sufficient numbers of employable young people in lower socio-economic areas. It is argued that these schools offering broad-based education by highly trained professionals through a nationally devised and internationally applauded curriculum should replace by schools with narrowly defined outcomes and a de-unionised and unqualified teaching pool. Preferably this fundamental change should result in financial profits for the businesses involved in managing the new schools. Proponents frame this idea as offering parents in poorer areas greater choice.

Failure and rescue informs the discourse of charter schools. Failing communities are blamed and shamed while the white knights of business are presented as the rescuers, the saviours of a system that teachers and principals refuse to admit needs rescuing.

There are other values and ideas about public education. If it's not working, then the government needs to work to improve the system, not give it over to business for rescuing. I reject the current practice of labelling children, schools and communities as failures. Schooling is about more than literacy and numeracy. The creation of critically thinking people, of people with vested interests in the success of fellow citizens, of people committed to justice and equity are valuable pursuits for education.

Instead of false choice I value the promise of equity. Equity suggests that parents have the right to expect their local publicly-funded and run neighbourhood school be as good as any school anywhere in the country. It means that charter schools shouldn’t flourish at the expense of other schools in the same area.

A progressive education system recognises that instead of merely training people for the economy, the central and primary purpose of school is to help young people make sense of the world they live in, and to give a sense they might be able to impact and improve it for themselves and others.

Let’s look at the options

Dr Airini
Head of the School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland

We have some success from our schools but don’t have enough. And we certainly don’t have enough time to wait for it to evolve. The needs Pacific students have are major, right now. We should have ways to tap into the full potential of Pacific students and all those who are yet to experience schools where achievement of qualifications happens and where success is normal.

It’s well known that education can change lives. So many teachers believe that and followed that hope into their careers in schools. Our teachers can make all the difference and should have choices as to how they do so. As a nation, we’re used to making a difference and doing things differently. You can’t be an island nation at the south end of the world without being open to change, and ready to lead that.

We have a track record of looking at difficult problems and tackling them, and doing that well. In the farming sector we have the electric fence. In medicine we have a low-cost, high-tech incubator for premature babies. For young ones’ literacy we have Reading Recovery. We’re innovators. We’re comfortable with that.

Another wrong policy

Liz Horgan
Principal, St Joseph’s School, Otahuhu, Auckland

For me, the charter schools policy raises a number of serious issues, in particular:

1. The undemocratic manner in which the policy was introduced gives cause for serious concern. Like the class size policy there was not a whisper of charter schools in the lead up to the 2011 General Election.
And, we are leaders for what we see is right - no to nuclear weapons, no to apartheid. We debate and we stand up for human rights. It is right that every child in New Zealand schools should be supported to reach their potential through the teachers who help their learning, the school arrangements put in place, the community ethic and the focus in which the school exists.

So my view is that we take an informed, calm look at all options that offer some chance of accelerating achievement across all population groups, across all of New Zealand. Charter Schools is an option we should be looking at.

Possible success or probable failure?

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies
Head of the School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice, Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland

Why would we want charter schools in New Zealand? The answer is, we probably wouldn’t. There is not a lot of evidence to show that charter schools have any effect on student achievement that would make them worth investing in. For example, John Hattie (2009) has shown that, in the United States, charter schools have a close to zero effect on student learning. “The hype and promise is much greater than the effects on student achievement.” (p. 76)

Nevertheless, I have seen one charter school that is working well, Cal Prep in Berkeley, San Francisco. Set up for the first child in a family to go to university, this school is based entirely on the expectation literature of Professor Rhona Weinstein and the work of her colleagues such as Professor Frank Worrell both of UC Berkeley.

High expectations is the underlying philosophy and the students certainly meet them. A “can-do” attitude is engendered in students and the teachers in the school are carefully scrutinised regarding their implicit teaching beliefs before they are hired. Teachers are important!

This year every one of the students in Grade 12 graduated able to attend a four-year college and four were accepted into UC Berkeley – an unprecedented achievement for so many students from a low socio-economic background and from one small school.

So, charter schools can work, but most do not. Research evidence has made the difference for Cal Prep. The problem with charter schools is that any philosophy is potentially acceptable, and most do not fulfil their promise.

The deciding vote may be whether or not our government would actually give the seal of approval for charter schools that were set up by universities, whose philosophy was research-based. These schools could be governed by internationally recognised academics, staffed by passionate teachers, and driven by an inspiring principal. Would this happen in New Zealand or would big business want to dictate direction? Would we opt for potential success or probable failure?

“If it’s not working, then the government needs to work to improve the system, not give it over to business for rescuing.”
- Associate Professor Peter O’Connor

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONCEPT

(Source: NZ Model of Charter School Working Group, Terms of Reference)

Charter schools

- Would need to serve the government’s priority groups and could include one or more of the following:
  - a rigorous academic focus
  - a focus on a particular language, vocational pathway or other specialisation
  - adopt a faith or culture based setting
  - apply a particular pedagogical philosophy.
- Apply specific governance principles
- Could be operated as individual entities or as a network of schools.
- Could co-locate with social service providers and/or early childhood providers.
- Schools will not be required to implement The New Zealand Curriculum. Any proposed curriculum would need to be approved by the authorising authority according to clear criteria.

For the purpose of the pilot, operating licences would initially be allocated to areas of significant disadvantage of educational underachievement.

Charter school operators

- Could be non-profit or for-profit entities such as Māori or Pacific groups, iwi, faith or culture based educational organisations, universities, private firms or management groups.
- Would be granted a licence for a fixed period by an authorised body, which may be renewed or revoked according to performance.
- Would be expected to appoint a governing body to be responsible for all aspects of the school operation. It is possible that they could operate the school themselves or contract out the management of the school to a not-for-profit or for-profit education provider.
- Boards would be free to determine their own teaching practice and policies regarding student behaviour, expectations of and support for parents, and the length of the school day and year.
- Boards would also be able to raise their own revenues and determine their own pay and employment conditions.
- Will be accountable to their sponsors, the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office for meeting student achievement goals set out in their operating licence.

Funding and access

- Schools will be funded by the government on a per-child basis.
- Schools cannot charge tuition fees.
- Schools will be expected to accept all students who apply (until capacity is reached) irrespective of background or academic ability.
- Academic boundaries or requirements relating to the specialisation of the school could be set as long as these are not designed to deny opportunities to students from the government’s priority groups.
- Where demand exceeds supply, schools could choose to conduct entrance on a ballot basis.
NZ team champions in the sport of reading

It’s not an Olympic sport, but if it were, the students from Awakeri School, a rural primary school near Whakatane, would have taken the gold medal. In an impressive display of knowledge and nerves, they beat the teams from Australia, Canada, Scotland, South Africa and the US to win the 2012 Kids’ Lit Quiz world final competition.

The annual literature competition, for children aged 10 to 13, was held on 4 July at The University of Auckland. The Kids’ Lit Quiz is the brainchild of Wayne Mills, a senior lecturer at the Faculty of Education. Wayne compiles all the questions and hosts all the national and international quiz events. There is no set reading list for the quiz. “As soon as you do this,” says Wayne, “it becomes a test in disguise and kids love the fact that there are no limits.”

The New Zealand team, who made the final after winning the New Zealand Kids’ Lit Quiz competition in June, finished nine points ahead of the South African team with the Canadian team placed third. The winning students from Awakeri School are (pictured above, left to right) Hannah Van der Horst, Jessie Schuler, Katy White and Jess Robbie, aged 12, and their coaches are Ann Petersen, Margo White and Peter Fitzgerald.

The students were asked seven questions in ten different categories, including authors, titles, villains, fictional machines, gods and goddesses, and books into movies. Questions asked during the competition included the name of the horn-shaped basket in the book and movie The Hunger Games and the name of the submarine in the book Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea. If teams answered a question incorrectly they lost a point and gained two points for a correct answer. “The New Zealand team played very strategically,” says Wayne. “They only answered the questions if they were sure of the answers or waited until they had more clues.”

“I was frustrated that young students were encouraged to compete in sports, science and maths but not reading,” says Wayne, who established the Kids’ Lit Quiz competition more than 20 years ago. “I never saw kids being rewarded for reading, and I wanted to make it fun, interactive and challenging.” He says he never envisioned the quiz would become so popular or that it would become the global event it is now. In 1991, 14 Hamilton schools took part. This year, a thousand schools in seven countries were involved. Now Wayne is hoping by 2020 to have 20 countries competing in the quiz, which is run entirely by volunteers and funded through the generosity of sponsors.

“I get huge pleasure from seeing the joy and excitement the kids get from the quiz,” says Wayne. “This age group is a critical period for young readers. Reading for pleasure can drop off as students get older and are required to do so much directed reading for their studies. If we capture them now then we can set a pattern for the future.”

Among a number of other activities while in New Zealand, the finalist teams visited Hobbiton in Matamata, saw a presentation of Margaret Mahy’s book The Great Piratical Rumbustificaton and visited Rangitoto Island to see the setting for Maurice Gee’s fantasy adventure Under the Mountain.

Wayne Mills was awarded the Margaret Mahy Medal in 2008 for his contribution to children’s literature and literacy. Last year he received the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to Education, specifically for his contribution to the Kids’ Lit Quiz™.
Auckland college of education.

Recognising Rocklands Hall

90 years on

This year marks the 90th anniversary since the first young female student, Marjorie Christiansen, stepped over the Rocklands Hall doorstep in March 1922. Later this year, a plaque will be erected in the Music Auditorium on the Faculty of Education’s Epsom Campus to recognise the significant impact the Hall of Residence had on the lives of hundreds of young female students who studied at the Auckland College of Education.

Remembering Rocklands Hall

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Fulbright Travel Grant recognises early career research excellence

Dr Te Kawaehau Hoskins, a post-doctoral fellow and lecturer in Te Puna Wānanga, the School of Māori Education, received a Fulbright Travel Grant to travel to Canada and the United States in June where she undertook research and presented at the Native American and Indigenous Studies Conference in Connecticut. The grant recognises Dr Hoskins as an emerging world leader in educational research. “Receiving this award provided the opportunity to travel to the USA and Hawai and aligned well with my Te Whare Kura post-doctoral fellowship research into indigenous iwi/ Māori environmental governance,” said Dr Hoskins who is currently developing case studies with a number of iwi and hapū involved in ongoing or post-settlement governance of natural resources. “It further expands our knowledge and understanding of indigenous environmental governance models, the challenges and possibilities useful for the New Zealand context.”

Researching Te Arawa Māori student success

Researcher for the Starpath Project, Dr Melinda Webber (Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāpuhi, Pākehā) is working with a consortium from the University of Canterbury, Victoria University of Wellington and Ula Consulting Ltd to examine Māori student success in her tribal area of Rotorua. The Te Ara a īnenga consortium has received significant funding from Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga, a centre for research excellence funded by the Tertiary Education Commission, to work with secondary schools, students and their whānau throughout Rotorua to understand educational success from a Te Arawa worldview. All of the consortium researchers are originally from Te Arawa and the two-year project has been developed in conjunction with local education and iwi trusts in Rotorua.

The consortium are currently meeting with a selection of the region’s most educationally successful Māori students, their parents, teachers and principals to understand the conditions and circumstances that have enabled them to achieve success as Māori in schools within the Waikato area. “Instead of researching academic underachievement we are hoping to dispel some of the negative stereotyping that goes on around Māori achievement by looking at the supportive and enabling things that families, students and schools are doing to be successful,” says Melinda.

Rocklands Hall, the former residence of Judge Gillies, was transformed into a Hall of Residence for up to fifty young ladies who travelled from the country to study at Auckland Teachers College. Historically, the grand residence was considered an integral part of the girls’ training in social skills and residents organised an array of social activities from study circles, drama and gardening clubs to hosting regular balls in the ornate ballroom.

In 1924 some of the earliest residents formed the Rocklands Old Girls Association to maintain links between the past residents and organise reunions. “Rocklands was a very gracious place with a true air of romance,” recalls Annette Williams who left Rocklands Hall when she completed her teacher training in 1952. “We were all country girls and forged very special relationships. Through regular reunions and annual luncheons we have been able to maintain those special friendships and form new ones from the memories that we share of our time living at Rocklands Hall.”

In the 1960s and 70s two new residential wings were built at Rocklands Hall to cater for over 110 female students each year until it was eventually closed in 1993 and sold in 2000. Annette says the plaque is particularly significant for the Rocklands Old Girls Association. Earlier this year the group hosted their final reunion luncheon to mark the 90th year. “The strength of the ladies who lived there in the 1940s, who were an integral part of the reunions, is definitely waning,” she said. “Having the legacy of Rocklands Hall acknowledged with the plaque is gratifying for all of us.”

Starpath director lends expertise to ministerial forum

Professor Elizabeth McKinley, director of the Starpath Project, is sharing her expertise and research experience as a member of the new Ministerial Cross-Sector Forum on Raising Student Achievement. The forum, which met for the first time in June, aims to provide collaborative cross-sector leadership and advice to the Minister of Education on a quality achievement programme for education that will help meet the Government’s Better Public Service Targets of 98 percent of new school entrants having participated in quality early childhood education and 85 percent of 18 year olds having achieved NCEA Level 2 or an equivalent qualification over five years.

Professor McKinley will be working with representatives from primary and secondary schools, early learning and tertiary education sectors, unions, business, academics, iwi and educational experts to identify, clarify and progress system issues in the four key areas of quality teaching; smarter use of achievement information at individual, school and national levels; strengthening the performance and accountability of schools and education agencies for student achievement; and learning environments that are fit for purpose in the 21st Century.

“Research undertaken by the Starpath Project has shown that when schools use data to set targets and inform decision making, they can significantly improve student achievement,” says Professor McKinley. “This is an opportunity to work collaboratively with experts from across the country toward a common goal of improving the educational outcomes for all our learners.”
It is expected that the review will provide insight into the perceptions of the quality of graduate teachers and the content of the diploma programmes offered. “Over the last few years Tonga has undergone significant primary curriculum development, which has been extremely successful,” says Eve. “We will be looking at the extent to which the new curriculum has been integrated into primary teacher education programmes at the Institute.”

The recommendations made by the review team will inform discussions regarding the current status of the Institute as a tertiary level educational facility and provide guidance to the Tongan government for continued development. “The Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry, Emeli Pouvalu, is absolutely committed to ensuring that the recommendations of the review team are implemented,” says Eve who hosted Mrs Pouvalu’s recent visit to the faculty as part of a five-day Prime Minister’s Fellowship to meet with key government officials, education advisory groups and a number of early childhood, primary and tertiary education providers throughout the country.

Eve says it is vital that aid programmes are led by the country receiving aid to ensure they are sustainable and the outcomes can be achieved. She believes that when aid donors become involved it is often difficult to find a balance between the country receiving aid and the country administering it. Eve’s role in the review is to integrate her knowledge and experience of aid programmes, and work with the team to consolidate the findings in a report that will be presented to the government in October. “It is a huge privilege to work in collaboration with such an experienced group of Tongan educators who are conducting the review in consultation with the education community,” says Eve.

Some of the Tongan educators in the team have their own links with The University of Auckland. Dr Konai Helu-Thaman is co-leader of the team and Professor of Education and Culture at the University of the South Pacific. She has a long association with The University of Auckland both as a graduate and visiting professor. Her colleague and fellow team member Dr Mo’ale Otunuku recently graduated from The University of Auckland with a Doctor of Education and is now working as a research fellow at the University of the South Pacific.

The issue for education in a country like Tonga is to get the right balance between global knowledge and local knowledge. “It is an issue in developing school curriculum and also in developing teacher education programmes,” says Eve. “It is vital to look at the reality of the context and what the aims and objectives of teacher education are and should be according to the community concerned. It is essential that an ‘outsider’ involved in educational change processes understands the importance of context.”
A tribute to Peter Farrar Smith, OBE, one of the most influential art educators in New Zealand

Kua hinga he totara i te wao nui a Tāne
A totara has fallen in the forest of Tāne

Peter Smith was the most highly respected and influential art educator of his generation in New Zealand. An outstanding artist and art educator, Peter left behind a legacy as a leader and champion of art and art education when he passed away on 8 May 2012 at Mercy Hospice, Auckland aged 86 years.

Peter’s association with the Epsom Campus began in 1943 when he trained as a primary school teacher at Auckland Teachers College. He won, through his creativity, a coveted third year in art and graduated to become an art advisor with the Department of Education from 1946 to 1953. As an advisor Peter travelled throughout the Auckland region working with primary and secondary school teachers to bring art alive for students in the classroom whilst also completing a Bachelor of Arts with majors in education and philosophy part-time at The University of Auckland.

In 1953 Peter was seconded to Auckland Teachers College to develop the country’s first ever training scheme for tertiary art graduates to become secondary school teachers, and in 1956 was appointed to the secondary division of the Teachers College where he advanced from Lecturer to Principal Lecturer in a reputable career spanning 17 years. During his time at Secondary Teachers College, adjacent to Auckland Teachers College at the Epsom Campus, Peter led every curriculum, assessment and moderation initiative that was to shape secondary art education in New Zealand. Many of his former students continue to be leading art educators and numerous others are among this country’s most illustrious artists.

In 1974, Peter was appointed to the Department of Education as an inspector and later senior inspector of secondary schools before starting his role as Assistant Regional Superintendent of Education from 1983-84. His limitless passion for art education was recognised when he received an Order of the British Empire in 1986.

From 1985-90 Peter was appointed Principal Coordination, having joint responsibility with Jack Archibald and Dennis McGrath for the establishment of the Auckland College of Education, an amalgamation of the Auckland Teachers College, Secondary Teachers College, Early Childhood Education and the School of Social Work. His passion and dedication for art and education continued into his retirement in 1990 when he became a consultant for the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, a member of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council and Chair of the Northern Regional Arts Council.

Peter’s professional career was complemented by a life enriched as an exhibiting artist, a creator of fine furniture, a restorer, a designer and builder of numerous boats from small to large, and an author. An expert yachtsman, the natural elements of wind, sea and sky, that he often encountered while sailing have been an enduring feature of his artwork. He was one of the first New Zealand artists of the twentieth century to explore the use of aluminium for graphic mark-making in painting. His ingenuity and inventiveness is expressed through many of his works, including three in The University of Auckland art collection exhibited at the Epsom Campus.

One of these is Peter’s 1984 water colour Navigator: Entrance to Whangaroa Harbour, which commemorates two Auckland Teachers College students who perished when the yacht Lionheart encountered severe gale force winds off the coast of Northland. The yacht was returning to New Zealand after the Auckland to Suva yacht race in 1983 when it struck bad weather. The skipper decided to seek shelter in Whangaroa Harbour, a lee-shore with a narrow entrance which is notoriously difficult to navigate. The work’s roughened vertical edges, sombre tones and seemingly endless depth of field depicts the indiscriminate and unrelenting severity of the elements, which resulted in tragedy when Lionheart hit rocks near the entry with only the skipper surviving.

As a painter and multi-media artist, Peter exhibited in numerous group and independent shows and his works are held in public and private collections in New Zealand and overseas. In addition to artworks in The University of Auckland Art Collection, Peter also has works in the Hocken Collections, University of Otago, Dunedin.

Peter’s legacy in art education is continued by his wife and best friend Dr Jill Smith, who is a Principal Lecturer in Art and Art History at the Faculty of Education.
John Morris was just 11 years old when opportunity knocked for the first time. Growing up in the North of England, the son of a seamstress and a bricklayer came from humble beginnings. It wasn’t until he sat his eleven-plus exam in England that doors started opening for him and since then he has not looked back.

As John Morris prepares to leave his role as Headmaster of Auckland Grammar School in Auckland after 19 years at the helm he confesses that he never really thought about becoming a teacher when he was growing up. “I have been lucky really, it may sound unusual but I have never really planned my career but have simply made the most of every opportunity that has arisen.”

Despite no family academic background, John excelled in his eleven-plus exam in England, paving the way for him to attend a grammar school where the challenge of academia and sport were part of the fabric of the school.

It wasn’t long before opportunity knocked again when John’s parents immigrated to New Zealand in the 1960s. As a senior student at Kelston Boys’ High School in West Auckland, John discovered he was good at history. Inspired by two young history teachers, George Bowen and Jonathan Hunt, John decided to pursue teaching as a career. “Both were passionate about their subject, loved kids and also coached sport. I loved sport too and, as a teacher, the opportunity to work with kids in a different milieu really appealed to me.”

John became the first in his family to gain a degree when he completed his Bachelor of Arts at The University of Auckland in history and geography, and went on to gain honours in his masters degree in history. After completing his teaching diploma he went back to Kelston Boys’ High School, but this time as a teacher. “I have a lot of affection for Kelston Boys,” he reflects. “It was a great starting point for my career.”

As a young student, his passion for soccer brought about other opportunities. In his final year of his bachelors degree the first nationwide sporting competition, the National Soccer League, was established in New Zealand. As an energetic 20-year-old John played
for Blockhouse Bay's top team in the national league and at the end of the first season was selected to play as goalkeeper for the New Zealand All Whites. “Luckily I was at university so I could train quite intensively and still do my study as well”.

John played for the All Whites from 1970 until 1974 and in the national league until 1982. When he wasn’t playing or teaching, he coached at both senior men’s and at schoolboy level. In 2000 he was approached by the New Zealand Football Board to become involved in their administration and was Chairman within six months. “Not because I desperately wanted to but because the place was in a bit of disarray and I was asked to take over,” he says. “It was a huge learning experience to be chairman of a national sporting body and something that I learned a lot from.”

John rose to head of geography at Kelston Boys’ High School before moving to Avondale College as head of social sciences and then deputy principal. He was offered his first school leadership opportunity as principal of Takapuna Grammar School in 1990. “That was a real turning point for me,” he reflects. “We sold our house in Blockhouse Bay and moved the family just two streets away from the school. We threw ourselves into the life and soul of the community and the school”.

Yet, after just three years as head of the North Shore school, John was shouldertapped to apply for the headmaster’s role at Auckland Grammar School. “It was a really tough decision. I am a loyal person and felt there was still work to do at Takapuna although we had made great strides in a short space of time. To be honest, I didn’t get my application in for the Grammar job until the very last hour of the last seven years where he has also utilised his keen interest in athletics to grow the school’s athletics team, culminating in their six-medal success at the national School Athletics Championships. Before deciding to return to classroom teaching. He has been at Avondale College for the last seven years where he has also utilised his keen interest in athletics to grow the school’s athletics team, culminating in their six-medal success at the national School Athletics Championships. Before deciding to return to classroom teaching. He has been at Avondale College for the last seven years where he has also utilised his keen interest in athletics to grow the school’s athletics team, culminating in their six-medal success at the national School Athletics Championships.

As Headmaster of what is arguably one of New Zealand’s top state schools John has been hailed by the Board of Trustees as a visionary leader who has guided the school through a period of massive structural and policy change in education. For John, the opportunity has been transformative. “I have been truly fortunate at Grammar to work with some outstanding teachers and Board members as well as motivated and involved young men, and I have learned so much. I am now looking forward to still being able to contribute in the education sphere but in a different capacity.”

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HEATHER PETERS WHO HAS BEEN AT THE HELM OF THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION’S TAI TOKERAU CAMPUS IN WHANGAREI SINCE ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS IS MOVING ON.

“If you believe in something you work hard to make it work,” says Heather who, after two decades as the boss of the Tai Tokerau Campus, is setting her sights on new adventures. Heather, who finished as Academic Director on April 5, has been in charge of the Whangarei-based campus since its inception in 1992.

Pioneering is how she describes Tai Tokerau’s early years: “We had two classrooms, one for early childhood and one for primary, 30 students and a common room the size of a telephone box.”

Heather, who taught three of the six primary courses in the beginning, says it was a sink or swim scenario. “Although it was very difficult to work without many resources, we wanted to make it work because we knew if we didn’t make it work, in terms of the programme and in terms of the success of the students, it wouldn’t have continued.”

The Tai Tokerau Campus today has a student roll of nearly 180 and the bulk of its graduates are teaching in Northland schools and at least 20 are principals, something Heather is immensely proud of.

Before taking on the role of setting up Northland’s first teacher education campus, Heather had worked at the Auckland College of Education and Northland Polytechnic. Her teaching career, which spans several decades, included teaching posts at Onehunga Primary, Otahuhu College, Auckland Girls’ Grammar School, Kamo High School and at London and Australian schools.

The Tai Tokerau Campus was established in response to a plea from the Northland community. “In 1992 there was a demand from mature adults in the area. They were asking, ‘Why can’t we have teacher education in Northland? Why should we have to go to Auckland?’ Auckland College of Education does have a reputation for addressing the educational needs of diverse communities so it responded positively to their request,” she says.

More recently, Heather has been keen to promote the bilingual campus as a University of Auckland Campus rather than just the Faculty of Education. This has resulted in the University’s Business School offering a Postgraduate Diploma in Business (Māori Development) and the New Start programme offering a University preparation block course each year during semester two. Dr Brent Mawson has been appointed to the role of Associate Dean (Tai Tokerau) and is keen to continue in this direction.

Heather, who is from a prominent Northland farming family, was one of 11 children, many of whom have had distinguished careers. “Our parents wanted us to do well at school and to get a good education. They made many sacrifices so this could happen.”
Two of her brothers, New Zealand First leader Winston Peters, and Jim Peters, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Māori) at The University of Auckland both trained as teachers, which partly influenced her decision to enter the profession. “When I left school there weren’t a lot of options for women in the 60s. It was either be a secretary and work in an office or be a nurse or perhaps be a teacher.”

Seeing her students succeed has been one of the most rewarding parts of the role, says Heather. “A highlight is seeing so many people who have gone through and graduated actually out there enjoying teaching and making the most of their opportunities - it’s about Northland people teaching Northland children,” she says.

Heather says teamwork is a big part of what makes the Tai Tokerau Campus successful. “The whole campus functions here on the basis that everyone has a part to play. We all have different roles and we don’t consider ourselves more important than others.” She was walking the talk on the evening prior to her farewell. Heather and her niece spent the evening prior to her leaving party making savouries for the event because she had heard her colleagues were “a bit short of hands”.

Faculty of Education Dean Associate Professor Graeme Aitken said, at Heather’s farewell event, that the Tai Tokerau Campus succeeded due to Heather’s leadership and commitment. “It hasn’t happened without somebody who is fully committed to this place, fully committed to the communities of the north and fully committed to engaging with them on behalf of the Auckland College of Education and more recently on behalf of The University of Auckland.”

Graeme said Heather had done much more than dedicate 20 years to the Tai Tokerau Campus. “If you think about the programmes that have been developed here, and the size of the campus over that time - the primary teacher education programme, an early childhood programme, which we don’t have at the moment but we would love to provide again, a secondary programme, a postgraduate programme, the Huarahi Māori programme, the foundation programme and the New Start programme - all of those have come through the leadership that Heather has shown, her initiative, her drive, her vision, through her commitment to make things happen here on this campus for the people of the north.”

Kamo Primary School Principal Ken Ward who was a member of the foundation class of ’92 said: “One phrase comes to mind when I think of Heather and you may have heard it: Be inspired, be inspiring. That is certainly in my mind what Heather has strived to achieve in the time that she has been at the helm of the Tai Tokerau Campus.

“Heather has always expected the best from the students and the staff of the campus and it is these high expectations that have cemented the campus as an integral part of the local education community and held it in high regard and respect.”

Trish Edwards, another foundation student who spoke at Heather’s farewell, said her former teacher had been a wonderful mentor to herself and others. “You would follow up on everything and you paid great attention to detail. You encouraged and supported. You shared ideas and perspectives and equally you listened to ours. You were firm, yet fair and this all came with a wicked sense of humour.”

Heather is quick to dispel any notion that she is retiring. Spending some time overseas, perhaps in Europe and a teaching stint in Australia are on the cards for Heather. Why did she decide to leave the job now?

It’s best summed-up, Heather says, by a Peter Drucker quote: Some people retire on the job and some people leave the job and retire. “I’ve held this job for 20 years, that is one reason. I did not want to retire on the job. I wanted to leave the job and move onto something different and have a change.”

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Finding solidarity on shaky ground

New research explores the experiences of refugees living in Christchurch in the wake of the earthquakes.

When Dr Jay Marlowe, Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education School of Counselling, Human Services and Social Work visited Christchurch’s earthquake ravaged red zone in January it had a profound and lasting impact on him. “To walk around the barren streets and still see food on the plates in a restaurant where people had fled in panic when the quake hit was quite surreal,” he reflects of the experience. “It was like a frozen moment in time.”

That was more than a year after the devastating earthquake struck the city on 22 February 2011 claiming the lives of 185 people. “It was difficult to comprehend the impact the ongoing natural disaster has had on the lives of Cantabrians,” says Jay, “let alone the refugee communities who live there.”

As a specialist in refugee resettlement and trauma, Jay visited the city earlier this year to conduct a small-scale research project in partnership with Refugee Services, New Zealand’s leading refugee resettlement agency. Together they conducted a series of in-depth focus groups with members of refugee communities still living in Christchurch to learn about their experiences and responses to the natural disaster.

It wasn’t until after the February quake in 2011 that Jay discovered New Zealand had no articulated policy to respond to refugee communities in the advent of a natural disaster. There was also a dearth of international literature about disaster responses for refugee communities that have resettled in countries like Australia, Canada, the UK, Scandinavia and the US. “That’s when I contacted Anne-Marie Reynolds, Southern Regional Manager of Refugee Services, to discuss the possibility of working together,” says Jay. “We wanted to understand how refugees experienced the organisational responses to the natural disaster, how they found meaningful ways to participate in the community and what they have found most useful to support one another as they rebuild their lives.”

Christchurch is home to numerous refugee communities with the largest groups coming from Afghanistan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Bhutan. “The Afghan community is well established and has been in the city since the 1990s,” says Jay. “Most of them are resolute about staying despite the earthquakes.” In contrast, the Ethiopian community has been in Christchurch just as long but several of the participants he spoke with estimated that of the 400 that were there before the earthquakes around half have left. “I was particularly interested in why many of them stayed even though the ground was still shaking.”
Refugee Services in Christchurch, with the help of volunteers from other services and agencies around the country, provided immediate and ongoing support for refugee communities that have remained in the city. “It has been a challenging time for us and everyone else in Christchurch,” says Anne-Marie. “Refugees living here have needed significantly more support after the quakes.”

In his focus group sessions, Jay wanted to establish how refugees connected to Christchurch and how the earthquakes had impacted on their sense of participation and belonging. Many of the participants noted that prior to the earthquakes they hadn’t really known their neighbours. “Since the earthquakes many said their neighbours had started knocking on their doors to ask if they were okay and they felt a stronger sense of belonging in the community,” says Jay. “It’s not surprising that in the face of common adversity people find solidarity and support one another indiscriminately. But as the ground continues to settle and people get on with their lives, my guess is that those older patterns will return to what it used to be.”

A poignant comment from a participant summed up the stronger sense of connection many refugees still living in Christchurch now have with the wider community. “One man commented that Christchurch would always be a place for him but it would never be as beautiful,” reflects Jay. “Another participant responded to this man by saying he doesn’t care if the city isn’t as beautiful, so long as the people in the city are as beautiful to them as they are now Christchurch will be an even more beautiful place.”

Participants also spoke about being hopeful for Christchurch and were thankful for the opportunity to be part of the rebuild. In the aftermath of the February quake the Afghan and Somalian communities rallied together to clear liquefaction and are continuing to contribute significantly to the rebuild. Late last year, 105 refugees received their Red Cross first aid certificate through a partnership initiated by an Afghan community leader and Refugee Services. “This enabled them to feel more confident and prepared to help in the event of a future emergency, which was hugely reassuring for them,” says Anne-Marie.

For all of the refugee communities Jay spoke with, the presence of a community leader was critical when deciding whether to stay in the city. “If a key member of their community decided to leave it could potentially create a mass exodus,” says Jay. “For the Ethiopian community, many left because they were scared, but half stayed partly because one of their key leaders had also decided to stay in Christchurch.”

Jay also spoke with a number of community leaders about their experiences of the natural disaster. Many mentioned how difficult it had been to deal with the immediate impact on their families while at the same time supporting their communities. “This is an important message for resettlement services and support agencies because there are a number of key leaders in refugee communities who need support in the wake of a natural disaster,” says Jay. “It would be a heck of a lot to shoulder for anyone, much less supporting hundreds of other people.”

The presence of a central meeting place was considered vital for participants in the wake of the disaster. “When I asked participants what was the most helpful thing after the quakes they all said it was having support from their local community,” notes Jay. “Given that the earthquake destroyed telecommunications systems, agencies had difficulty reaching these communities. For them to know they had a place to meet gave them a sense of autonomy and self determination in a situation where they probably felt there was relatively very little.”

After the earthquake the Afghan community, which has a dedicated community centre to the west of the city, met regularly each week to disseminate information, support one another and identify those in the community that were struggling. They noted that the free text messaging offered by mobile phone providers immediately after the February earthquake was helpful for them to be able to communicate and rally together. Families whose homes were destroyed stayed with other families and they found that the community centre enabled them to coordinate their own response to the earthquake.

The Ethiopian and Bhutanese communities weren’t so fortunate. The Ethiopian church where the community would regularly meet was totally destroyed in the earthquake and the Bhutanese, being relatively new to the city, didn’t have an established community centre prior to the earthquake.

Fortunately, one of the Ethiopian community leaders negotiated with the council to establish a temporary centre where the community could meet to support each other and share their experiences. “It became a local meeting point where they could speak about their experiences and respond in ways that were resonant for them culturally and spiritually,” says Jay. “All participants clearly stressed the importance of space and place in disaster management and response.”

Jay also discovered that despite still being scared of the aftershocks that have ravaged the city, the experience of the earthquakes didn’t compare to the persecution many participants had experienced in their homelands. Participants drew resilience and strength from reflecting on their difficult past experiences and celebrated that they managed to survive as a way of helping them to deal with the earthquakes. “Refugees are people who have been persecuted and fled their homeland, often not even knowing their destination. Many leave with only the clothes on their backs, without any documentation or proof of their identity, qualifications or experience,” says Jay. “In comparison, natural disasters don’t target people, they just happen.”

Jay challenges the perception of refugees as damaged or traumatised people. “If we primarily consider refugees through the lens of trauma we have to ask: Do businesses want to employ traumatised people? Do neighbours want to knock on a traumatised person’s door and invite them to a barbecue?” he says. “Refugees actually have amazing capacity and local knowledge to respond and find resonant ways to work through adverse circumstances. They are resourceful people who can make meaningful contributions to New Zealand society in many ways.”

Refugee Services in Christchurch continues to support refugees in the local community with ways to prepare them for the advent of a natural disaster without heightening their fear and anxiety. Jay and Anne-Marie will be illuminating the specific needs of refugee communities in disaster response planning when they present their findings at the Australasian Hazards Management Conference being held in Christchurch this August.

Jay has also just received a Faculty Research Development Fund grant through The University of Auckland that will support a similar but much larger study in Christchurch. This project will enable Jay and Anne-Marie to further their research and make some key recommendations to government, health providers, resettlement agencies and other organisations about disaster management and response for refugee communities.
The Starpath Project has been working in partnership with a selection of secondary schools in Auckland and Northland to radically redesign traditional parent-teacher interviews and, as a result, parents have been responding in droves.

Just last year the Starpath Project, a Partnership for Excellence between The University of Auckland and the New Zealand Government, expanded exponentially and is now working with close to 40 schools to implement Starpath’s Data Utilisation, Academic Counselling and Target Setting programme aimed at transforming the educational outcomes for students who are currently under-represented in tertiary education, particularly Māori and Pacific students and student from low-income communities. An integral part of the programme is a new style of parent-student-teacher conferencing, which is transforming the way schools are engaging with their parent community, breaking down the barriers between home and school and paving the way for students’ academic success.

“A school should be a place where parents can walk in and feel comfortable at any time of the day,” says Professor Liz McKinley, director of the Starpath Project. “Our research has shown that when schools build strong, positive relationships with parents and whānau then student success is more likely. Teenagers continue to regard their parents and whānau as highly influential people. Starpath is excited to be working in partnership with almost 40 secondary schools in this new phase to further develop positive relationships and better communication with their communities.”

Parent-teacher interviews are perhaps the most common way that secondary schools in New Zealand engage with their parent community to discuss students’ performance and progress. Like them or loathe them, they come in many guises but essentially, they involve parents and teachers converging in a school hall for an evening once or twice a year to talk about students’ achievement in individual subjects. In a speed dating style set-up, parents ‘hop’ from one subject teacher to another for a short five-minute conversation about their child.

Starting in 2008, Starpath worked with Massey High School in West Auckland to evaluate a new style of parent-student-teacher conferencing the school was implementing. Starpath then worked with a further four low to mid decile secondary schools, including Manurewa High School in South Auckland, to implement an effective parent-student-teacher conferencing strategy for each school in an effort to improve the way schools engage and communicate with parents.

For many of the Starpath Project partner schools, parental attendance at their bi-annual parent-teacher interviews was often as low as 10%. Starpath’s first partner school, Massey High School, identified early in the project that poor parent-school engagement was a significant barrier to student success in NCEA. “Traditional parent-teacher interviews just didn’t cut it anymore, especially for our Māori and Pacific parents who rarely attended,” reflects principal Bruce Ritchie. “After years of getting a poor turnout we knew that if we wanted to really improve our student achievement we had to engage more parents and we definitely needed longer than five minutes to do it.”
While overseas on two Woolf Fisher Fellowships, Bruce had witnessed a number of secondary schools in the UK, USA and Finland implementing a style of parent-student-teacher conferencing that he thought could work well at the school, particularly for Māori and Pacific students. “The number of parents that attended overseas was huge and the feedback from parents, students and the teachers was enormously positive,” reflects Bruce. “When I came back I was determined to develop something that could work at Massey.”

As part of a broader academic counselling and target setting programme, and based on what Bruce had seen overseas, Massey High School radically redesigned the way they were approaching parent-teacher interviews. The new style of parent-student-teacher conferences provided set appointment times for parents to come to the school with their child and meet with one teacher for a 20-25 minute discussion about the students’ overall goals, specific achievement targets, current performance and how they could work together at home and at school to maximise achievement. “Instead of parents coming in to do the five minute subject teacher hop, we chose the student’s form teacher to lead the three-way conference because they have a significant role in the student’s life and the relationship with the parents,” says Assistant Principal Sam Smith.

The work in partner schools provided the evidence for Starpath to develop the Data Utilisation, Academic Counselling and Target Setting programme that is now being implemented in partnership with 38 secondary schools in Auckland and Northland. Starpath researchers evaluated the overall impact of the programme at Massey High School on students, their parents/caregivers, teachers and middle leaders and identified the key barriers to academic success for particular groups of students. The redesigned parent-student-teacher conferences resulted in a dramatic increase in parent attendance and the feedback from parents, teachers and students was overwhelmingly positive. In many cases it was the first time form teachers had met with parents and, while some were initially sceptical about the conferences, they commented that it was the best thing they had ever done. “This is about creating educationally powerful connections,” says Bruce. “Communication between parents and teachers isn’t just at the conferences now, it is ongoing.” Previously at the school’s parent-teacher interviews, attendance had been between 9% and 13%. “A staggering 76% of parents attended our first conferences in 2007,” says Sam. “And we continue to have similar results year on year.”

Every potential barrier to parents attending the conference has been thought of and addressed in the redesign. Conference times are prescheduled as opposed to students booking times with individual subject teachers. A formal letter is sent from the principal to parents with the appointment time, stressing the importance of attending their child’s academic “health check”. Farm teachers phone parents before the conference to confirm their attendance and advertising is placed in the local paper so that employers are aware of the importance of parents having time off work to attend.

Over the two days it takes to run parent-student-teacher conferences for the almost 2,200 students who attend Massey High School, staff park their cars at the back of the school to allow enough spaces for parents to park. Students are on hand to meet and greet parents and a crèche caters for parents with young children. NCEA information sessions are available and careers advisers are on-hand to answer questions and provide guidance. “All students, parents, form teachers, subject teachers, deans and senior leaders have a significant role to play to ensure the conferences are a success,” says Sam. “It is a whole-school effort with the atmosphere resembling a festival. It is absolutely buzzing. A far cry from the parent-teacher interviews we previously had.”

Achievement data collected by the school in addition to reports from individual subject teachers are used by the form teacher to lead discussions about a student’s short, medium and long term goals, their current performance, whether they are on track to achieve their targets and what parents can do to support their child’s learning and achievement. “For some form teachers, the thought of having a conversation with a parent and student for 20-25 minutes can be a bit overwhelming at first, especially when they don’t teach the student directly,” says Sam. “In secondary schools we still tend to see ourselves as subject teachers. This is a huge shift for some teachers but, while it seems like quite a lot of work to start with, when they see the difference it makes for students and their relationships with parents it is worth it.”

Using the Starpath programme to inform their approach to parent-student-teacher conferences, Manurewa High School in South Auckland has developed a comprehensive resource pack that provides a framework for form teachers to lead discussions with parents and students before and during the conference. “The discussion is now structured to ensure it is focused specifically on what everyone involved needs to be doing to ensure the student achieves their academic goals,” says Associate Principal Dan Wilson.

Students at Manurewa High School are expected to lead part of the conference. “Initially the conferences were completely teacher-led,” notes Dan. “This aspect of the conference has evolved since we started three years ago. We wanted the students to be able to articulate where they were and where they wanted to be rather than the teacher telling them where they are and where they needed to be. It is important that students are able to internalise and verbalise their goals and the actions they need to take to achieve them.”

The school runs a programme in tutor class time that prepares students for their role in the conference. “Students learn how to set goals effectively and what the focus of their goals should be,” says Dan. “Tutors are also encouraged to have conversations with students around such things as attendance, home learning, tutorials and credit tracking to help them prepare.”

Over the past three years Manurewa High School has achieved, on average, 85% parental attendance at their parent-student-teacher conferences. “The feedback we get from parent evaluations has consistently been 95% positive,” says principal Salvatore Gargiulo. “There are still some parents that would like to speak to subject teachers and we make sure they know they can request to meet them at any time. We also run a referral system during the conference so that form tutors follow-up with the subject teacher or careers advisor afterward.”

While each Starpath School develops a style of parent-student-teacher conferencing to meet the specific needs of their students and parent community, the focus on using data to inform longer discussions about student achievement remains the same. “For every school that has introduced the conferences, the conversation with parents doesn’t stop when the conference ends,” says Liz. “By engaging with parents and students in deeper discussions about progress and achievement, Starpath schools are significantly reducing the barriers between home and school, reducing the anxiety for parents around how their child is doing at school and, as part of the broader Starpath programme, increasing student achievement in NCEA.”
A study by a faculty researcher has found important links between the parenting behaviours of fathers and ADHD symptoms in boys.

Preschool boys who had responsive fathers in tune with their needs were less likely to show hyperactive and impulsive behaviours when they were of primary school age, according to a longitudinal study by developmental psychologist Dr Louise Keown.

110 four-year-old boys and their parents were involved in the three-year study, spearheaded by Louise, a senior lecturer in the School of Learning, Development and Professional Practice at the Faculty of Education. The purpose of the study was to examine relationships between parent-child interactions during the preschool years and ADHD symptoms in middle childhood.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most commonly diagnosed childhood mental health condition. It is estimated that between 3-6 percent of school age children are affected by ADHD, a condition characterised by excessive hyperactivity, inattention and impulsivity.

“Children with ADHD have difficulties with self-regulation skills such as listening and concentrating, making them challenging to parent. Previous research has established the role of responsive parenting in the early years for the development of children’s self-regulation skills. However, there is little work that tracks parenting of children with early signs of ADHD across the transition to school, when new demands are placed on children’s self-regulatory skills,” says Louise.

For the study the boys were split into three groups: children showing signs of inattentive and hyperactive behaviours at the extreme end of the ADHD spectrum, a group with moderate signs of ADHD, and a control group of boys with no symptoms.

As part of the study researchers observed the boys when they were aged four interacting separately with their mothers and fathers. When followed up at age seven, ratings of the boys’ behaviour were collected from parents and teachers.

Louise’s research found that the boys who had fathers who were more “tuned in” and responsive to their son’s cues and supportive without being controlling during play and task interactions when they were of preschool age, were less hyperactive and impulsive at primary school and more attentive at home.

“For example, in a task situation where a father is interacting with his son who is making a Lego construction - it’s about providing support and giving that child space to work out how do the task himself, which helps the child to develop attention and self-organising skills. In contrast, fathers who take over doing the task limit the amount of control their child has over the task and limit learning opportunities for self-regulation skills.”

Louise’s study, which has been published in the respected international Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, built on her PhD research which looked at family relationships of preschool children with hyperactive behaviour problems.
“An obvious gap in my earlier research was the lack of father data and data that followed parents and preschool children with hyperactivity over time. I focused on mothers and I felt there was a need to include both parents and see whether father-child and mother-child relationships made distinct contributions to behavioural development”.

Louise says her findings extend her earlier work with mothers and also highlight the importance of examining responsive parenting behaviours of both fathers and mothers in relation to ADHD symptoms in young children.

“I do think it (the study) indicates that we need to look more closely at these signs of early behavioural difficulties and do what we can to support parents at the preschool stage because for some of these kids it was definitely leading onto difficulties once they got to school. If we can intervene early on, it may prevent the progression into chronic behaviour problems.”

There is growing recognition internationally that ADHD symptoms often emerge in the preschool years and persist into middle childhood and beyond, placing children at risk for a range of negative social and academic outcomes, says Louise.

Louise, an advocate for having more father-related parenting research and support for fathers in New Zealand, says historically parenting research has focused on mothers.

“Looking at fathers’ parenting only started as a body of research in the 1970s. Right through the 90s there were huge gaps in what we knew about dads compared to mums. It has probably only been in the past ten years that knowledge about fathers’ contribution to child development has advanced substantially. UK and US governments have got big initiatives around fatherhood and parenting, which we could do with in New Zealand.”

Dr Louise Keown is a member of the Triple P Research Group which carries out family intervention research aimed at preventing behavioural and emotional problems in children. She was invited to speak about engaging fathers in evidence based parenting interventions at the International Congress of Psychology in Cape Town, South Africa, in July.

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Since the introduction of National Standards in New Zealand primary schools, lifting student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics has become arguably the top priority for teachers. Government funded professional development for primary schools has steadfastly focused on literacy and numeracy leaving many primary schools struggling to prioritise professional development for teachers in other curriculum areas such as health and physical education.

Despite efforts to provide a balanced curriculum, one of the inevitable consequences of the pressure to meet the mathematics and literacy requirements of The New Zealand Curriculum is that the development of teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge in learning areas such as health and physical education tends to get less focus, time and energy. “This is a very real challenge for many schools,” says Associate Professor Ben Dyson, a physical education expert in the faculty’s School of Curriculum and Pedagogy. “Ultimately it means teachers often tend to use their preconceived content knowledge of games and sport when teaching physical education, but as a learning area it has the potential to be so much more.”

Ben is working in partnership with four primary schools in Auckland and Northland to examine whether professional development using cooperative learning, a model commonly used in other curriculum areas, can help teachers to reconceptualise physical education and put it firmly back in the picture.

“Physical education is conceived as a socially critical curriculum in New Zealand,” says Ben. “It seeks to make a significant contribution to the wellbeing of students and society through health-related and movement contexts yet research suggests that it is still largely seen as games and sport in schools and in the community,” says Ben who believes there is enormous opportunity to shift the traditional paradigm of physical education as sport and integrate it across the curriculum. “Take orienteering for example, students need to employ social studies, maths, measurement and geography. It is an integrated and holistic approach to physical education.”

Based on his extensive school-based research in the USA, Canada and New Zealand, Ben has developed a model of cooperative learning specifically for teaching and learning in the context of physical education. Over the next two years he is working to develop professional learning communities of teachers in two primary schools in Auckland and two in Northland, to implement and test the effectiveness of an in-depth continuous professional development initiative that uses a cooperative learning model, instead of using sport and tactical models, to teach students specific skills.

“Cooperative learning is a dynamic interactive model for teaching and learning that many teachers in New Zealand are already familiar with,” says Ben. “The model allows us to teach diverse content to a range of students at different levels with students working together in small, structured heterogeneous groups to master a skill or task. These are initially teacher-selected groups with the aim of equity and quality outcomes, which seek heterogeneity in terms of race, gender, and socio-economic background, and ability. It has a strong research tradition, is used frequently as a professional development tool in general education and is now emerging in physical education.”

Papatoetoe South School in Manukau is one of the four schools involved in the project. For principal Mark Barrett, the opportunity aligns perfectly with the school’s strategy to deliver professional development in a different way. “We want to increase the relevance and ownership of professional development across the school,” he says. “Earlier this year our whole staff worked together to identify some key professional learning communities based on identified needs of both students and teachers. While they are all strongly linked to the strategic plan each one has a different focus and mode of delivery that is specific to the group.”
Collectively staff identified that, while some had experience of and were good at particular sports, they had limited pedagogical content knowledge for teaching physical education.

“Our focus was definitely more on sport, such as soccer skills and netball drills, particularly in the middle and senior school,” reflects Mark. “Physical education tended to be related to a game as opposed to the skills involved and relied heavily on the teachers own personal knowledge. Students were not engaged with it as learners which meant those who were good at sport got better and the quiet kids, who didn’t necessarily like or enjoy sport, weren’t improving their skill-base.” The school has been using cooperative learning structures across other curriculum areas so far and Associate Principal Sue Berry, who leads the physical education professional learning community in the school, it was a nice synergy.

Earlier this year Ben started working with Sue and four teachers who volunteered to be involved in the physical education professional learning community. They started by developing their pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge of the cooperative learning model in the context of physical education. “Essentially, cooperative learning features five key elements in group learning,” says Ben. “Positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive face-to-face interaction, interpersonal small group skills and group processing.”

By creating positive interdependence, students rely on each other to complete a predesigned task such as throwing and catching, which Ben introduced as the first unit at Papatoetoe South School in Term Two. As individuals within the group, students take responsibility, and are individually accountable, for completing their part of the task for the group to be successful. “Teachers can use tools like task sheets to assign roles related to the task for individual students in the group,” says Ben. “This ensures there are no ‘free riders’ or ‘competent bystanders’ and everyone is aware of their role in ensuring the success of the group.” When students interact face-to-face in a small group situation, they engage in positive discussion and utilise interpersonal and small group skills in ways that allow free and easy communication between members. “These skills are developed through the tasks students do and may include listening, sharing decision making, taking responsibility, giving and receiving feedback and encouraging one another,” says Ben. Group processing occurs when students engage in dialogue or group discussions related to what they have just learned.

These five key elements are brought to life through a variety of cooperative learning structures that are commonly used in schools. The teachers at Papatoetoe South School used think-pair-share and pair-check-perform structures to teach students how to throw and catch. “Think-pair-share allowed the students to formulate individual ideas and share them with other students in their group. It encouraged them to think more deeply about what a successful catch and throw would look like,” says Sue. Using pair-check-perform, students worked in pairs to check their technique, perform the task and provide feedback based on learning cues and success criteria that had been co-constructed with the teacher. “For throwing and catching this might be standing side on to the target and having the arm right back before you release the ball,” says Sue. “Students learn and understand what a successful throw looks like so that they can articulate what they are learning, provide feedback to other students and importantly, know when they are successful.”

As part of his research, Ben has been conducting observations of teacher practice and filming lessons as well as interviewing students. “Even at this early stage, students are now more aware of their learning cues and success criteria that relate to the skill they are learning,” says Ben. “Having a common language with the students empowers them and they feel more confident about their learning and success.”

Mark and Sue have already noticed that using the cooperative learning model for physical education has taken the focus firmly away from the teacher bringing preconceived content knowledge to the lesson. “The focus is now on the learner which brings physical education more in line with the values of The New Zealand Curriculum,” says Mark. “Our role is to provide students with the core skills to lead a more active life. We like to be competitive but we actually don’t see sport having any role in the physical education programme at the school now. The seemingly simple tasks of catching and throwing apply to a huge range of sports and will open some unexpected doors for students.”

Of the four classes involved in the project, three have students with high special education needs who are funded by the Ministry of Education’s Ongoing Resource Scheme. Activities and equipment are modified for these students according to the cooperative structures used by teachers so they can still actively participate in the lesson. “One of our students who is in a wheelchair was one of the most successful throwers because being in a wheelchair meant that she literally had to put her arm right back to throw the ball,” recalls Sue. “The impact this had on the student and the family was huge. Her parents are now aware of what she can do and are exploring options within the community for her to play T-ball. This is just one example of how the cooperative learning model can have a positive effect on students’ experience of physical education and their ability to participate in the community.”

Mark’s vision for the professional learning community within the school is clear. “We want them to be able to deliver the professional development wider within the school,” he says. “As a culturally appropriate pedagogy for our kids, cooperative learning hits the mark. It acknowledges what the learner brings to the table so the child has the opportunity to share what they know about a task. It also has the potential to demand higher cognitive skills because students need to think more deeply about the skill they are learning.”

Critically for Sue, cooperative learning is about all students achieving and experiencing success. “It is not about winning or losing, it is about being successful,” she says. “In order for a learning team to be successful each team member has to play their part. With winning there can only be one. Now that we are talking about success, all our students can be successful.”
Task-Based Language Teaching from the Teachers’ Perspective
Task-based language teaching (TBTL) is being encouraged as part of a major overhaul of the entire school languages curriculum in New Zealand. However, teachers often struggle with understanding what TBTL is, and how to make TBTL work in classrooms. Using the stories that emerged from a series of interviews with teachers (the curriculum implementers) and with advisors (the curriculum leaders), this book highlights the possibilities for TBTL innovation in schools. It also identifies the constraints, and proposes how these might be addressed. The result is a book that, whilst rooted in a particular local context, provides a valuable sourcebook of teacher stories that have relevance for a wide range of people working in a diverse range of contexts.

Asian Englishes: Changing Perspectives in a Globalised World
The world has become increasingly globalised and, with English at its vanguard, globalisation has provided many new opportunities as well as challenges for the English language teaching profession in recent years. Among these are the emergence of several new Englishes, particularly in the Asia-Pacific context, and the implications for learners and teachers as well as course material designers, curriculum developers, and policy makers in the region and beyond. The current status, roles, functions and manifestations of the English language in these diverse settings have thus assumed great academic significance and warranted much professional attention and interest. Asian Englishes: Changing Perspectives in a Globalised World seeks to explore issues pertaining generally to the problems and possibilities concerning the teaching, learning and use of English in a globalised world. Edited by scholars in the field of global/world Englishes and TESOL, this is a collection of articles that covers a wide range of research interests from linguistic features, cultural, ethical, political, and identity issues, to pedagogical implications and applications, all within a highly coherent overall framework. This volume documents a sampling of the dynamic nature of Englishes in a variety of Asian contexts and domains of language use. The aim is to re-invigorate thinking on the spread and use of English in Asia from a range of perspectives.

Cooperative Learning in Physical Education: A Research Based Approach
Cooperative learning is a dynamic instructional model that can teach diverse content to students at different grade levels, with students working together in small, structured, heterogeneous groups to master subject content. It has a strong research tradition, is used frequently as a professional development tool in general education and is now emerging in physical education. This book defines cooperative learning in physical education and examines how to implement cooperative learning in a variety of educational settings. It explores cooperative learning in physical education from three main perspectives: the context of learning, curriculum and key aspects of cooperative learning.

The Politics of Knowledge in Education
This book explores the decline of the teaching of epistemic, conceptual knowledge in schools, its replacement with everyday social knowledge, and its relation to changes in the division of labour within the global economy. It argues that the emphasis on social knowledge in postmodern and social constructionist pedagogy compounds the problem, and examines the consequences of these changes for educational opportunity and democracy itself.
Today, more than 60% of the Pacific community living in New Zealand were born here. Many have never visited their homeland. This is about to change for a selection of students at The University of Auckland thanks to the indomitable spirits of a group of dedicated Pacific Island students at the Faculty of Education.

Earlier this year the Epsom and Tai Tokerau Students’ Association (ETISA) established the first Faculty of Education Pacific Island Students’ Association (FOEPISA) to represent Pacific Island students. As the association’s inaugural president, third-year Bachelor of Social Work student Carlos Kapagahemata hopes the Association will provide Pacific students with a voice and lead to a stronger student body in the faculty. “We hope that having a dedicated association will empower and better connect the Pasifika student body at Epsom and Tai Tokerau,” he says.

In the first of many initiatives, the association is organising a student visit to Niue at the end of 2013. A special Komiti Pasifika of 23 Pacific island students from throughout the University of Auckland has been established to raise money and coordinate the visit which, for many, will be the first time they have travelled to a Pacific nation. “We wanted to organise this as part of our commitment to providing a global service back to Pacific people,” says Carlos. “We hope to encourage and emphasise the need for students throughout the University to serve the Pasifika communities as professionals once we are qualified. This opportunity will reinforce what it means to lead and serve and, for many of us it is also to remember where we come from and why we are here.”

As the fourth largest Pacific community in the country, over 22,000 Niueans call New Zealand home. With a resident population of approximately 1,600 people, the tiny island in the South Pacific has just two school campuses, which serve the educational needs of early childhood, primary and secondary school students. During their visit, the Komiti is planning to volunteer at the campuses as well as in the local community. “They implement The New Zealand Curriculum in Niue so this is a fabulous opportunity for the education students in particular to consider how they could put their teaching into practice over there,” says Lilien Skudder, Association treasurer and third-year Bachelor of Education (Teaching) student. “Other students will be able to give their time for maintenance work or supporting the local community in other ways.”

To raise the $20,000 required for the students to travel to Niue, the Komiti has hosted a series of fundraising events. During Pasifika Week in May, the Komiti transformed the Music Auditorium at the Epsom Campus into a tropical oasis for a Kai Pola, or traditional Tongan feast. Over 100 people enjoyed a lavish banquet of fragrant flavours from throughout the Pacific nations and were treated to entertainment provided by Tongan dance group Tava. “It was more than a night of food, it was a complete Pasifika experience for everyone who bought tickets and supported us,” reflects Carlos of the huge effort that was required to cook the food and bring the event to life. “So much was happening and the Tau’olonga, a traditional Tongan girl’s dance, by Susana Pahulu was beautiful. It just topped the night off.”

The faculty’s Centre for Educational Design and Development (CEDD) is getting behind the group and plans to capture their journey from the planning and fundraising, through to the work they do and experiences they have in Niue. The material they develop will be featured on digital television screens on campus as part of a larger project to engage with and inspire students around the faculty. “This sort of thing is a huge part of student life and we need to hear about the journey from inception to completion,” says Warren Patterson, manager of CEDD. “This is our student body, it is powerful and purposeful. What we are trying to do here is excite minds. This is the very thing we love to be engaged with.”

**End Note: Message from FOEPISA:**

We would like to thank Tammy Kingi-Falakoa, President of The University of Auckland Pacific Island Students’ Association for her ongoing guidance and support with this project. Thanks also to Alison Richardson for allowing us to use the T-block kitchen to ensure that our guests had plenty of food at the Kai Pola. It’s staff like Alison that allow us to do our work. Staff support is invaluable - Fakaave Lahi!!
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