

## Teaching Today, a podcast from The Teaching Council

### Season 2, Episode 2: Nurturing Pacific culture and engaging with whānau and community

#### Host:

**Francesca Hilbron**

#### Panellists:

**Andy Cairns** – senior teacher

**Caroline Mareko** – senior manager, community and participation

**Ngaretta Strong** – learning communities liaison teacher

**Alana Nootai** – assistant head teacher

**Francesca Hilbron:** Kia orana, Fakaalofa atu, talofa and welcome to this episode of the Teaching Today podcast. For this episode we visited Toru Fetū Kindergarten in Cannons Creek, Porirua, just outside of Wellington. Toru Fetū is the first purpose-built Pasifika kindergarten in New Zealand and the first early centre to win a Prime Minister's Education Excellence Award Excellence in Engaging. We wanted to hear how Toru Fetū delivers culturally responsive teaching.

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**Voice over:** Pacific communities are joining together to create a learning environment immersed in the cultures of three nations. Toru Fetū Kindergarten teaches the culture and language of Niue, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. Whānau support programmes allow easy access to community services for their children while regular events and workshops also encourage elders and parents to join in the teaching.

And the winner for Atahāpara Award Excellence in Engaging is... Toru Fetū Kindergarten in Porirua!  
I think this is not finished at all, it's unfinished work we have to keep going.

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**Francesca Hilbron:** The kindergarten's mission is to build the culture and identity of young children from Niue, the Cook Islands and Tuvalu communities but to be a place that nurtures belonging for everyone.

There was Pacific drumming as we stepped through the doors of Toru Fetū and we were impressed by the



warmth, the colour and the friendly welcome – it's no wonder the children are flourishing here.

The kindergarten grew from three playgroups which came together about nine years ago. Licensed for 80 children, there's a room for each language.

It's not immersion is it?

**Alana Nootai:** It's not a full immersion but we do try our best.

**Francesca Hilbron:** And do all your teachers have language skills outside of English?

**Alana Nootai:** Yeah, yeah.

**Francesca Hilbron:** And do you ever get children coming in whose first language isn't English?

**Alana Nootai:** Yep, we do. Come on through, this is the Cook Island classroom. Our children have the opportunity to explore all three classrooms while they are here even though they are booked for one room they can explore all three. We have an open-door policy.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, when we talk about the importance of culture and identity of a child, do they self-identify? You might get children who are of multiple cultures.

**Alana Nootai:** Absolutely, they self-identify as to what culture they belong to and it's really emphasised here. The teachers do teach the children about their identities here. It's pretty special being here, even for the teachers.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Engagement is the foundation for success at Toru Fetū and we sat down to find out how this is done with senior teacher Andy Cairns, assistant head teacher Alana Nootai, learning communities liaison teacher Ngaretta Strong and senior manager: community and participation Caroline Mareko.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, what's unique about Toru Fetū?

**Caroline Mareko:** The three communities and how their aspiration in wanting a service such as Toru Fetū and the journey that they've taken to get it to where it is now. That's what makes it unique, with the three languages, the cultures, the variety of identities because it's not just Niuean, Cook Island and Tuvalu. We have many identities here but there's a strong commitment for those three cultures.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, you guys started off officially as Toru Fetū in 2010, what have you seen from your young children who have gone through here and they've gone off to the local schools – in terms of leaving here with a strong sense of identity.

**Caroline Mareko:** Confidence. Very confident.



**Andy Cairns:** Leaders. I think when you go to community celebrations in the weekend and you see children from Toru Fetū that will on the stage leading in dance, or leading in language, and that sense of pride as well.

**Francesca Hilbron:** And the feedback from teachers at the primary school and the college?

**Ngaretta Strong:** Excellent. Especially from our neighbouring school, although we have quite a few children who disperse to different schools because whānau do choose to come here so they will travel here or our vans will pick them up, it's all been that the children have settled in and become confident and comfortable quickly and I think that's because that sense of self that identity that has been nurtured here.

**Francesca Hilbron:** People talk a lot in education, don't they, about the value in understanding a child's identity and culture and that's how they learn because they know their place – but how do you guys express that? If you were to go out in your community and say, 'this is why it's important, this is how we see that.'

**Andy Cairns:** I think we've been a little bit lucky here where it's been the community that has come to us. That's something we talk about too, it's quite a difference when the community comes to you instead of you going to the community.

**Ngaretta Strong:** It's a natural dynamic because it's not like a buy-in it is in, we are it.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Another thing I read, and I don't know if it is true, is that for the most of your children here, their parents are the children of migrants. Do you think people are wanting a resurgence to connect with their culture?

**Alana Nootai:** Absolutely. You're absolutely right with that, our parents here are NZ-born parents, but their parents are from the islands. It is a place where they can reconnect with their culture and their identity, is through their children because their children go home and teach them, it's really cool. One of our parents, her five-year-old son just left to next door, she gave this huge speech thanking all the teachers because she found herself reconnecting back through her son. She had been living out of the Cook Island community for so long that she didn't have anything to do with it and it was through her son that she was brought back into the community. It's pretty special and it's what we want to do. Teach our children here so they can go home and also help.

**Andy Cairns:** One of the things that we had running for a while was morning teas where the parent would come and they would get to be part of a mat time in the particular language because the parents were saying 'hey our children know more than we know and we feel like we're getting left behind, what can we do?' That's when the teachers came up with this idea and they ran like these group times where the parents would be here, and it supported the parents to know and understand the language the children were going home with.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Some of the things we hear from teachers is how do I gain the trust of my community? You mentioned before that it was the other way around, where the community came to you, but what is your advice for people saying we want to bring our community in and we're not getting there, because we don't understand the language, or the culture is different?



**Ngaretta Strong:** When I first came and brought me into the community is the point that I wanted to be part of the community not that I had to be. The teachers that come here are teachers who really want to be part of this community not because there's a vacancy. That makes a really important commitments, dedicated and being responsive within the community and that gets in a dynamic view and action outside of the community. You can have all these great plans in the world but if you haven't got people behind it that authentically believe in it and want it to occur then it could effectively be a tick list. Yeah, we did this, that's great what's our next focus. We don't move like that. We are truly authentic, and it takes that commitment from the teachers, it's because they want to, and they believe in it and our community deserves it.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, how do you make the time for that? It's a sensitive subject for teachers no matter which part of the profession they are in, around have I got the time to do this, this and this and then is what you're talking about just an add on and if it happens, great, otherwise I don't have time.

**Andy Cairns:** So, we have a vision that guides us for three years and then each year the leadership team, and we are a team, it's not an individual person, get together and go 'right what are our priorities?' One of our priorities for this year was around Pacific learning support and we went hey this isn't happening, we haven't got Pacifica people out there, we've got our parents who are really struggling to go through and feel okay through the referral process, we have our teachers where there's a whole lot of cultural complexity..

**Francesca Hilbron:** When you talk about referral do you mean a child who needs more assistance?

**Andy Cairns:** Yeah. We were like 'what do we do here?' and that's where we come up with something that will work. We started a fono about a year ago and we have parents from all of our kindergartens who have children with diverse needs, they come, they have now started supporting other Pacifica parents who might go through the same issue. We have teacher aides or Pacifica teachers from other schools, they have been struggling, they have come joined us as well. It's just grown and grown and so I think coming back to your question, it comes back to our priorities. This is the focus, one of the main focuses this year and make it a priority. We're really fair – for example, we might have had a meeting scheduled for Monday, we go we're good, let's not have Monday because tonight is going to be a big night.

**Ngaretta Strong:** It's the fairness of time for our teaching team.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, in terms of integrating new people, and it almost feels like there aren't new people because your community is so strong there's obviously connections everywhere, but when you get a new teacher come in, what are the things you do to help integrate them into your core values? Especially around that bridge between your centre and your whānau out there increasing participation for Pacific learners and the community. What are the things you do to help that happen with your new teachers?

**Alana Nootai:** We have an induction process for new teachers. So, that's when our head teacher Trinity takes the new teacher aside and just goes through a process with them. They're given a booklet when you first start, this is what it looks like and then it's just the reality of the practical stuff.

**Ngaretta Strong:** It's also time, time to feel who we are. We don't have high expectations to go and do something first week, second week. It's just to get to know the relationships with the teaching team, with the children, whānau and community.

**Francesca Hilbron:** That's a really good point you make because we've been talking about privileging the time



for teachers, something they don't have much of, to have that experience and for example, overseas teachers that are coming in, the time to understand what it looks like, how it actually works.

**Andy Cairns:** Some of the things we've started as well at the association is that we have some core things that every teacher needs to do if they are part of the association. So, we have what our assessment practice looks like. Every term, depending on when the new person is employed, they learn what our bottom lines are around assessment. Then Mandy comes and talks about what the values are from our strategic are, what we are all about, how we view children, our non-negotiables, all those sorts of things so they know this is the essence of Whānau Manaaki. Then we have some other key workshops that new teachers have to attend which are on Tapasā, Tātaiako, on carrying the tapa to give that underpinning of Pacifica values so we make sure we have workshops on those. So, there's the individual things that happen in each kindergarten but there's also the association, this who we are stuff and knowing our key documents and how we want them used.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Tell me about Tapasā, what does that look like to Toru Fetū on a daily basis.

**Ngaretta Strong:** Like Tapasā.

**Alana Nootai:** We are Tapasā!

**Francesca Hilbron:** That's great though – we are Tapasā. We were talking about this in the car on the way over: when people say Tapasā is for teachers of Pacific learners, and then people say it is good for people who are non-Pacific teachers but surely there are Pacific people out there who need it.

**Alana Nootai:** Absolutely. Even our teaching team here still needs it. It's a good refresher for ourselves, good learning, you learn something new in Tapasā all the time.

**Francesca Hilbron:** In a practical sense, it's challenging because you have the Standards for the Teaching Profession, Tātaiako, you've got Tapasā, how do you wrap that all up together in a meaningful process for your teachers when you got through appraisal, have discussions, or go through PD that's required.

**Andy Cairns:** One of the things we've just started doing is we have developed an evaluation, reflection sheet. So, we have a whole lot of PD that teachers come to. When they come to the PD what we are now doing is finishing 15 minutes earlier, giving each teacher a form because we actually want the teacher reflection for appraisal folders to be done then and there so we're not creating extra workload and part of that in there is how is this connecting to the cultural competencies? What we're doing is keeping the documents alive – so, how are you connecting it to this cultural competency? What is being exemplified here? That's been really helpful. We have things like look at your philosophy, can you see the documents coming through, okay your self-reviews, can we use an indicator from the documents.

**Francesca Hilbron:** And with your whānau and parents, do they have any understanding of what Tapasā is, do you engage with them around that?

**Ngaretta Strong:** They will slowly, when it becomes more visible like in our group planning and when it becomes more meaningful and responsive to in the moment of the teaching and learning. We haven't rolled out yet a



Tapasā workshop for our whānau or anything like that but I'm sure we will. Small steps at a time but I think the most valuable part is to see it visible in the documentation. Te Whāriki is beautiful, I love it, but sometimes it just doesn't quite link into that cultural responsiveness, so that's sometimes not as highlighted in our whānau evaluation or understanding. But Tapasā aligned with it is just powerful.

**Andy Cairns:** And what's great too, is the emphasis is on teachers. It's about what are we doing to improve, what are we doing to change, the focus isn't on the child as such, it's actually putting the emphasis back on how we're changing and growing, and I love that.

**Francesca Hilbron:** It's teachers taking professional responsibility. Of course, there's work underway to see what kind of resources we need for teachers to be able to engage and implement Tapasā so, as you say it's a work in progress.

So, the strong sense I'm getting after our hour we've had together I think is around that community. Either way – whether you're going out to your community or you're going to them, without it you're not going to have the success that you're experiencing.

**Andy Cairns:** One of the things when Toru Fetū was being set up was developing the community space out there so right from the very start we wanted Toru Fetū to be for the community. That's why many of our services are run from here so that our parents can come here and then they can access say Plunket or we can have the breastfeeding nurse to mums or WINZ could come here and support. Every weekend the place is used by the community. We have drumming groups, 5th birthdays, and this place is looked after. We never have to worry about graffiti or vandalism.

**Caroline Mareko:** We also help, because the school next door had a really high vandalism bill, nearly every weekend and in the nighttime, there would be graffiti and broken windows but ever since we moved in next door and because we are open right through the school holidays, very little. We are their eyes and ears.

**Andy Cairns:** And being connected to the community, the community looks after us.

**Francesca Hilbron:** So, tell me about your views then, we hear from teachers a lot, that they are trying to teach but also be a social worker, police officer, we're balancing the needs of our learners and our communities but really, I just need to have the space to teach. I know schools and kindys and services are different, but do you have any advice for how schools, for example, might navigate that engagement with agencies while doing their job of teaching?

**Caroline Mareko:** I think it's again having the time to build those relationships. We've got the time to build those relationships with the services that look after our kids and families. For the schools it's whoever is not in the classroom that has to try and establish or strengthen those relationships and it is a lot of work. You have to keep it going, you have to keep that momentum. You also have to know how each service works, and also which services are good, and which are useless. We have the people in our organisation that can navigate that and are able to get the best for our kids and families.

**Andy Cairns:** Looking too, at looking differently at the education setting, whether it's a school or kindy or early learning service, looking at that setting, looking at that community and it's actually having the kindergarten at the heart of the community. So, if you become the heart of the community then the community is going to come. So, one of the things that we based this model on was the Pen Green model over at Corby (UK). That's based



around the school as well – so what they are is an educational setting and then the social services come. Mandy, our boss, talks about where the bank robbers go to rob banks – they go to a bank. Okay so, where are social services going to come to get the children? They're going to come to the kindy or the school. So, if you view your service that way then you don't see yourself as isolated you see yourself as integrated.

**Francesca Hilbron:** Well, clearly that's been recognized by your Prime Minister's Excellence Award. When we came in, we had a look at it, which is stunning, so we'd like to say a huge congratulations and I can absolutely see why you were given that award, this is an amazing place. I don't know if you would be happy for me to say but I encourage anyone to come down and have a look, if they could.

**Andy Cairns:** Oh yes. I think too, when we've reflected, there was huge risk with this. But the leaders in our association saw this as too important not to do it. Whereas some people are risk adverse so they would see the risk as no we can't, but they saw that Pacific children participating in their language and their culture that it was too much of a risk not to and then found all the ways to get around it. I think the whole leadership has been incredibly important. We never make decisions as individuals; we always make decisions collectively.

**Ngaretta Strong:** I was going to emphasise that it is the top leadership and our general manager, Mandy's determination and true belief of what can we do to better? This became 'well, we're going to, we're determined'. We followed, we had some teachers who waited for this to fail before they came in. That's that sort of 'oh we'll just wait on the sidelines' whereas our leadership had that full commitment and belief and that's where we jumped on. If they didn't have that belief and commitment, we wouldn't be here. I just think the accolades have to go to the top on that one because it's scary world of doing something so different and beautiful when the government's maybe not fully behind you either with the funding.

**Francesca Hilbron:** And this is what we tell our young people all the time right, we've got the belief in you and you've got to go out and make it happen. That's fantastic. Congrats again and thanks so much for hosting us and we look forward to hearing about some of your young people in the next, say, five to ten years.

Thanks for tuning into this episode and thanks to Toru Fetū for showing us how they support children and nourish their Pacific identity. Tapasā is a tool designed to help teachers and leaders to engage with Pacific learners and it's for all teachers. For digital copies of Tapasā visit our website or order your hard copy from the Ministry's Down the Back of the Chair.

