

Eyes on Pacific media

by Lauradanna Radesic

A new AUT University initiative aims to encourage collaborative research between the communications industry and people of the Pacific.

The Pacific Media Centre represents one of the five industries within AUT's Creative Industries Research Institute.

Professor Olaf Diegel, director of the institute, says its purpose is to get people working together.

"The institute has several research centres that cross many disciplines," he says.

"Communication is almost the glue that binds it all together, and the centre provides the vital link to both getting information from and to the Pacific region."

The centre's director, associate professor David Robie, says it is a unique resource for New Zealand.

"There is currently a lack of media diversity and plurality

within this region and we're trying to stimulate media research and excellence in this field."

Dr Robie, who has been involved with Pacific journalism for more than 20 years, says his interest in this specialised area has grown out of his time as a journalist and educator in the Asia-Pacific region.

"It has certainly become my area of interest, but there has been an enthusiastic, committed group of people who have contributed along the way," he says.

Dr Robie says there is not enough independent discussion over the role of the media.

"There are constant threats to media freedom," he says. "In New Zealand and Australia the independence of the media is long-

entrenched, whereas in smaller

countries like Fiji, journalists and media centres are constantly under threat."

Dr Robie says the main focus of the centre will be on Maori, Pacific and ethnic media with the aim to provide vigorous research and publication.

"We need to have an understanding of the interests in the region," he says.

"Many people were surprised by the Fiji coup which occurred

last year.

"I think if we had been following what was happening over there we would have seen it as inevitable."

Dr Robie says the media's response was hampered by no real understanding of why the coup happened.

"As journalists, there's never enough reporting of the why," he

says.

Another aim is to provide opportunities for students to get their work published.

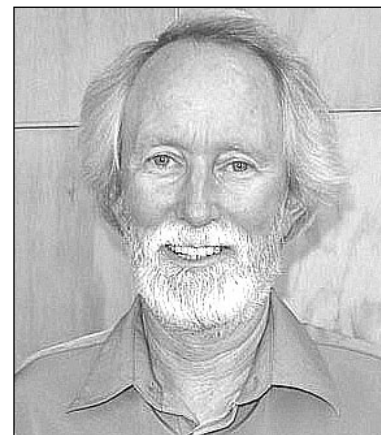
"We often come across students whose stories don't fit into the mainstream media, and we want to generate opportunities for these important stories to get published," says Dr Robie.

The centre will also give journalists access to media outlets and resources, including the *Pacific Journalism Review*, Pacific Media Watch, a digital archive of media freedom reports, and Nius Beat (an online Pacific news outlet).

Scholarships for directed study and research, and a journalist-in-residence fellowship are also being offered.

"We hope to make the centre an outlet for post-graduate research, creating a synergy of all their efforts," says Dr Robie.

For more information see www.pmc.aut.ac.nz



GRAEME DINGLE

Back to pen and paper for tech addict teenagers

by Sarah Lockwood

More than 180 private school-girls will go bush for a month and be stripped of everyday technologies as St Cuthbert's College goes back to basics.

The compulsory camp will begin next year at the school's remote Kahunui campus in the Bay of Plenty.

The year 10 girls will not be allowed internet access or phones of any kind – but they will be encouraged to write letters, and to practise committing thoughts and feelings to paper, says board of trustees chairman Cameron Fleming.

"We see writing as a very positive and different way for the kids to communicate with their parents," he says.

"It can be the first time that a lot of students have communicated with their parents in writing," says Graeme Dingle, outdoor education guru and patron of Kahunui.

But mastering a dying form of communication is not the only skill the 14-year-olds will be encouraged to develop.

"They're almost learning to go flattening," says Dingle.

Students live in groups of eight in houses they will manage themselves.

They will clean, do laundry, plan menus, buy food, cook meals and run a household budget.

A staff member, or house tutor, will be attached to each group, but will not live in the house.

"They're learning the business of co-operation, leadership, self-reliance, goal-setting and goal achievement," says Dingle.

"Many young people today aren't having a rural and outdoor experience that many other generations of New Zealanders have had," says Fleming.

Each week students will complete five days of academic study and two days of outdoor education where they can pursue activities like tramping, rafting and mountain biking.

Some academic learning will take place outside, so students can apply what they read to the real world.

While Dingle has spoken to parents about the St Cuthbert's camp and the response has been extremely positive, he admits some students may be apprehensive.

"Inevitably you're going to get young people who don't think they're going to like it," he says.

"I'd like to hear from them afterwards and say 'How do you feel now?'"

Learning life skills through love

by Carlie Platts

Auckland primary schools are trialling a revolutionary programme that aims to increase empathy in students and reduce bullying.

The Roots of Empathy programme started at the beginning of the second term in 10 schools.

It is a first for New Zealand and is being assessed by an independent agency, which will supply the Ministry of Education with results.

The programme was founded in 1996 by Canadian Mary Gordon, who travelled to New Zealand last year to speak to educationalists.

Paul Pinkus, director of marketing and development for the programme in Canada, says Gordon's creation came from her experience as a kindergarten teacher.

"Mary recognised the humanity of the baby as a way to teach children and break the intergenerational cycles of violence and poor parenting," he says.

The programme involves a parent and young baby (aged two to four months) visiting year five students in their classroom once every three weeks.

With a certified instructor, students observe the baby's development, interact with it and learn about its needs.

The instructor works with the class in the weeks before and after each visit to prepare and reinforce teachings.

A 2001 study by the University of British Columbia found that Roots of Empathy had increased emotional knowledge, social understanding and decreased aggression.

Mairangi Bay Primary principal Bruce Warren says he was attracted to the programme as "the central concept was such a strong and exciting one".

Warren says he was excited about the empathy aspect of the programme.

"We're fortunate because we



BABY STEPS: A year five class prepares for a Roots of Empathy family visit.

don't have a bullying problem, but empathy is important – enabling our children to become caring citizens in tomorrow's society," he says.

He says it is often much harder to build empathy later on in life.

"The programme builds important skills and attitudes in children at a young age," says Warren.

He says because the baby can't talk, the children have to work out why it smiles and cries.

They learn how to stop a baby from crying, its sleeping patterns and how to keep it safe.

Marion Hancock, coordinator for the programme in New Zealand, says the children "come to understand that we are all different in some ways, but we all have the same basic needs".

She says parents and children of different races visit the classroom.

"They see that the relationship between a parent and a

child doesn't change, no matter what the race."

Children follow the baby's milestones like the first time it sits up, crawls, gets its first teeth and stands," says Warren.

"It's really a celebration of a new life.

"The children get to see the world through somebody else's eyes,"

Programme instructor Dianne Bell says the programme is going well.

"I think the children have an excited anticipation about it," she says.

"The children are so intent on the baby they forget they are at school."

Hancock says the children develop a deeper understanding of what it takes to be a parent, learning that babies need love and attachment to help their brains grow.

"As Mary Gordon says, 'love grows brains'," she says.

Belinda Twose, one of the par-

PHOTO: CARLIE PLATTS