School curriculum and outdoor education

Part 1: Early childhood and primary school

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Introduction for full chapter

This chapter explores broad possibilities for learning outdoors in formal education contexts.

In part one we set the scene for the chapter by examining contemporary curricula in the early childhood and school sectors. National curriculum documents are introduced to look at the vision and 'big picture' direction they suggest for outdoor education practice. Attention then turns to consider outdoor education initiatives in early childhood settings, with examples drawn from programmes to illustrate the unique and practical ways in which they 'walk the talk' of student-centred, bicultural, holistic, and sustainable approaches. The discussion moves to consider the opportunities the primary school context affords for outdoor education that deliberately focuses on students' relationships with the outdoor places they inhabit. Examples such as the well established Enviro-Schools programme and integrated units of learning are outlined to illustrate what we consider to be the heart of this forward looking outdoor education.

In part two, the focus moves to outdoor education in the secondary school. While the distinctiveness of the secondary setting with its associated compartmentalised, subject-focused curriculum is initially acknowledged, the focus broadens to consider a range of factors or enablers of innovative outdoor education practice. As with part one, examples of 'real' curricula, co-curricula, and extra-curricula programmes are featured. These examples provide powerful guides for outdoor educators seeking to rethink, refine and reshape their students' outdoor learning experiences in ways that enable them to enjoy, understand, and act for the environments in which they live and move. In sum, this chapter explores a vision of a more sustainable outdoor education future.
Setting the scene: Outdoor education in school settings

Snapshot one
Kaitakitanga is looking after places, things and people. We have observed our children gain a sense of pride and respect for our kindergarten environment. We believe that when children have the opportunity to engage and care for the natural environment they will gain the skills, knowledge and desire to care for it in the future. The environment is the third teacher. There is a learning opportunity in every space. We have gardens that are sensory, edible, native and flowering. We have composting and recycling systems, including water conservation and eco-systems. Children are having a shared responsibility to look after our place and this is valued as real work, so everything that we do in the kindergarten here is included with the children.
(Carolyn O’Connor; teacher at Papamoa kindergarten in Ritchie, 2010b, p.13)

Outdoor education in early childhood settings and schools in Aotearoa New Zealand has a long and rich tradition (see Lynch, 2006 for the history in schools). It remains a key component of school life (Haddock, 2007; Zink & Boyes, 2005/06, 2007), with a wide variety of outdoor education experiences currently offered in centres and schools nationwide. These school-based experiences are the focus of this chapter.

Many authors in this book suggest that conceptualisations of outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand have been, and continue to be contested. Given this, it is timely to note that in this chapter we embrace a broad definition of outdoor education. This means that we view outdoor education in a multidisciplinary and holistic way as any curriculum-based learning in, for, and about the outdoors. Such a conceptualisation includes, but is not limited to, outdoor education experiences as described in health and physical education curricula (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1999, 2007). Adopting this multidisciplinary definition of outdoor education gives a clear signal about the prominence we give to approaches that connect rather than compartmentalise school subjects, and that respond to contemporary societal and global concerns about the environmental issues and pressures identified in the opening chapter. We also aim to demonstrate that there is much to celebrate about present practice and to build from as we look to the future. To this end, snapshots of contemporary outdoor education initiatives and approaches that explicitly educate for a more sustainable future are scattered throughout. We hope that these glimpses of programmes in-situ inspire you and prompt you to ponder the questions: What are the common threads in the stories shared? And in turn, what possibilities or insights are opened up for my outdoor education practice?

What frameworks do curricula provide for contemporary outdoor education?

Snapshot two
A makeover at Omata School in Taranaki now sees a self-sustaining bush trail that is managed and well used by students....Each class looked at what was needed to make a long-term difference. Along the way they found out that real scientists often change their minds. Bridgit Barleyman's Year 2 and 3 class discovered they could build ponga seedling beds alongside the tracks to gather leaf litter and help tiny plants grow. They mapped out their beds and pairs of children made each one. 'I thought we could put the beds on the hilly bits,' said Katie, 'but I wouldn't do that now. They would get washed away.'

'My class established that trees were actually alive' said Year 1 and 2 teacher Julie Herbert. 'A lot of children hadn't realised that because they couldn't see them moving...The five year olds will see their trees grow,' said Karen, 'so they'll want to take care of them while they're here. Some parents have shown the children the trees they planted in the 1980's. They're still pretty proud of their trees.' (Tapp, 2008, pp. 8-9)

Official national curriculum for early childhood centres and schools (MoE, 1996, 2007, 2008) arguably provide a strong conceptual platform for outdoor education that explicitly educates for a more sustainable and equitable future. This part of the chapter briefly introduces these curriculum documents, and in doing so, provides a foundation for the discussions about school-based practice that follow.
Te Whāriki He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa (MoE, 1996) is the official early childhood curriculum for Aotearoa New Zealand and its first bilingual curriculum. Te Whāriki is based on the concept of a whāriki (mat), weaving together four principles (Empowerment - Whakamana, Holistic Development - Kōtaitanga, Family and Community - Whānau Tangata, and Relationships - Ngā Hononga) and five strands (Well-being - Mana Atua, Belonging - Mana Whenua, Contribution - Mana Tangata, Communication - Mana Reo, and Exploration - Mana Aotūroa). Embracing a definition of curriculum as "the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (p.10), Te Whāriki also emphasizes how learning is socially and culturally mediated. As a result, "reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things" (MoE, 1996, p.9) are highlighted. Professional commentary has consistently noted that Te Whāriki integrates rather than separates traditional subjects (e.g. Mutch, 2003), is non-prescriptive, clearly communicates a "profound acknowledgment of the importance of culture" (Te One, 2003, p.42), and positions children as active participants in their own learning (e.g. MacArthur, Purdue & Ballard, 2003; Nuttall, 2003).

Despite being published fifteen years ago, we consider that Te Whāriki identifies a range of relevant prompts for a future-focused outdoor education. Looking more closely at the principles, strands, and goals for example reveals a view of learning as being relational, integrated, and holistic. The pedagogical potential of this for outdoor education is alluded to by Ritchie (2010b) when she noted that the principle of Family and Community - Whānau Tangata and the strand of Belonging - Mana Whenua supported early childhood centres endeavouring to work with their local communities to encourage ecological sustainability. Furthermore, the focus on children learning through active exploration of their environment in the strand of Exploration - Mana Aotūroa, gives rise to curriculum goals identifying the value of play as "meaningful learning", the importance of children gaining "confidence in and control of their bodies", and the need for children to develop "working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical, and material worlds" (MoE, 1996, p.16). Implicit in children's active exploration of the environment is the importance of "respect for the environment" as well as "Māori ways of knowing and making sense of the world and of respecting and appreciating the natural environment" (p.82).

Turning to the primary school curricula The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) (MoE, 2007) and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (MoE, 2008), we similarly see philosophical precepts that are relevant to outdoor education aiming to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future. In the NZC for example, a vision of young New Zealanders being confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners (MoE, 2007, p.8), specifies connectedness to the land, environment, and communities as well as contribution to the environmental well-being of Aotearoa New Zealand as integral aspects of this. Stepping through to the eight principles, there is explicit attention given to sustainability (within the principle of future focus), cultural diversity, and community engagement. Furthermore, diversity, equity, community participation, and ecological sustainability are directly targeted as values or "deeply held beliefs about what is important or desirable" (MoE, 2007, p.10). The five key competencies or "capabilities for living and lifelong learning" (MoE, 2007, p.12-13), are considered to be "shaped by interactions with people, places, ideas, and things" (ibid). More particularly, the key competency of Participating and contributing highlights the importance of students being "actively involved" in their communities and of "contributing to the quality and sustainability of social, cultural, physical, and economic environments" (MoE, 2007, p.13). As has been suggested before (Cosgriff, 2011), human relationships and interactions with communities as well as non-human nature, are arguably also woven through almost all of the eight learning area (subject) statements that enact this philosophical framework of the NZC.

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1 Te Whāriki (MoE, 1996) is designed for children from birth to the time they enter school.
2 For further discussion of the Māori concepts underpinning Te Whāriki, see Reedy (2003).

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3 The NZC is the curriculum for all English-medium state and integrated schools, while Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is the curriculum for Māori-medium schools.
4 The 8 Principles of the NZC which "embody beliefs about what is important and desirable in school curriculum" (MoE, 2007, p.9), are high expectations, Treaty of Waitangi, cultural diversity, inclusion, learning to learn, community engagement, coherence, and future focus.
The English translation of *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (MoE, 2008) reveals that the *Treaty of Waitangi* is both central to the curriculum and gives rise to the five overarching principles: Ngā Matapono Whānau. As with the NZC, we consider that these principles further illustrate that national curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand provide useful policy platforms for outdoor education that is attentive to environmental sustainability. For example, not only should the school-based curricula aid learners to be “confident in the Māori world” (p.6) but it should also include “experiences outside of the school which are relevant to the whānau and community” (p.7). More specifically the fifth overarching principle “Environmental health is personal health’ draws attention to the “place of the student in their own world” (p.7) and thus calls for school-based curriculum to support “a sustainable environment; learning pathways which enable the learner to engage purposefully with the environment; holistic teaching programmes; and learner engagement with their environment” (p.7). The values and attitudes identified in *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* as well as the commentary in sections such as that on teaching and learning, continually reinforce the importance of the world of the learner, Māori knowledges, and learning environments including the marae and those in local areas and beyond. In a similar fashion to the NZC, the strands and achievement objectives in a range of learning areas address sustainable human relationships with the natural environment.

Finally, while not a curriculum document per se, the *EOTC Guidelines* (MoE, 2009) clearly reinforces the relationships between national curricula (MoE, 2007, 2008) and outdoor education. This is evident in statements such as “The NZC supports the aspirations for broad deep learning in real life contexts within and across the learning areas” (MoE, 2009, p.6), and the point that “The vision of New Zealand’s national curriculum cannot be achieved inside classroom alone” (MoE, 2009, p.7). In summary and like others (e.g. Hammonds, 2008, 2009; Hislop, 2008; Ritchie, 2010b), this section thus has argued that contemporary early childhood and school curricula (MoE, 1996, 2007, 2008) provide fertile philosophical frameworks for the practice of outdoor education that explicitly prompts learning about sustainable relationships between students and their local communities and environments. We now turn to explore some of the ways that these curricula directions play out currently in practice in early childhood education and primary school settings.

### Outdoor education in early childhood education settings

**Snapshot three**

When we decided on using the creation story of Ranginui and Papatuanuku as the basis of our mahi-and in particular the idea that if you look after Papatuanuku, she will look after you- we were surprised at how readily the tamaki took this concept on board, and to heart. We heard them in the playground telling each other that Papatuanuku would not be happy about a piece of rubbish they could see on her. Parent and grandparents came to kindergarten with tales of being scolded at home by their four year olds for alleged crimes against Papa! In fact, it was a surprise when the children began talking about Rangi and Papa as if they were someone’s Mum and Dad. We couldn’t believe the genuine care, concern and understanding that the children displayed-and these people are our future! The children articulated the ancient story of Rangi and Papa very well, and were able to use the story in their own lives in a practical way, such as working towards a litterless lunchbox, keeping the kindergarten playground and a local park litter free, sorting their rubbish into reusable, recyclable and compostable categories. (Ellwood, 2010, p.20)

Our research for part one of this chapter necessitated moving beyond outdoor education practice in primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, which we both have some first-hand familiarity with, into the domain of early childhood education. As we work and teach outside of early childhood education settings, we were curious to identify the ways in which early childhood educators interpreted the curriculum vision of *Te Whāriki* in regards to outdoor education. We were also keen to see how contemporary attention to place responsive approaches and sustainability in professional commentaries and a growing number of outdoor education programmes in the compulsory school sector, played out in early childhood settings. Conversations with early childhood colleagues and further delving into academic journals, professional publications, and sector newsletters revealed much that we thought was of relevance to answering this question.

Learning through play has been recognised to be an essential feature or the “fundamental vehicle for learning” (Elliott, 2010, p.63) in
early childhood education and care settings here and internationally for decades. Outdoor play in particular contributes to the holistic development of children by affording them significant and memorable opportunities to develop physical skills, explore the material and natural world, develop a sense of agency and place (Elliott, 2010), and demonstrate a variety of skills and competencies (Garrick, 2009; Greenfield, 2007). Furthermore, sustained play experiences in outdoor settings in particular are recognised as integral to fulfilling many learning outcomes in Te Whāriki. After reviewing New Zealand research on outdoor play in early childhood education, Greenfield’s (2007) conclusion is pertinent to note:

Young children want to play outside. However it is not just about letting children go outside but providing outdoor settings that awaken their senses to the beauty, complexity and ever-changing dynamics of the natural world; that honour children as curious and motivated to explore and problem solve, be physically challenged, to practice and repeat experiences, and then move onto new challenges. (pp. 28-29)

Elliott’s (2010) plea for the provision of opportunities for children to play in nature spaces extends this argument, and is particularly relevant to our discussion of early childhood outdoor education that promotes curiosity about, enthusiasm for, and connectedness to the natural world. Like others (e.g. Schepers & van Liempd, 2010), Elliott suggests that children’s innate connectedness to nature has been eroded by a number of factors including reduced time and access, increasing technology and safety concerns, and changing perceptions of what is an appropriate playspace. Early childhood education provides an ideal setting to redress these factors. Specifically, play in and with nature potentially promotes creativity, cultural inclusion, and engages “the risk appetites of children (as) natural shapes, textures and scales are not so predictable, require concentration and challenge both senses and physical skills” (Elliott, 2010, p.64). New discoveries about the ever-changing world of nature also may occur. Furthermore in nature as Elliott suggests, children can take on “real work” projects such as farming, gardening, and building, developing even more agency about how they can contribute to caring for nature spaces. The value of productive gardens, natural materials for indoor and outdoor play, the use of community members with knowledge, natural playspaces rather than manufactured equipment, and trips outside the centre into the local community and beyond in early childhood education for sustainability are advocated for.

Examples of these features in practice abound. At the Open Spaces Centre near Whangarei, a commitment to nature-based play means that each day staff and children head to the ‘Wild Wood’ for four hours with their lunchboxes and water bottles in hand. In this outdoor setting of a field and groves of native trees, the children engage in imaginative play, thus learning about nature and non-human nature from firsthand play in amongst it (Brownlee & Daly, 2009). In other early childhood centres, human–made play structures provide a similar stimulus and also reflect a commitment to sustainability in their design. Katikati kindergarten’s adobe playground, built collaboratively with the local community, includes a hobbit house with a “green” roof that allows for a garden, a maimai for bird watching, an adobe crawl tunnel, and swing bridges (Katikati Kindergarten, 2010). Other teaching approaches supporting sustainability include maintaining gardens, composting, worm
farms, “community basket” for sharing excess fresh produce (Ritchie, Duhm, Rau, & Craw 2010a, p.3), the use of children’s literature to target aspects of sustainable living like recycling (Barker, 2010), art experiences about and using nature to explore sustainable human—non human nature relationships, regular parental and community input, plus children’s active contribution to environmental projects in the wider community. All explicitly seek to promote connectedness and care between the children and the communities they inhabit.

The importance of developing an ethic of care and caring thus appears a central feature of a number of initiatives in early childhood education for sustainability (Ritchie, Duhm, Rau, & Craw, 2010a; Ritchie, 2010b) and accordingly, a feature we consider potentially integral to outdoor education as well. Robinson & Vaaliki (2010) propose caring to be one of four ethical principles (listening, participating, and hopefulness are the other three) that are essential to any sustainability education in early childhood. Caring in this instance however moves beyond traditional notions of children needing to be cared for and not being able to provide care, to a perspective recognising children can care in significant ways (Robinson and Vaaliki, 2010). Accordingly, an ethic of care emphasises interdependence, relationships with family and the natural world, and cultural values such as manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga. Using a philosophical framework centred on Māori values such as manaakitanga, aroha, and kaitiakitanga interwoven with an ethic of care (Martin, 2007), Ritchie, Duhm, Rau and Craw (2010a) similarly identified the “significance of early childhood educators generating localised “pedagogies of place” for ecological sustainability, integrating kaupapa Māori notions of kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga along with an ethic of care within their specific communities” (p.3). A host of examples of practice in the ten early childhood centres involved in their research further illustrated this point (see for example, Barker, 2010; Ellwood, 2010, Ritchie, 2010b).

Outdoor education in primary school settings

Snapshot four

At the back of Hurupaki School is a wetland area. “This used to be a swampy horse paddock,” says Callum, “but now we’ve got all kinds of native plants growing here.” Tall trees like kahikatea and cabbage tree grow in the Hurupaki wetland, as well as smaller plants like flax and matipou. In a sheltered corner, the kids are growing a medicinal garden. A medicinal garden has plants that have healing properties. “We did heaps of research,” says Lewis. “We looked in books and on the Internet. We found out that there are hundreds of native plants and trees with healing properties.” They planted their garden... They planted during autumn so that the plants would get plenty of rain to help them grow... Each week, the kids check their plants and pull out any weeds... Next year, they hope their trees will be big enough to harvest the leaves for making ointment. (Gibbison, 2010, p.19)

Our brief examination of early childhood outdoor education highlighted the centrality of play in outdoor spaces, the importance of explicitly teaching children about sustainability and living sustainably, the relevance of a philosophy of care and caring (manaakitanga), and the support for teaching approaches integrating subject matter and actively including whanau and the wider community. We now turn to consider some of the distinctive hallmarks of outdoor education in primary schools as it is, or could be, practiced.

As previously noted, the NZC (MoE, 2007) offers a clear mandate to provide opportunities for students to become “connected to the land and environment” and “to be active seekers, users and creators of knowledge and informed decision makers” (p.8). Sobel (2005) describes such a connectedness to the land and local environment as a place-based approach, which is “the process of using the local community and environments as a starting point to teach concepts” (p.7) in a range of subject areas. Using hands-on learning approaches and “real-world” learning experiences, Sobel suggests such an approach facilitates student connectedness to their local communities, valuing of the natural world, as well as an increased commitment to being a contributing member of the community. Furthermore, it is proposed “Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations and environmental resources in the life of the school” (Sobel, 2005, p.7). Martin (2005) similarly highlights the importance of direct experiences to develop a relationship with nature and revisiting areas to get to know and discover them more fully. Hammond (2008) also reinforces the point that developing “a real appreciation of the natural world needs to be part of children’s lives from the earliest age and integral to all school learning” (p.7).
Thorndon School in Wellington provides a rich illustration of a future-focused outdoor education programme which exemplifies the prompt to use “the river as the text book and the town becomes the classroom” (Sobel, 2005, p.2). Reflecting the school motto of ‘Developing independent creative thinkers and learners’; learning experiences at Thorndon School are based on integrated, authentic contexts in local environments. The potential of the immediate surroundings is embraced and students provided with regular opportunities to engage in environments within walking distance of the school. Thus downtown Wellington, the Botanical Gardens, Tinakori Hill, and the public library all become the ‘classroom’ for outdoor education, with teachers tapping into students’ interests and topical units. Thorndon school students are regularly seen exploring the waterfront and the history of the shore line, visiting the City Galley or Te Papa museum, or involved in projects about sustainability in and around the school. Teachers pride themselves for the integrated approach taken to units of work: science extends to sailing on the harbour with students learning to sail and to understand and ‘read’ the weather; the local farmers’ market becomes a focus of study with producers coming to school to show students how to make cheese, cook fish, and prepare vegetables and the students then journeying to the farms in the Wairarapa to study the source of the products. School playgrounds are also student-centred and emphasise the importance of play in the natural environment. Students can explore and create by digging holes, building huts, developing their own gardens, and the grounds are ever changing. In short, as the school principal Bill Sutton noted (personal communication, June 1, 2011), “playgrounds [in this school] don’t tell kids what to do” and “the more experiences students have, the more connections they can make”.

Extending to more traditional camp experiences does not mean however that the school’s commitment to integrated learning approaches, ‘real’ life relevance, and connectedness to local communities is compromised or forgotten. Thorndon School camps are sequenced through the school, beginning with an overnight noho marae in the school grounds, followed by camps within local environments, and finally a camp planned and implemented by students. Such an approach is ideal for integrated studies and investigations where planning, implementing, and reviewing sit naturally in the teaching and learning process. Planning menus and

a programme that allows time for skill development and building an understanding of the history and cultural significance of the place, necessitates the provision of opportunities for students to discuss and negotiate food choices, alternative transport options, impacts on the environment, environmental clean ups, and the opportunity to enjoy and appreciate the surroundings. Cosgriff (2008) emphasises the value of this integrated approach when she suggests we should look more holistically at outdoor education and take advantage of the “unique histories, geographies, cultural understanding and traditions associated with any given rock, river, lake, or area of bush… (and see them as) integral to the teaching approaches employed or students’ learning” (p.21).

Martin (2005), Hammonds (2008), and Sobel (2005) amongst others, highlight the importance of learning occurring in natural, backdoor environments to engage and connect learners with their immediate world and encourage appreciation and care for the environment. School grounds, creeks, stands of bush, walkways, and parks just outside our classroom doors provide accessible, cost effective, and low risk environments in which students may build a greater depth of relationship, understanding, and engagement by observing and monitoring seasonal changes, the effects of weather, growth patterns, and the many small creatures that live close at hand. Like others (e.g. Owens, 2009), Therienard (2010) has noted that such “authentic experiences where students research and experience ‘the real deal’ connects them to the environment and the issues of the planet” (p.6).

It appears therefore in a growing number of primary schools, sustainability education and students’ active engagement in ‘making a difference’ in their school and local communities is squarely on the outdoor education agenda. A number take a whole school approach to their projects and draw on community support and resources. For example, Birchville School in Upper Hutt, with the support of the Greater Wellington Regional Council (2004) Taking Action for Water programme, has each class developing their own project after an analysis of their immediate environment. Ideas such as replanting the creek at the back of the school, planting the Birchville dam, recycling, and developing worm farms, a walkway through the school bush, and weta homes have been generated (M. Howard, personal communication, 3 October, 2011). These projects encourage integration across subjects, student negotiation, and active
participation in and learning about local environs. Furthermore, traditional notions of adventure are arguably challenged by such an approach. As Beames and Ross (2010) propose, journeys in local neighbourhoods may not only “actually have a much higher degree of authentic adventure than highly regulated ropes course and rock climbing sessions” but also “move away from contrived outdoor challenges towards more authentic, real world, ‘broad adventure’ demanding student initiative and responsibility” (p.101).

In summary, this section has identified that integrated multidisciplinary approaches, the use of the local built and natural environment and community personnel, and teaching approaches that promote student input, decision-making, and action, appear to be conducive to outdoor education promoting sustainable human and non-human nature relationships. This is arguably even more so, when the work of Enviroschools is examined.

**The Enviroschools programme in early childhood and primary settings**

**Snapshot five**
Hukanui School is an Enviroschool, where everyone works together to create a healthy and sustainable environment—and the students are in charge! Over the past 10 years, students have worked on many different projects. Their school is an example of how kids can work together to shape a rich, living environment. (Tu'akoi, 2010, p.3)

**Snapshot six**
Students and teachers from five Porirua Schools recently experienced the diversity of Kenepuru Stream on “Te Oranga o te awa o Porirua”- a guided walk to introduce students to stream life. The trip drew inspiration from Patricia Grace’s story “Watercress tuna and the Children of Champion Street”, set on the banks of the Kenepuru Stream. Greater Wellington Environmental Educator, Warren Field, brought his pet tuna (long fin eel) along, and as the students walked along Kenepuru Stream from Cannon’s Creek School to the Porirua Harbour mouth they learned about the eel’s life cycle and habitat. Local experts shared their knowledge, including fresh water ecologist Frances Forsyth, author and eel enthusiast from Rangitaane o Wairarapa Joe Potangaroa, Tiff Stewart from Otari Wilton’s Bush and Porirua City Council harbour coordinator Keith Calder (retrieved from Enviroschools, 2010, www.enviroschools.org.nz)

The project in snapshot six was organised by Charles Barrie the Porirua Enviroschools Facilitator, and was a collaborative effort between Enviroschools, Porirua City Council and representatives from other organisations, including Greater Wellington Regional Council.

From humble beginnings in Hamilton, there are presently around 776 early childhood education centres, kura, and schools involved with Enviroschools all working towards enhancing the wellbeing of the school, community and ecosystem. In regions close to the origins of Enviroschools like Waiheke and Bay of Plenty, this translates to an uptake of over 40% of schools in the region. Five Guiding Principles: Ngā Mātāpono underpin Enviroschools programmes and ideally are integrated throughout the approaches of participating schools. These principles: empowered students, learning for sustainability, Māori perspectives, diversity of people and cultures, and sustainable communities, clearly resonate with precepts that we have already targeted in our discussions about early childhood and primary outdoor education programmes. Furthermore, the whole school approach that is promoted identifies four underlying areas of school life that effect sustainability and student learning: physical surroundings, organisational management, operational practices, and living curriculum (www.enviroschools.org.nz, 2011). With the support of resource people, students and schools are encouraged to take small steps as they work towards the long-term goal of sustainability being a piece of every aspect of school life and something all students are involved with.

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3 A full description and discussion of Enviroschools is beyond the scope of this chapter, however interested readers can read more about the programme on www.enviroschools.org.nz. Data in this section was retrieved from this website on 31 May 2011.
Weaving it all together: Future-focused outdoor education


In part one of this chapter we have endeavoured to discuss and illustrate some of the hallmarks of a forward-focused outdoor education that promotes sustainability and connects students with the communities and outdoor environments they inhabit. Our intention is not to propose these as recipes for practice but to prompt readers to reflect on, and possibly re-vision, their own pedagogical practices.

The tone of this book, as guided by the editors and embraced by the other authors, suggests that environmental sustainability, Māori philosophies, and place responsive and slow pedagogies may have a transformative potential for outdoor education. These sentiments resonate with us also and accordingly, this chapter provides illustrations of outdoor education in early childhood centres and primary schools that in some way bring such ideas alive. Each example prioritises human connectedness and responsiveness to outdoor environments and local communities, draws on a range of curriculum and Māori perspectives, values kinesthetic experiences, and utilises community resources and skills. Using the backyard, bush, beach and rivers as the "text book," students are provided with engaging opportunities to be active, reflective participants in their own learning and to contribute to the wellbeing of the world around them.

References


**Acknowledgments**

We are indebted to Bill Sutton the retiring Principal of Thorndon School in Wellington for sharing stories about the practice of outdoor education in the school. Our further thanks go to Moira Howard, Principal of Birchville School in Upper Hutt, and Karyn Burgess and Charles Barrie from Enviroschools for their comments about their respective programmes. We also wish to acknowledge the work of the other early childhood and primary educators and programmes referenced in this chapter.