Te Whakatika

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From Connection to Care: Why children need to know a place before they can care for it

"We're Going to the Zoo!": Enablers and Challenges of Extending Primary Science Learning Beyond the Classroom

EDUCATION OUTDOORS NEW ZEALAND

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Te Whakatika Purpose statement

Sitting at the nexus of academic inquiry and educational practice, Te Whakatika seeks to create a space to share good practice, innovative ideas, and critical engagement in outdoor and environmental learning.

In doing so, Te Whakatika seeks to:

- Provide access to the space between academics and practitioners, to connect these spaces.
- Encourage academics to make their work accessible to practitioners through practical application
- Encourage practitioners (teachers and other education providers) to share good practice and innovative ideas from their work through writing articles.
- Encourage strong connections between theory, research, and practice
- Encourage and support high quality learning and teaching in outdoor and environmental contexts.



Editorial

By Celia Hogan

This edition of *Te Whakatika* arrives at a moment of mixed emotions for our sector. There is much to celebrate in the confirmation that Outdoor Education will be a Ministry-led subject for Years 12 and 13. This outcome reflects the extraordinary collective effort of students, educators, whānau, researchers, organisations, and communities who spoke up so clearly about its value. I feel both relieved and deeply grateful that those voices were heard.

At the same time, it is difficult to celebrate without acknowledging what remains missing. Education for Sustainability and Environmental Education have not been given the same recognition within the new senior curriculum. At a time when young people are living with climate change, biodiversity loss, and a growing disconnection from the natural world, this is deeply disappointing.

Environmental Education is not simply about learning facts about the environment. It helps young people understand the connections between people, place, culture, and the living world. It gives them opportunities to think critically, take action, and see themselves as capable of making a difference. This learning should not depend on the passion of individual teachers or be squeezed into the edges of other subjects.

We can hold both truths. We can be thankful that Outdoor Education has a future as a Ministry-led senior subject, while continuing to advocate for Environmental Education to have the place it deserves.

The articles in this issue show why learning beyond the classroom matters so much. We begin by remembering Associate Professor Mike Boyes. In Kua Hinga te Tōtara, Shannon McNatty pays tribute to Mike's immense contribution to Outdoor Education and the many people whose thinking and practice he shaped. We also share information about the Dr Mike Boyes Memorial Scholarship Fund, providing another way for his legacy to continue.

Jane-Sophia Mailangi, a 15-year-old student, explores whether the Kahunui programme improves academic success, while Andrew Skipworth looks at how school camps bring curriculum learning to life. Erin Porteous takes us into the water through Wāhine, Waves, and Flourishing Together, exploring wellbeing and connection through shared experiences.

Karatī Metcalfe reflects on the different perspectives coming together within Manaaki Tāpoi. My own contribution looks at why children need opportunities to know and build a relationship with a place before we can expect them to care for it. Samantha Newton then shares her journey of finding her purpose in EOTC through passion, process, and persistence.

Deepa Chand, Linda Bonne, Libby Paterson, and Charles Wilson explore what helps, and what gets in the way, when primary science learning moves beyond the classroom and into places such as the zoo. The issue closes with a resource list and a roundup of recent research to support further reading and learning.

What connects these articles is that they come from people doing the work. They share what is happening with young people, in schools, in communities, and in the outdoors, and this matters. Sharing our experiences helps others see what is possible, while speaking up ensures that the people making decisions hear from those working directly with ākonga and te taiao.

The outcome for Outdoor Education has shown us that a strong collective voice can make a difference. There is still more work to do, and the continued absence of Environmental Education cannot be overlooked.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition and shared their knowledge, experiences, and whakaaro. We're grateful for what has been secured and look forward to continuing this kōrero.

Ngā mihi nui,

Celia Hogan
Editor, Te Whakatika



Kua Hinga te Tōtara: Tribute to Associate Professor Mike Boyes

Tērā te Ara, te ara o Tawhaki
I piki ai ki te rangi
I kake ai ki tou tini, ki tou mano
I whano ai koe
I taemai ai tō wairua ora ki tōna kaupapa
Tēnei hoki ahau,
Te mihi atu nei,
Te tangi atu nei,
Ki tō wairua mate
Puta pūrehurehu mai
Tō putanga mai ki aha
Ki tō kaupapa
I piri mai ai koe
Tēnā te tiri, ko te tiri a ō tūpuna
Ko te tiri a ngā pukenga
A ngā wānanga
Aku, a tēnei tauira
Kia hora te marino
Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana
Kia tere te kārohirohi i mua i tō huarahi
Whano, whano,
Tau atu te wairua
Haumi e, hui e
Tāiki e!

This is the pathway, the pathway of Tawhaki
That climbs into the sky
To your many, to your ancestors
You are ready to move,
Your spirit set for its journey.
Here am I,
Who greets you, and grieves for your spirit
Let things grow dim as you leave us
Off on your new journey
That is yours now
Removed is the tapu,
The sacredity of your ancestors,
The sacredness of the learning
Now planted in us, your students
May peace be widespread
May the sea glisten like greenstone
And may the shimmer of light ever dance across your pathway
May the spirit travel peacefully onward, while those gathered here are united as one, bound together in remembrance and love, and so it is complete!

Moe mai rā e Mike, kei raro i te maru o te rangimārie.

Āpiti hono tātai hono te hunga mate ki te hunga mate.

Āpiti hono tātai hono te hunga ora ki te hunga ora.

Karakia shared by Chanel Meads, former student of Mike

A Tribute to Associate Professor Mike Boyes

By Shannon McNatty

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Associate Professor Mike Boyes on 9th May, 2026. Mike was a remarkable leader, inspirational educator, kind mentor, and passionate advocate for outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand. He was a unifying force whose generosity, wisdom, and vision helped shape the direction of outdoor education in New Zealand for decades.

Mike devoted his life to enriching outdoor education, inspiring countless students, generations of outdoor educators, and practitioners in Aotearoa and internationally through his teaching, research, writing, and unwavering commitment to learning beyond the classroom. Mike mentored many postgraduate students, and encounters with Mike were invariably uplifting. I was one of Mike's postgraduate students at Otago University. Those fortunate enough to know Mike remember his kindness, humility, encouragement, and genuine interest in others.

Mike was born in Marton on March 25th, 1951, the oldest of four brothers. He also had a sister, who died young. He believed the identities of he and his brothers, Paul, Nigel and Simon were shaped by the outdoors.



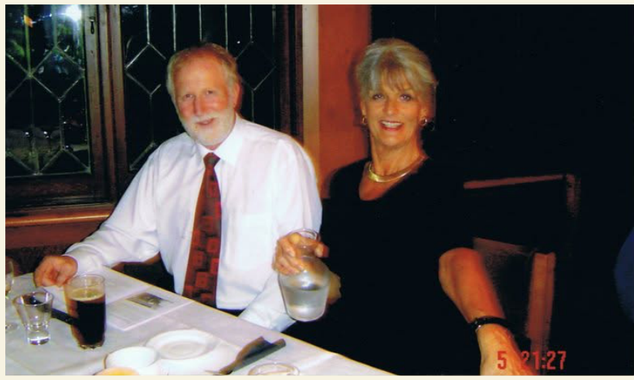
Mike described the influence of his father, who always loved being outdoors, his fond memories of being a boy scout, and family holidays largely living in the outdoors simply, being at the beach and wandering walking tracks (Boyes, 2023). Mike hand-made his first canoe as a teenager while he was a member and volunteer secretary of the River City Canoe club. He recalled: "I learnt the value and happiness that comes from working with natural materials to make something by hand that has beauty and vitality" (Boyes, 2023, p. 4). A key formative experience for Mike was taking part in a remote wilderness trip with Rangitikei College in 1967.

Throughout a career that spanned decades, Mike encouraged others to grow, fostered meaningful connections that strengthened the outdoor education community and challenged people to think deeply. His outdoor career began as a ranger in Fiordland. Later, after training to be a teacher, Mike spent his first two years of teaching in Waitara, where he fondly recalled: "the staff were tight and cohesive… the school had daily lessons in te reo … I especially loved the waiata" (Boyes, 2023, p. 14). With close links to the Oakura marae, Mike ran his first school camp there, grounded in tikanga Māori. Mike was passionate about infusing Māori values in his teaching: "If we embrace these beliefs as an ideology, we may save the earth and be truly called tangata-whenua" (Boyes, 2010, p. 5).



In 1978, he began teaching at Okato College, with opportunities for outdoor education. It was at Okato that Mike drew on his early crafting skills and hand-made a set of canoes for the school. In 1981, Mike completed his Master of Education at the University of Western Australia in Perth, during which time he also worked with the Perth Outward Bound School. Returning to Okato College, Mike introduced outdoor education electives and developed in-service courses for teachers. He also spent a year as the PE and OE school advisor for the Taranaki District. Mike and his family moved to Whanganui in 1986 when he became the HOD of PE at Whanganui Boys College.

Mike began lecturing in Dunedin from 1987-1998 at the Dunedin College of Education, developing both the PE and Outdoor Education courses and became a senior lecturer and HOD. However, it was also during this time that Mike and his wife Jane separated, and she and the children moved back to Taranaki. Without his children, Mike described the time as: "… the darkest time in my life and I felt the children's loss deeply…" (Boyes, 2023, p. 25).



He later became close friends with Helen Green and they married in 1998. Steve Parker, Scarlett Hagen, and I recalled how when we had morning meetings as his PhD students, if Mike was later meeting Helen for lunch, he would seem to have an extra sparkle and spring in his step. Mike reflected on the richness of his life: "… well supported by the love and companionship of my wife Helen and adult children Rachelle, Jeremy, Hannah and Malachy" (Boyes, 2023, p. 61).

Mike became a key part of a dynamic and talented group of outdoor education staff at the University of Otago in 2002 as a Senior Lecturer. Mike described the highlight of each year was working on the Outdoor Education Paradise camp, which he was part of annually for 19 years, "…seven day camping trips, under canvas, in groups of 8-10…located at Diamond Lake between the Dart and Rees rivers at the head of Lake Whakatipu…a truly delightful spot in native

beech forest…" (Boyes, 2023, p. 43). Mike wrote a new postgraduate qualification in outdoor education which enabled students pathways to master's and PhD study in an outdoor topic. By 2005, Otago had more postgraduate students focusing on outdoor education than any other research university in the world (Hepburn, July 11th, 2026). He served as acting Dean for the School of PE several times over his time.

Mike was deeply angered and saddened in 2019 by what he described as: "…a scandalous piece of social engineering and [Otago University] dropped physical education, outdoor education, sports history and dance from the curriculum…a huge and senseless loss…" (Boyes, 2023, p. 48). Allen Hill and I refer to how these qualifications and opportunities, under Mike's supervision and mentoring, positively changed the course of our lives. Mike ran his final outdoor education camp as part of PHSE 416 for Otago University at Aramoana in 2018. Although he had lost the use of his right arm by this stage, he pitched his own tent and in the calmness of the early morning, Mike ventured out in a double sea kayak guided by one of his highly skilled students. His smile could have lit up the ocean. Geoff Ockwell, a close colleague for many years, organised a surprise dinner and I recall Mike's delight as former staff and students began arriving. The evening concluded with a spontaneous haka passionately performed by the students and staff in the room and Mike, forever the humble leader, was overawed and speechless. Completing his academic career in 2019, Mike became an adjunct associate professor, but continued to publish, supervise PhD students, and write regularly.





Mike's impressive research career included 160 research outputs; "made up of 14 book chapters, 51 journal articles, 17 research reports, 24 conference papers, and 54 conference presentations" (Boyes, 2023, p. 61). In 1982, Mike wrote his first publication, a contribution to a book chapter on, "Stress for teachers". His final publication, released in the weeks after his death, was an article on "Developing emotional intelligence through affective outdoor learning" (Boyes et al., 2026). He described his research as



representative of his friends and colleagues across the globe combined with the multidisciplinary stages and interests, he had across his lifespan. For example, Mike's serious brush with cancer in his 50s, resulted in his interest in successful aging and the therapeutic and restorative power of the outdoors.

Mike contributed to outdoor education, outdoor learning and mountain safety throughout his life. He was a member of the New Zealand mountain safety (NZMSC) council from 1993-2015, served on the Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ) executive board from 1992 to 2015, including being chairman for three years. Mike was a foundational member of New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) in 1987 and held several qualifications until 2015. In 1997–2000, Mike served as the chairperson for Physical Education New Zealand (PENZ) and was the journal editor until 2001. Mike served on the board of Outdoors New Zealand (ONZ) from 2000-2007 contributing to a wide range of initiatives.





Mike received numerous accolades and awards for services to outdoor education. In his early career these included a 'NZ times Top teacher award' in 1985 (Boyes, 2023), the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council's 25th Anniversary Award for services to the council in 1991 (Otago Daily Times news team, Dec 31, 2009), and the Otago University Students Association Supervisor of the Year in 2005. Later on, his outstanding contribution was recognised nationally with the New Zealand Sport and Recreation Commission's Supreme Award for Services to Outdoor Recreation (2007) and then he was appointed a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM) in 2010 for services to education and outdoor pursuits. In 2019 Mike was also honoured with Education Outdoors New Zealand's Te Tumu Herenga Waka, Herenga Tangata award, a title that recognises someone who brings people together through leadership, service, and connection. In 2022, he received the Sport NZ Lifetime Achievement Award, further acknowledging the lasting impact of his work. Few embodied these honours more completely than Mike.

In his final weeks, I visited Mike and Helen, and he showed me around the gardens of their newly built home. Mike had completed the entire landscaping and planting of the gardens himself, using one-arm. He had hand-made wooden sculptures on the fence, built a manuka outdoor chair, put together a garden shed, and he quietly remarked to me, how it was now all completed. Our heartfelt condolences go to Helen and Mike's whānau, friends,

colleagues, former students, and all those across the outdoor education community who are mourning his loss. He will be deeply missed, fondly remembered, and forever appreciated. His legacy lives on in the many lives he touched, the educators he mentored, and the values he championed.



In Mike's own words;

"I have always found being in a natural environment to be calming, yet vital and seductive. It makes me feel good and my mind swirls with possibilities. I love it all, be it bush, river, mountain or sea. I find it an emotional experience, set off by the warm caress of the sun's rays on bare skin, the ruffle of the wind through my hair, the searing coldness when water hits the skin and the visual complexity of just being outdoors. I feel I belong here; I am at home in Papatuānuku - mother earth. I like the excitement too, of engaging with the environmental challenges by moving companionably with the natural elements of river flow, snow, rock, waves and bush track." (Boyes, 2023. p.1)

Further tributes to Mike can be made here

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Author Bio

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Mike Boyes was my supervisor, colleague, and friend. I was fortunate to co-present at a conference with Mike and co-authored three papers with him. I was also his final PhD student and graduated on the 9th of May, 2026.

Dr Mike Boyes Memorial Scholarship Fund

EONZ is pleased to announce the establishment of a scholarship fund to honour Dr Mike Boyes. The fund will be used to further outdoor education research through support of a postgraduate student to attend a conference, to present completed (or nearly completed) research, or as recognition of the publication of a paper in a peer-reviewed journal.

To be eligible, applicants must be a current postgraduate student, or one who has graduated within 1 year of the date of application, enrolled in a NZ tertiary institution (any nationality) or a NZ resident/citizen who is studying at an overseas university. The research must be undertaken within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Applications can be submitted at any time but must be supported by evidence of acceptance of a conference paper or refereed journal article.

Successful applicants will be expected to submit a paper suitable for publication in *Te Whakatika*.

A panel of three experienced researchers/academics will assess the merit of applications.

Those who wish to acknowledge Mike Boyes and contribute to the scholarship fund can make a contribution via Education Outdoors New Zealand, account number 38-9023-0287009-01

Reference: M Boyes Scholarship Fund (or if insufficient space just, M Boyes)

Please note EONZ is registered with Charities Services, Ngā Ratonga Kaupapa Atawhai, CS No.CC25473. A receipt will be issued to all donors.

Initial applicant inquiries should be directed to Dr Mike Brown (mike@eonz.org.nz).



Does a full-immersion outdoor education camp improve academic success?

By Jane-Sophia Mailangi

St Cuthberts College offers 28 day long off-the-grid, transformative outdoors education camp for Year 10 students in the Waiotahi Valley. Girls are separated into nine intakes, going out at different times of the year. Each girl experiences being completely disconnected from electronic devices, while being immersed in communal living, the outdoors, and building close friendships with other girls in their year. Students live in houses of eight, where they are all responsible for cleaning, cooking, and managing their daily routines. Kahunui's purpose is to build resilience, independence, and interpersonal skills through outdoor education.

There's a noticeable feeling every month when Year 10 intakes return home from Kahunui. Within a week, teachers begin noticing and saying the same thing: "They're different. There's been a shift." Kahunui is marketed as an outdoor education programme at St Cuthberts College, not as an academic programme. Despite this, according to research conducted at the University of Otago (McNatty et al., 2025), the month-long experience has been essential in reshaping young girls' identities, equipping them with confidence and key learning behaviours that continue long after they return to school. Kahunui may truly be one of the most academically progressive programmes at St Cuthberts, despite it not appearing academic at all.

Kahunui isn't just a camp that's thrown together with fun and Rogaine maps. It is a purposefully designed education strategy. Kahunui's key focus is on developing perseverance and resilience, and the evidence shows that it works (McNatty et al., 2025).Kahunui builds on girls' strengths and challenges stereotypical gender expectations. Staff at both Kahunui and St Cuthbert's have reported "significantly altered social dynamics" when girls return to school, affecting their attitude towards learning. Academic success relies not just on intelligence, but also on confidence, independence, and resilience. Every educator will tell you this. Kahunui isn't deviating from learning; it is the foundation of it.



Girls develop an increase in self-belief, improved problem solving and critical thinking skills, greater independence, and strong relationships and collaboration skills. These are indicators of academic accomplishment that schools spend years trying to develop in workshops and assemblies, yet nothing truly parallels the impact of Kahunui. When girls return from Kahunui, teachers observe that they participate more, take greater academic risks, and manage themselves effectively. They also show an increased amount of eagerness and willingness to learn and attempt difficult tasks. This directly influences learning behaviours once you get back to school. One hundred percent of Year 10 girls at St Cuthbert's complete Kahunui. This means that this academic strategy benefits every student at that year's level, not just the sport focused girls or the girls who love the outdoors, but everyone. In a school that is focused on academic achievement and progression, Kahunui enhances the intangible qualities that make measurable achievement and performance possible.

A girl I interviewed, Emily Smith said she "realised she was capable of more than she thought," a sentiment shared among many girls who have attended Kahunui over the years. Another spoke about learning to trust herself, which is a skill that no exam can measure, yet all learning requires. Anyone who has been to Kahunui understands the experience of cooking dinner and burning half of it or panicking after getting lost while leading a group of girls to their campsite for the night. In those moments, fear turns into questions. "What do I do now?" and "How can I fix this?" These are the moments when every girl realises that she can do more than she ever believed.

The memories made at Kahunui are all lessons. The girl who climbed a track she initially believed she could not complete, can later approach an algebra math internal she was nervous about. A girl who has made a fire for the first time now is not afraid of putting her hand up in class. Every girl who has attended Kahunui now is not afraid of trying, and even possibly failing. It is the perseverance built at Kahunui that shapes her and pushes her forward.





Kahunui does not improve academic performance because girls learn how to kayak or set up a tent. It establishes academic success because girls learn who they are. Once a girl believes she is capable, resilient, and independent, she becomes unstoppable! Once she has lived in this reality for 28 days, no classroom experience can take away her belief in herself. Kahunui does not teach trigonometry; it teaches the courage to attempt it.

AI Acknowledgements:

I acknowledge the use of AI in my writing to help with grammar, spelling, and flow.

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Author Bio:

Jane-Sophia Mailangi is a 15-year-old, Tongan, female student at St Cuthberts College whose writing explores resilience, identity, and the positive impacts of Outdoor Education on youth. She is passionate about amplifying student perspectives and highlighting how opportunities and experiences such as Kahunui, shape confidence, wellbeing, and academic success.



School Camps: Rich Experiences that Bring the Curriculum to Life.

By Andrew Skipworth

Matamata Intermediate is a state school located in the heart of the Waikato with a roll of around 400 ākonga. Over the past few years, we have made significant changes to our annual school camp programme. A key driver behind these changes has been a desire to achieve equitable outcomes for all. Put simply, we want school camps to be affordable, accessible and engaging for all ākonga at our school. We also see camps as a key asset to bring the curriculum to life in real world contexts.

This case study aims to highlight how school camps can be much more than a collection of outdoor activities or an enjoyable break from classroom learning. We have found that, when intentionally designed around curriculum, place and relationships, school camps can provide rich contexts for authentic learning and the development of key competencies. Below, we share some of our observations learned along the way, as well as key design features that have helped us create equitable and safe camp experiences with a strong focus on learning outcomes.

Our new camp model

In 2023, we shifted from a classroom specific camp model to one where all ākonga in our school experience the same three-day camp programme. By moving to a collaborative model, we aimed to reduce the workload for classroom teachers, achieve more consistent and targeted outcomes for all ākonga and reduce the overall costs associated with camps.

While considering changes to our camp model, we engaged with the EOTC Guidelines to ensure our decisions were evidence-based. A key document for planning school camps, The EOTC Guidelines 2025, emphasises that education outside the classroom (EOTC) experiences such as residential camps have the potential to develop key competencies and bring to life learning areas as learning takes place in real-life contexts (Ministry of Education, 2025). Furthermore, the Guidelines suggest that "EOTC events (e.g. camps) should follow a purposeful sequence of learning, not just a mix of rostered activities." (p. 15, Ministry of Education, 2025). Engaging with the guidelines helped with our revisioning of our camp programme and ensured we had a strong focus on learning and safety.

At our school, all classes are composite with Year 7 and 8 classes; therefore, we developed 'A year' and 'B year' camp programmes. In our 'A Year' we base our camps out of Epworth Camp in Karāpiro. In our 'B year' we use Sea Esta Camp at Waihi Beach for accommodation. We fully staff and run our camp programmes at both venues, but we contract the support of a small number of external providers where necessary. A group of teachers from our specialist teaching team lead the camp programme and stay onsite for the duration, with classroom teachers and whānau volunteers helping to run the camp rotations. Our camp programme at Waihi Beach takes two and a half weeks to cycle through five separate camps, with three classes out of school at a time.

Pre-learning

A few weeks prior to camp, ākonga engaged in pre-learning activities that were linked to the places they were planned to spend time in. Classes were tasked with choosing a "camp theme" such as '*different atua in the environment*', '*ocean explorers*' or '*myths and legends of the sea*'. Classroom teachers planned lessons relevant to the chosen theme and responded to the interests of the learners in front of them.

Through our partnership with Enviroschools, we were able to access facilitators who ran the Kauri Pou Kaitiaki: Kauri Protection learning programme with all classes over a course of a week. Through this programme, ākonga learnt about kauri as a taonga



species, used mathematical thinking to estimate tree sizes and explored a virtual forest through VR headsets.

In preparation for our planned stream study during camp, classes took part in science experiments in the classroom to test the pH of different liquids as well as nitrogen levels in water. Teachers also facilitated pre-planned lessons around marine biosecurity. We borrowed these kits and resources through our partnership with Enviroschools.

We know the importance of education in helping young people to make good decisions around water and so we also planned surf safety pre-learning. Ākonga learnt how to identify rips and what to do if you find yourself in one. This learning set the scene for kayaking and stand up paddleboarding, which took place at Waipaopao (Anzac Bay).



Learning from the places we visit

The places we can access locally from our camps helped to drive our learning outcomes and camp programme. While visiting local beaches, inland waterways and forest areas, we allowed time for ākonga to become curious and take in their surroundings. Through these deliberate acts of teaching, we were fostering what Wattchow and Brown (2011) describe as "apprenticeship to places". By focusing less on the activity and more on the journey, we hoped that ākonga would develop connections with the natural environment. As one of our ākonga noted "*It was fun learning about new things and the animals that live there and also spending time on the beach*". Outside of the planned camp rotations, classroom teachers added their value to the programme based on the interests of their particular group. Camp groups built sandcastles, played beach games, went for morning walks and challenged each other through team building games.

We value personal and social development outcomes, but they are a by-product of our planned learning experiences. Opportunities for ākonga to lead, help one another, work together and problem solve happen organically throughout our camp adventures. We focus on the collective and developing a sense of whānau, and in doing so there is less weighting on outcomes centred around individual success.

Risk assessment and supervision

We have strong support from our senior leadership team and board of trustees to assist in the delivery of equitable, safe and enjoyable camp experiences. All staff complete a full-day camp induction on site prior to camps taking place, participating in and familiarising themselves with the

planned activities. This happens at the start of the year during one of our teacher-only days. The day also serves a dual purpose with a strong focus on whanaungatanga as staff reconnect throughout the day having just returned from the summer break.

Additionally, we ask for volunteers with outdoor skills and knowledge, leading groups or working with young people. This year, we were fortunate to have around 50 whānau members volunteer to help with our camps over the course of three weeks. Classroom teachers had responsibility for liaising with volunteers and keeping them informed about their upcoming camp. Volunteers also attended an evening information session led by the principal where they were able to ask questions about their roles and responsibilities.

Continuous improvement

This year marks the fourth camp programme we have planned and delivered under our new camp model. We survey a range of stakeholders and value their responses in helping to shape our next round of camps. We regularly seek feedback on camp experiences from ākonga, teachers, external providers and whānau who volunteer.

The comment below from our Enviroschools facilitator (who wrote an article about our 2026 camps) provides an example of the rich data that helps shape our thinking:

> *"Camps can offer more than a change of scenery. When learning is scaffolded before the trip, made flexible and responsive in the field, and then nurtured at school with student-led action, camp can become part of a longer learning story. The positive outcomes came from thoughtful preparation, hands-on resources, and a willingness to adapt activities when needed." (Dromgool, 2026).*

Comments from our learners also affirmed our intended learning outcomes, with one ākonga noting, "*I liked how we went to different places, learning about the ocean and how to look out for rips in a beach*". Another learner commented that their camp was "*amazing, being around friends*", which connects to one of our key outcomes of developing a sense of whānau.

A key part of building our camp model has been trying new approaches then critically reflecting on them. In the same way that our classroom practice shifts as we respond to our learners, our camp programme and delivery also look different year by year.

How we keep costs low

Like many other schools, we are deeply aware of the costs associated with running overnight camps.

We keep costs as low as possible by:

- Streamlining a food menu that gets replicated over the duration of camps and helps to minimise wastage. The week before camp, classes in food technology cook a bulk dinner that will be frozen then reheated on camp.
- Taking just the right number of adults to safely run camps. We develop supervision plans based on the needs of the specific camp groups.
- Carefully planning transportation and using hire vans and buses where possible and minimising the number of personal vehicles being used.
- Utilising staff and volunteers to lead and assist with camp learning activities.
- Borrowing gear we need where possible. For example, we use:
  - life jackets from the Community LifeJacket Hub,
  - kayaks from our local college, and
  - marine and stream study kits from Enviroschools.

Critical reflection

Camps have the potential to enrich the curriculum by bringing to life the learning areas and further developing key competencies through authentic experiences. To begin a reflective process about your own camp programme, we suggest asking the following questions:

- Is your camp driven by learning outcomes derived from your school curriculum?
- Is camp accessible to all ākonga in your school?
- How much influence do you have on your camp programme when working with external providers?
- How does your school develop staff competency around camps?
- Do you use local environments for your school camp where possible?
- How can members of the community contribute to your school camp experience?

Final thoughts

School camps have long been woven into the fabric of our education system, and in our view, contribute to a unique part of the Aotearoa schooling experience. Just as teaching practices change and evolve over time, we see camp experiences doing so in the same way.

Our experiences suggest that when camps are intentionally designed around curriculum, place and relationships, they can offer rich experiences that add significant value to our school curriculum. We are still learning. Each year provides opportunities to trial new approaches and re-imagine experiences that create safe, equitable and enjoyable learning opportunities for our ākonga, whānau and staff at our school.

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Wāhine, Waves, and Flourishing Together

By Erin Porteous



In the previous issue of *Te Whakatika*, I explored the protective capacity for youth wellbeing that connection to nature spaces can provide. Drawing on my PhD research through a surfing programme with young females, that article highlighted how repeated, intentional engagement with a local beach helped transform it into a place of calm, connection, and respite. The physical "place" played a significant role in enhancing participants' hauora and created an environment for a shared experience and personal achievement. While the ocean provided a treasured place to support wellbeing, it was the deliberate construction of the programme's social aspects that enabled participants to move through the outdoors with trust and confidence.

This article explores the role of embodied human connection in enhancing hauora while in a challenging outdoor context. By focusing on a tuakana-teina framework and an intentional female-only environment, the *who* of programme design becomes just as critical as the *where* and *what*, helping young females understand and cultivate wellbeing and enabling the conditions to flourish through connection and belonging.

Females and Belonging in the Outdoors

Young females begin to construct their role in physical activity, play, and the outdoors from a very young age, with parental influence playing a significant role in a child's exposure to risky or outdoor play (Rogers et al., 2024). Once they get to school, gendered play in the playground shows that young females spend less time in free play and on playground equipment (Parsons & Halstead, 2022). By the time a female in New Zealand reaches her teenage years, she is less likely to participate in physical activity than her male counterparts (Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa, 2023). She is also much less likely to spend time in nature, do nature-based activities, or see female role models in these spaces (Evans et al., 2020). The impact of this lesser exposure in turn reduces access to the protective nature and psychological benefits that outdoor play and physical activity can provide.

Young females encounter several barriers to outdoor activities that their male counterparts do not necessarily experience. In a general sense, young females experience more struggles with negative body image (Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa, 2023), which can hinder their self-selection into particular activities. They are then more likely to feel judged by others, and many are intimidated by current physical activity models within schools that often promote competition (Sport New Zealand - Ihi Aotearoa, 2023). When in a mixed gender situation, many young females will not fully engage or take on roles traditionally held by males.

Schools are well placed to disrupt this narrative by providing young females with opportunities to carve out their place in the outdoors and participate in challenging physical activity. When the barriers can be identified and mitigated through thoughtful planning, access and connection to the protective nature of the outdoors can be fully realised.

Seeing other Females in the Outdoors

Females interpret some of their place and role in the outdoors through others, so female role models become an impactful factor in supporting other females' participation. Evans et al (2020) found that a significant factor impacting young females' experiences in the outdoors was including

females as leaders, which plays a role in breaking down traditional gender roles and gender typing in outdoor activities.

An all-female environment cultivates a space where young females are more likely to have the confidence to try new activities and feel supported and without judgment (Evans et al., 2020). Gender stereotypes continue to be acted out in many outdoor settings, in part through the representation of men in technical roles and women in communicative leadership roles. However, Warren et al., (2019) found that gender roles were removed through an all-female setting and female leaders were able to take on roles outside their gendered expectations.

Girl Time

My PhD research centred around a female-only surfing programme that was led by tuakana, or older female students, who were experts in their field of surf lifesaving or surfing. These tuakana mentored to share their skills and passion for the ocean, and their voluntary hours contributed to the school's community service programme. They facilitated the surfing progression over 10-weeks, allowing each participant to have increasing autonomy over their goals for each session. They monitored safety, held briefings on conditions, and supported through the learning phases of surfing.

The group reported that the single sex environment with female role models proved to have a positive impact on participation, contribution and the removal of fear of judgment. The groups' experiences showed that concentrated "girl time" had significant positive impacts on these young females' experiences, as supported by other research (such as, Pearson et al., 2025). Several participants discussed a distinct level of comfort that allowed them the freedom to learn in confidence. As one student shared:



> *I think I'm definitely more comfortable surfing with girls, you know? Less judged you know, like this sort of mana wāhine thing, like we all understand each other. Sort of like there's an understanding between all us. Just really comfortable with that, with the girls.* (Kya)

Whether this judgement is real or perceived, young females in this programme were able to participate freely and with growing confidence. This created a sense of community, belonging, and care, as well as building culture through shared experience.

> *It was good to be able to do it as a community, ... to go out there with, you know, a group of other people, and especially with the seniors that were there to help us.* (Huia)

The role of mentors – tuakana-teina

As busy educators, we commonly look to our staff and other adults for expertise in EOTC and outdoor education experiences, but often our student body is rife with experience and passion across many outdoor activities. The use of tuakana-teina not only builds leadership capacity among senior students but can also foster trust and confidence among younger participants. Challenging experiences in the outdoors can help to flatten traditional school hierarchies and strengthen peer relationships. Young people are often involved in local community clubs, where they develop substantial skills, knowledge, and confidence that they can bring into school-based outdoor programmes. In this programme, it alleviated anxiety for the teina-participants:

> *I knew that everything would be okay, purely because we had a lot of surf lifesavers, there. And I knew that, even if they weren't able to get us, I knew that what you do is you just let the rip take you out.* (Rose)

By the end of the surfing programme, the role of these tuakana-students had transitioned from coach to safety managers to observers. As the participants developed their skills and trust in each other, they increased their agency as a group and didn't require the intensive supervision or instruction that they did at the start. However, the tuakana continued to play a vital role in the psychological safety of the group as they provided a safety net:

> *They (the senior students) have definitely helped, like making me feel more safe. And knowing that I'll be Okay, if anything did happen.* (Elandri)

It is acknowledged that there are limitations and likely some negative implications in always providing single sex opportunities; nonetheless, the significant improvement in the participants' pre- to post- survey taha whanau and taha hinengaro scores showed the benefits of providing this option.

Practical tips for Kaiako

Offer single-sex opportunities: Create some single-sex options within EOTC programmes- especially for vulnerable activities where body image can impact participation (e.g. surfing)



Embed female leadership and mentorship: Support equity by appointing female leaders and role models and using tuakana-teina structures within activities.

Make small EOTC adjustments: Adapt existing programmes by introducing single-sex classes or providing single-sex/ mentoring group choices within existing school camps.

Utilise community and mentoring schemes: Embed tuakana-teina models into current school community service or mentoring programmes so older or more experienced students can lead and support their younger peers.

Riding the wave of wellbeing

Schools provide an ideal space to connect young females with older mentors and experts from localised outdoor activities. The success of this programme leaned on the expertise of local surfers and surf lifesavers, who stepped up to provide guided safety management, instruction, leadership and mentorship.

Outdoor education and other school-based experiences in nature remain a vital buffer from the stressors that youth encounter, offering a pathway to long-lasting resilience. Anything will grow when provided with the right conditions, and our wellbeing is no exception. When we intentionally design programmes to cultivate connection and confidence, we are creating the conditions for young people to understand and nurture their own wellbeing, providing them with a platform to truly flourish.

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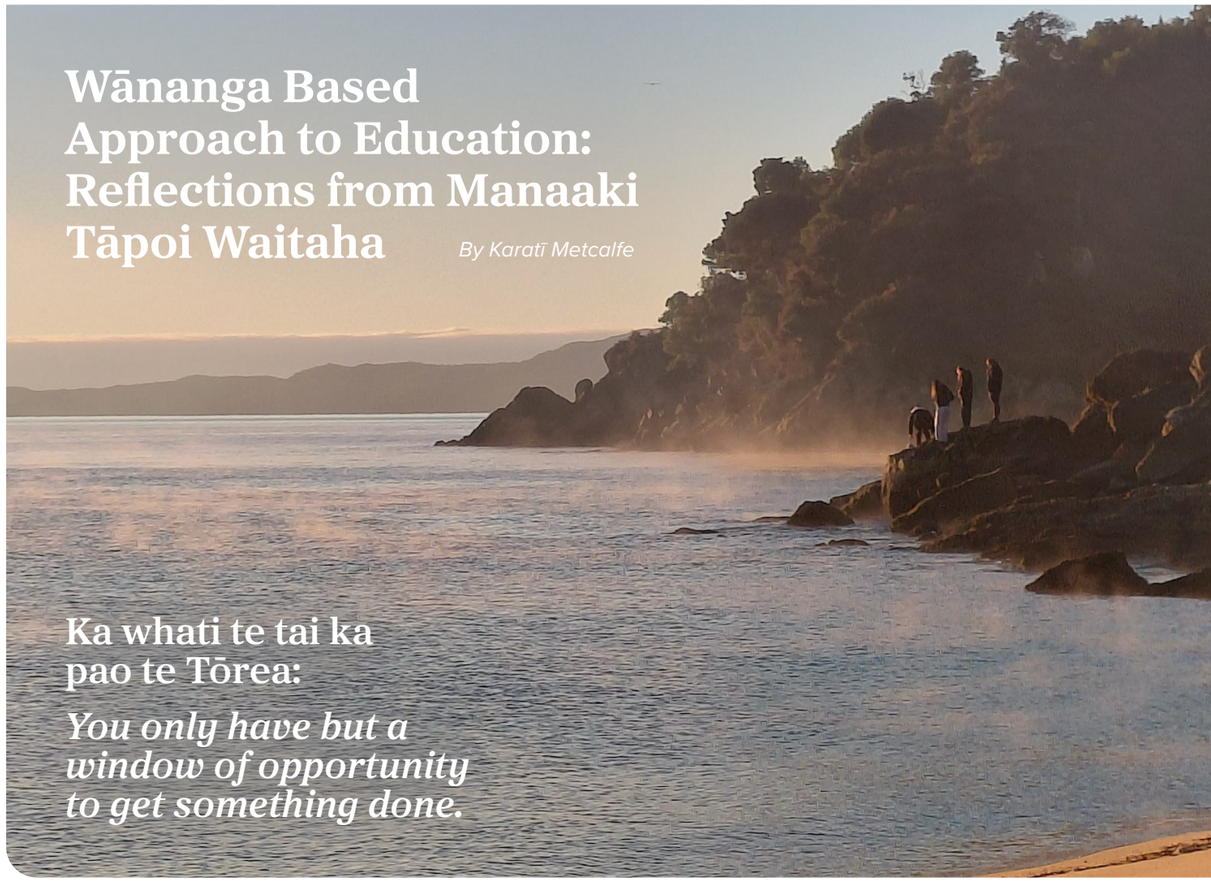

Wānanga Based Approach to Education: Reflections from Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha

By Karatī Metcalfe

Ka whati te tai ka pao te Tōrea:

You only have but a window of opportunity to get something done.

As we stood beneath Ranginui and on Papatūānuku we were greeted with a sky so clear and a land so alive it was as if it was briefed on the kaupapa in advance.

When the opportunity exists, take it. The Whenua Iti: Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha initiative was an opportunity that existed for our rangatahi, and it was one they all took and embraced, without hesitation and without needing to be told twice.

Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha is a Māori Tourism Programme that was introduced to Horoeka Haemata Rolleston College in terms two and three of 2026. Although the programme has been running through Whenua Iti for the past 25 years in Motueka. This is the first time it has been facilitated in Waitaha and the first time being run through a school. We were fortunate to be chosen as the school to run this pilot programme for Whenua Iti.

Our journey started at Kaiteriteri, a place known for sunshine. Yet it was not the sunshine that lingered in memory. It was a feeling, one to which I am perpetually returned whenever immersed in a wānanga based approach to learning with rangatahi Māori: *this is what education should feel like.*

That wānanga constituted the first iteration of Whenua Iti: Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha, an initiative conceived expressly for Darfield

High School, Ellesmere College, Lincoln High School and Rolleston College, and one that holds the distinction of being both the first programme of its kind delivered within Waitaha and the first to be operationalised through a school rather than an external provider. Historically, this Kaupapa was the province of Whenua Iti Outdoors. Its translation into a school-based programme was spearheaded, with considerable foresight, by Andy England Tumuaki of Darfield College, and it situates itself with evident ease within Rolleston College's institutional commitment to the Hikairo Rationale, a commitment the College holds, quite literally, at its core.

It would be remiss to proceed without acknowledging the late Professor Angus Macfarlane, architect of the Hikairo Rationale, who contended that *a blending of Indigenous and Western bodies of knowledge creates an approach that is potentially more powerful than either alone* (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2019). This proposition, deceptively simple in its phrasing, sits at the theoretical heart of Whenua Iti: Manaaki Tāpoi, offering any educator contemplating a wānanga based approach a useful point of departure, not as an embellishment to an existing practice, but as a completely different approach toward learning itself.

A challenge familiar to outdoor educators across the motu is the persistently low participation of Māori in outdoor education, a phenomenon for which several explanations present themselves. The term outdoor education itself carries a Euro centric connotation that may sit uneasily against the aspirations of whānau Māori. The pursuits selected to populate a programme can themselves constitute a barrier, as can cost, and in certain circumstances, ākonga Māori may reasonably fail to feel safe within programmes structured around values that are not their own.

As a nation, we have travelled a considerable distance toward integrating te ao Māori into our programmes. Karakia tīmatanga, karakia mō te kai, ngā atua Māori, pūrākau Māori, and ngā uara Māori now find themselves woven into outdoor education courses across the country, producing learning environments that uplift the mana of te ao Māori and tangata whenua, and that gesture toward our bicultural obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Over the years I have had the privilege to work alongside educators who have genuine passion and mātauranga woven through their programmes.

I have designed programmes in which te ao Māori is woven through every conceivable dimension. I have also, on other occasions, simply defaulted to the status quo and delivered a Euro centric programme, its content largely untouched by such considerations. On each occasion, without exception, my Māori numbers were high.

There will always be legitimate variation in how educators approach teaching and learning, but the singular constant across every iteration of my own practice has been my involvement in kapa haka. To be very clear, and without false modesty, I am no expert. What kapa haka illuminated, rather uncomfortably, were my own vulnerabilities, and in doing so it afforded my ākonga the opportunity to regard me as the teina. The relationship developed from that position outward, and without any great effort at persuasion, my rangatahi Māori numbers grew accordingly. It was not, in the final analysis, the content of the programme that affected this change. It was, learning kapa haka and te reo Māori alongside my own learners, in full view of their scrutiny.

A question worth sitting on: What kaupapa Māori am I actually involved in at school? Am I providing genuine support to the te ao Māori department? Do I stand with my rangatahi tāne at the front of the school as they perform haka? Am I driving the vans to manu kōrero? Am I, however tunelessly, singing in the ranks of kapa haka? The list could extend further, but the essential point remains that whakawhanaungatanga does not confine itself to a single ABL sequence at the beginning of the academic year. It occurs, rather, in the ranks and columns of kapa haka, in the full-throated calling of ingoa atua during haka, and in the earnest, imperfect mispronunciation that accompanies genuine effort.



The kaimahi at Whenua Iti constructed a space in which tikanga Māori occupied the very core, not as a lesson to be delivered but as the environment itself. There was no requirement to explain what whanaungatanga looks like in action, no requirement to explain examples of manaakitanga, and precisely because of this restraint, rangatiratanga emerged, quite naturally, for everyone who was present. Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha unfolded across three wānanga: the first at Kaiteriteri, the second at Ōnuku marae, and the final instalment at Living Springs. At each location, our tauira visited wāhi tapu, namely Ōnawe, Taumutu, Koukourarata, and Riwaka and were afforded time alone to connect as individuals, alongside time together as a rōpū to mihi to those spaces. Our tauira also undertook hīkoi and paddled waka. At Te Mata Hāpuku, every participant located ākete, agates, scattered along the shoreline, a modest and unscripted discovery that produced its own quiet form of connection to that place. Nothing was imposed. The architecture of the wānanga simply made room for such things to occur.

For our learners, the outcome was a deepened sense of connection: to te taiao, to their rōpū, and to their own tuakiritanga. For my part, teaching outdoor education and countless wānanga based encounters with rangatahi Māori, I arrive, with tiresome regularity, at the identical realisation: this is what it should feel like. Whānau, kotahitanga, manaaki, pono, and aroha are the values that tell learners they are cared for, and ākonga, in my experience, learn more when they know this to be true.

The course concluded on the 27th of August with a graduation ceremony held at Darfield High School. Every rangatahi who attended Manaaki Tāpoi Waitaha passed

every unit standard on offer, in its entirety. What was remarkable is that the programme began with eighteen rangatahi and concluded with eighteen rangatahi passing. As we all know, numbers on programmes often change. For a programme constructed around whanaungatanga and manaaki, this felt like the truest available measure of whether the approach had, in fact, succeeded.

None of this requires an educator to convene a multi-day wānanga at Kaiterīteri to draw upon its underlying logic. The shift that matters most is structural rather than additive.

For ākonga Māori in particular, this approach removes the burden of being positioned as the resident cultural expert, or of having their own culture explained back to them by someone else. For all learners, it offers a model of care consistent with Macfarlane's argument that: not two knowledge systems competing for space, but two streams flowing together to produce something stronger than either could achieve alone.



Ka whati te tai ka pao te Tōrea

What kaupapa Māori opportunities exist in your kura?

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In addition to his teaching experience, Karatī is an active member of Te Akatea, the Māori Principals Association, where he contributes to advancing Māori leadership and educational excellence. His work exemplifies a deep commitment to cultural inclusion and the empowerment of students through innovative and respectful educational practices.

From Connection to Care; Why children need to know a place before they can care for it

By Celia Hogan

In the programmes I run, I often watch children return to the same places and activities week after week. It might be the same tree they are trying to climb, a patch of mud they return to dig in, or a cluster of snails discovered under a log. It may look like repetition, but over time they are becoming familiar with the place, noticing small changes and beginning to understand how they fit within it.

When we talk about sustainability and environmental education, we often begin with what children need to know or do. We teach them about recycling, conservation, biodiversity and climate change. These things matter, but I wonder if we sometimes start too far along the pathway. Before children can feel responsible for the natural world, they need opportunities to build a relationship with it.



The place is more than a backdrop

When I first studied outdoor education at polytechnic in the late 1990s, I thought taking children outdoors was enough. As time has gone on, through having my own children and running Bush Kindy and Bush School programmes, I have come to see a difference between using a place and developing a relationship with it.

Place-responsive education asks us to pay attention to the particular environment, people, history, culture and stories connected with where learning happens. Hill and Brown (2014) argue that outdoor experiences can contribute to sustainability when learners develop meaningful relationships with place and consider their responsibilities within it. The place is not simply somewhere convenient to run an activity. It becomes part of the learning.

Returning regularly also gives tamariki time to notice. They see when the kōwhai begins to flower, where water gathers after rain, when particular insects appear and how the ground changes through the















seasons. Lynch and Mannion (2021) describe this as *attunement*: becoming more aware of, and responsive to, what is happening in a place over time.

This connects with what I continue to learn from mātauranga Māori. People are not separate from te taiao but part of a wider web of relationships involving whenua, waterways, plants, animals and people. Ideas such as whakapapa and kaitiakitanga carry much more depth than simply "caring for nature". They involve relationships, responsibilities and the cultural context of place.

Connection does not automatically become care

Research supports an association between childhood experiences in nature, connection with nature and later environmental attitudes and actions. DeVille et al. (2021) link time in nature with increased nature connectedness and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours. A review by van Heel et al. (2023) also found that childhood nature experiences can support both connectedness and action, particularly when they are sensory-rich, self-directed and part of everyday life.

However, sending children outside does not guarantee that environmental responsibility will follow. Waite (2013) cautions that spending time in a place does not automatically lead to care or action. Children also need opportunities to notice their impact and contribute in meaningful ways.

At Hansen Park in Ōtautahi Christchurch, I led a local initiative to turn a native planted area into a nature play space. Rather than installing traditional playground equipment, the space uses logs, branches, rocks, soil, bark and planting, allowing children to build, dig, balance and create.

Some of the most meaningful experiences there have happened through working bees. Tamariki, teenagers and adults have weeded, mulched, collected rubbish, cared for planting and built shelters from natural materials. These jobs are not particularly dramatic, but people can see the difference their contribution makes. Caring for the place becomes something they have participated in, rather than simply something they have been told is important.

Sustainability also requires access

The programmes I run offer regular and meaningful experiences in nature, but they are fee-paying programmes and not every family can access them. This tension is one reason I run professional development that helps teachers make greater use of their own outdoor classrooms and engage more regularly in EOTC.

If regular contact with nature helps grow environmental connection, then these opportunities need to be part of everyday education. Hill (2012) argues for outdoor education that engages more deliberately with sustainability, including the wider social and ecological systems shaping people's lives rather than focusing only on individual environmental choices.

Starting with what you have

This does not require a major new programme, a large budget or a bus trip. Schools can begin with the places and resources already available to them:

- Choose one area near the classroom and return to it regularly. Photograph, draw or record what changes across the seasons.

- Take existing curriculum learning outside. Science, measurement, descriptive writing, art and weather observations can all begin with what is actually present in the school grounds.
- Create a small growing space using planter boxes or large pots. Tamariki can plant, water, observe, harvest and cook what they grow.
- Give students real responsibility for a garden, tree, habitat or neglected corner of the school. Let them help decide what the space needs and how they could care for it.
- Make time for noticing before providing answers. Ask what children can see, hear, smell or feel and what questions the place raises for them.

Children need more than information about the environment. They need time to know places through their hands, feet, senses, play and relationships. When a place becomes somewhere they recognise, understand and feel they belong, caring for it begins to mean something.

Perhaps this is where sustainability education starts: not with another list of things children must do, but by giving them enough time and freedom to form relationships with the living world around them.

Further resources

For ideas to help you get started with everyday outdoor learning, explore these resources:

EONZ: Numeracy, Literacy and Cross Curriculum Learning Activities

NZAEE: Nature Connection for Aotearoa Educators

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"We're Going to the Zoo!": Enablers and Challenges of Extending Primary Science Learning Beyond the Classroom.

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Introduction

Interest in experiential learning has grown significantly in recent years, particularly in the contexts of Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) and out-of-school learning. Experiential learning, defined as learning through direct experience and reflection (Kolb, 2015), offers meaningful opportunities for learners to engage with authentic contexts beyond traditional primary classroom settings. This article explores experiential learning related to a zoo visit.

Within Initial Teacher Education (ITE), such experiences play a critical role in shaping how pre-service teachers (PSTs) understand and connect learning in formal and informal environments. Therefore, science education in ITE requires approaches that extend learning beyond the confines of the classroom to promote deeper engagement and understanding. Recent research has highlighted the value of integrating outdoor and experiential approaches within ITE programmes (North, 2020). Fägerstam (2014) argued for the importance of familiarising PSTs with outdoor learning experiences during their initial training, as these experiences influence future teaching practices. More recently, hybrid models of outdoor learning that incorporate mobile communication modes (e.g., iNaturalist NZ, a mobile app that helps identify species of living things) have been found to enhance PSTs' capability in outdoor pedagogy while equipping them with practical strategies to organise learning across different contexts (Kesler et al., 2024). Similarly, Jucker and von Au (2022) emphasise that outdoor learning is most effective when grounded in evidence-based pedagogical approaches that intentionally integrate environmental contexts into the learning process. Supporting this, Dean and Landreth's (2025) research with early childhood ITE students in a science methods course showed that direct participation in well-structured, curriculum-linked outdoor learning positively shaped PSTs' perceptions and pedagogical reasoning. Importantly, providing PSTs with opportunities to experience and analyse learning beyond the classroom can enable them to design meaningful, connected learning experiences for their primary science learners (Oktay, 2024).



Purpose of the Study

Our study aimed to identify the key enablers and challenges in extending science learning opportunities beyond the university classroom. The research examined PSTs’ experiences of an integrated campus and structured zoo-based learning programme. It was underpinned by sociocultural theory and experiential learning theory, which together emphasise the roles of social interaction, authentic contexts, and reflective experience in shaping learning.
This area of study is significant due to the increasing need for PSTs to engage with authentic, real-world contexts that support the development of pedagogical skills and reasoning.

Methodology

Our sociocultural perspective means that we see learning as occurring through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective led us to include a consideration of the role of relationships in how we conducted the study and in what we found. Our qualitative research design explored PSTs’ perspectives on extending learning beyond the classroom to investigate the question: What are the key enablers and challenges in extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom learning space?

Participants were PSTs enrolled at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. In their science sessions on campus, experiential learning was used as a method of instruction to support PSTs learning to teach science to primary school children. As part of their course, PSTs visited Te Nukuao Wellington Zoo for a learning experience designed to extend classroom-based science learning by observing live animals from around the world. Prior to the visit, PSTs had also been provided with online learning materials that considered the process for planning an EOTC experience, working in partnership with outdoor providers and safety management strategies.

During the visit, PSTs engaged in inquiry-based tasks, practised science process skills, connected theoretical learning with real-world contexts, and reflected on applications for their future teaching. Thirty-seven PSTs completed two written guided reflections and a separate observation task. After the Zoo visit, semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with 10 of the same PSTs. Students are referred to by pseudonyms here, in line with our ethics approval.

In this article, we present our initial findings from the PST interviews.





Findings

PSTs engaged in critical reflection on the enablers and challenges associated with experiential learning, both in their role as learners visiting the Zoo and as future primary teachers. Several key enablers supported PSTs’ engagement with experiential learning. The central enabler was a structured and purposeful learning design, where learning was embedded before, during, and after the Zoo visit. As one PST noted, “for the trips… we do pre-learning… and learning after as well” (Alex), highlighting the importance of continuity in learning. Similarly, Rachael emphasised that “it can’t just be… go have a look at your favourite animal… there needs to be structure”. PSTs also highlighted the significance of clear learning intentions, recognising that they were “not just… wandering around the zoo… we’ve got to do this [task]” (Maddy).

Strong partnerships with external educators further enabled learning opportunities, with PSTs valuing how “educators on site… showed us how they planned things” (Alex). In addition, scaffolding and multimodal approaches supported deeper engagement and reasoning. Structured prompts were seen as essential scaffolding, as they “give us prompts about what to observe rather than just watching” (Alex), while Georgia noted that “it helped with drawing… it wouldn’t come out like that without them”, enabling meaningful interpretation of experiences and reasoning.

Alongside these enablers, several challenges were evident. Time constraints emerged as a major limitation, with PSTs reporting that they “felt quite rushed… trying to accomplish set tasks within that time frame” (Daniel). Similarly, Lani highlighted that “we didn’t have time… especially for exploring,” indicating tensions between structured activities and opportunities for student-led inquiry. Planning and logistical demands were also identified as barriers, with out-of-school experiential learning described as “labour intensive… preparation and approvals” (Daniel). Furthermore, Alex acknowledged that “trips are… valuable… but… budget and logistics… need to be considered”.

PSTs’ beliefs and ethical tensions about keeping animals in captivity emerged as an additional challenge. They reflected critically on the ethics of zoos, noting that they “reflect on animals in the wild as opposed to being captives” (Alex), while Robert described the experience as “a bit weird… that [animals] eating is like a show for us”. These tensions were further influenced by emotional responses, reflected in James expressing empathy and

discomfort: “I kind of feel for them a bit… their enclosures aren’t that big”. Such responses highlight that PSTs (and primary students) should be provided with opportunities to express their thinking about ethical considerations and affective engagement, as these can shape PSTs’ interpretation of experiential learning contexts.



Discussion and Conclusion

PSTs' enthusiasm and excitement for science learning at the zoo were evident throughout the interviews. Our initial findings suggest that experiential learning opportunities can foster positive and engaging experiences in science teaching. These experiences supported the awareness of effective pedagogical strategies while also enhancing PSTs’ awareness of the potential challenges associated with implementing experiential learning beyond the classroom.

From our interviews with 10 PSTs, a consistent set of enablers emerged for effectively extending learning beyond the classroom. The identified enablers - structured learning design, clear learning intentions, strong community partnerships, and guided support - enabled PSTs to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world experiences in a zoo context. This reinforces experiential learning theory, where learning is enhanced through direct experience, reflection, and application. From a sociocultural perspective, the PSTs valued the teacher educators’ model of collaboration with the team of educators at the Zoo, in light of thinking about their future roles as teachers who might want to plan a similar learning experience for children. In relation to their own learning about science and science teaching, the PSTs’ peer collaborations supported meaning making and strengthened their developing pedagogical understanding.

The study also identified key challenges that can influence the implementation of experiential learning. Time constraints, logistical demands, and the labour-intensive nature of planning can limit the extent to which such approaches can be sustained. Tensions between structured tasks and opportunities for student-led exploration further highlight the complexity of designing effective learning experiences in authentic settings. Additionally, some PSTs demonstrated ethical awareness and emotional engagement when reflecting on issues such as wild animals being kept in captivity, indicating that experiential learning can also engage learners’ affective dimensions and critical thinking.

These findings suggest that ITE programmes should embed structured, well-supported experiential learning opportunities, while also providing space for PSTs’ critical reflection. This approach can contribute to improving EOTC in ITE, as called for by Hill et al. (2020). More than this, such an approach can support the development of reflective, innovative and adaptable educators capable of designing meaningful science learning beyond the primary classroom.

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Use of AI:

AI was not used in the development of this article.

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Libby has a long career in education, starting in primary and secondary teaching before moving to the tertiary sector. She spent sixteen years developing PLD experiences and in-school one-on-one support, across the schooling sector, mainly involved in, but not limited to, the HPE learning space. Libby is a lecturing fellow at Te Herenga Waka in both primary and secondary education.

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Charles is Team Leader Learning at Te Nukuao Wellington Zoo and an experienced educator, linguist and musician. His interests in teaching and learning in an EOTC context include weaving together different ways of knowing and understanding the world, including through science, mātauranga Māori, and creative arts.

Finding My Why in EOTC: A Journey of Passion, Process and Persistence

By Samantha Newton

If I look back honestly, my love for Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) didn't begin with policy, paperwork, or risk analysis forms. It began with a bus ride, a billet stay, muddy shoes, and laughter.

As a student, I signed up for everything. Camps, interschool sports, and exchanges. If there was a permission slip going around, my hand would be up. It wasn't just the events themselves; it was the friendships formed in the in-between moments. The long bus rides, shared cabins, and debrief over hot chips. That sense of belonging and shared challenge stuck with me long before I knew there was a name for this kind of learning.

Outside of school, I was in Girl Guides, an Air Force upbringing, and Guides became a place where I could hang out with my friend. I wanted every badge possible. A friend and I would sit with the badge book, plotting what we could complete before the next meeting. Then came the big ideas: "Let's do an overnight camp!" Suddenly we were planning menus, activities, and locations. Typing out pages of Microsoft Publisher. Without realising it, I was already drawn to the logistics, the coordination, the making-it-happen side of things.

At school, the overnight stays and billeting experiences were formative. Hours on a bus to get somewhere new. Stepping into unfamiliar environments and learning independence in small but powerful ways. That was EOTC in its purest form; authentic, slightly messy, relationship-rich learning.





University: The Seed Begins to Grow

Fast forward to the University of Canterbury, where I chose a paper in EOTC, as part of my teaching qualification. That's when things started to crystallise. We were tasked with running a full day of activities for students at a local school. I was appointed the overseer, the one checking in on each activity, ensuring organisation, troubleshooting issues, keeping the bigger picture in mind. I didn't hesitate. It felt natural. Looking back, that was a defining moment. My love for this strand of the curriculum had been developing for years, quietly and consistently. I just hadn't named it yet.

Reality Check: The Paper Mountain

Then came my first teaching job. Like many schools, we were introduced to what felt like a mountain of EOTC paperwork. Forms completed weeks before a trip, filed away afterwards, only to be dusted off the following year and largely redone. It felt reactive rather than reflective. Compliance-heavy rather than purpose-driven.

In 2014, I attended my first Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ) professional development. It was an eye-opener. Yes, the toolkit and the processes were valuable. Yes, the clarity around roles and responsibilities was reassuring. But what truly resonated with me was the yacht diagram, the visual representation of all the people involved in an EOTC experience and within the school system. That diagram became my key. It helped me see EOTC not as isolated trips, but as a coordinated, whole-school system. I went back determined to make changes.

From Templates to Transformation

I began reviewing and updating paperwork, refining templates and adjusting processes to make them purposeful rather than performative. It wasn't about adding more; it was about making it meaningful. When I moved to a new school, they had heard about the systems I'd developed and wanted something similar. This time, the canvas was almost blank. I couldn't wait.

We started with a Risk Assessment (RAMS) document suitable for camp and then moved on to sporting events. From there, it expanded into the school's Safety Management Plan. Step by step, we were building something sustainable. Throughout it all, EONZ was a constant support. I could flick off an email with a question, seek clarification, or ask for ideas. That partnership mattered.

I was fortunate to have one day of release to support my dual role as Sports Coordinator and Teacher-in-charge of EOTC. With that time, I created planning templates, camp slide decks to guide teachers, flowcharts, tick boxes – practical tools that reduced cognitive load for staff and improved consistency for students. Then came a pivotal moment.

"When Do You Get Time to Do All of This?"

I brought a board member along to a two-day professional development workshop facilitated by EONZ. During the course, he



turned to me and asked, “When do you get time to do all of this?” We all know the level of paperwork involved in health and safety. In EOTC, it’s significant. My honest answer was simple: “After school.” But his question stayed with me. It acknowledged the invisible hours, systems thinking and behind-the-scenes mahi.

With his support, I drafted a proposal and sent it to an EONZ facilitator for feedback to strengthen it. In that proposal, I outlined:

- The days I was already out of class
- Our EOTC aim and how it aligned with school values
- The number of events and students impacted
- Reliever costs and disruptions
- The long-term benefits of robust systems

And then I asked for something radical: time.

Time to strengthen systems and ensure robust, safe opportunities for students. Time to provide stability for my own class and to reduce workload pressure for teachers and senior leaders. I genuinely believe that if we invest in sound procedures and resources now, our staff and students will reap the benefits for years to come. I asked for two days of release and it was granted for a year, to be reviewed. That was a turning point.

Working Smarter, Not Harder

This new dedicated time has allowed me to focus on learning and refining. I have explored online platforms, attended tutorials, and spoken to local schools about what is working and what isn’t. Eventually, we settled on using the SchoolBridge programme. We started small with a leave request form and a professional development application. Then I adapted the existing templates for our context. This included a driving trip form and local walking trip form. Then there was camp, the real test.

The first version included a camp student form and a separate aquatic form. Better, but still clunky. So, I reflected, tweaked, merged and streamlined. Eventually, we created one comprehensive parent form. That process reinforced something important: systems are never “done.” They evolve. Now, we have a bank of SOPs and form ready to go for most of the trips we run each year. This means that teachers aren’t starting from scratch and expectations are clear. Students benefit from consistency and parents experience a more seamless process.

For educators, EOTC paperwork is most effective when it is practical, purposeful, and designed to support staff rather than add unnecessary pressure. The EONZ toolkit has been a fantastic starting point, but the templates and workflows need to be adapted to suit each trip or event, so they remain useful and manageable. For example, using SchoolBridge to build workflows means I do not have to ask teachers to write the date four times across four different documents, repeating the same information in multiple places. I can also pre-fill details such as addresses or teacher information, which makes the process quicker and reduces frustration. However, there are still many places where they must interact with the workflow and fill in information. This helps ensure the paperwork is still meeting good practice guidelines without becoming another barrier for busy teachers or parents.

The EONZ Effective Management and EOTC courses have also been valuable, providing fresh ideas, shared practice, and professional connections that strengthen systems over time. Those shared conversations and networks are gold, because they allow us to “magpie” good ideas and build stronger systems that work well in our own setting. Overall, these tools and networks help maintain high standards while making the process more manageable and meaningful for everyone involved.

Our next exciting step? An international trip. I fully expect the first attempt to be imperfect and I welcome that, because improvement comes through iteration.

Passion with Purpose

EOTC has changed significantly over the years. The health and safety landscape has shifted, expectations are higher, documentation is more rigorous, and yes, the workload can feel heavy.

But the heart of EOTC hasn’t changed. It’s still about relationships, challenges, and those moments students remember long after the paperwork is archived. If the passion is there, the drive, the enjoyment; fight for it. Advocate for it. Build systems that make it achievable rather than overwhelming.

Make it sustainable. And at the end of the day, remember your why. For me, it’s simple. It’s the children.

Author Bio:
Sam Newton is a classroom teacher and EOTC coordinator at Havelock North Intermediate in sunny Hawke’s Bay. With 14 years of teaching experience in both Hawke’s Bay and London, UK, she brings knowledge and a strong commitment to student learning and wellbeing. Sam has a deep love of the outdoors, including camping, fishing, and enjoys finding ways to bring these experiences to life for students at HNI. Her current work focuses on ensuring procedures and planning align with good practice, alongside creating efficient systems that support staff and students.

Support for Educators: Resources and Professional Learning

We're here to help you access relevant and effective resources, support and professional learning opportunities. Both EONZ and NZAEE receive funding through the Networks of Expertise initiative, with a focus on peer-to-peer delivery to build capability and support kaiako throughout Aotearoa.

In this section we outline and provide links to the support available from our organisations and highlight some recommended resources to read, watch and listen to.

New Zealand Association for Environmental Education

Visit our website www.nzaee.org.nz to find resources and support for teaching environmental and sustainability education including:

— Resource Catalogue

Find teaching resources for all levels, across a range of learning contexts, with a focus on environmental and sustainability teaching and learning in Aotearoa. You can search using keywords, or use the filters for education level, context and region.

— Professional Learning Resources

Access research, articles, webinars, books and guides to support your personal and professional learning. These are updated regularly and include collections related to current issues or priorities, such as local curriculum and climate education.

— Providers Database

With over 300 listings for organisations, programmes and groups around Aotearoa, you can filter by location and learning context to find support near you.

— Spotlights: Stories and Curated Collections

We also share inspiring stories and highlight providers and resources related to seasonal events and other relevant themes.

— Events

We have a dedicated space to promote events that are relevant for educators, including online and in person opportunities. Please get in touch if you'd like us to share your event (contact@nzaee.org.nz).

To stay in the loop about new content and upcoming webinars or networking events, you can sign up to our newsletter through our website or follow us on Facebook

Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ)

EONZ supports schools, kura, and educators across Aotearoa to provide meaningful, safe, and place-responsive learning beyond the classroom. Through resources, professional learning, advocacy, and practical support, EONZ works to strengthen Outdoor Education and Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) for all ākonga.

Visit www.eonz.org.nz to access resources, explore PLD opportunities, and find out more about how EONZ can support your school or organisation.

— Resources and Curriculum Support

The EONZ website hosts a growing range of free resources to support educators working in Outdoor Education and EOTC contexts. This includes practical teaching resources, research, curriculum support materials, case studies, videos, and examples of good practice from across Aotearoa.

Resources support areas such as local curriculum design, place-responsive learning, Te Ao Māori and mātauranga Māori, school camps, outdoor learning, and experiential approaches to teaching and learning.

— EOTC Safety Management

EONZ provides extensive support for schools in developing and strengthening EOTC safety management systems. This includes toolkits, templates, guidance documents, self-review tools, and practical examples designed to help schools build effective and workable systems that align with good practice.

— Professional Learning and Development (PLD)

EONZ offers a range of PLD opportunities for schools, kura, and organisations. Workshops and support are available across areas, including Outdoor Education pedagogy, EOTC safety management, local curriculum development, school camps, place-responsive practice, and weaving mātauranga Māori into programmes.

— Teaching and Learning Support

EONZ supports educators and school leaders with curriculum and programme development, helping schools design learning that is engaging, authentic, locally grounded, and connected to the aspirations of Te Mātaiaho and their local communities.

— EOTC Management Support

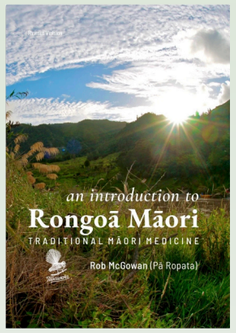
EONZ works alongside schools and kura to strengthen EOTC systems and processes. Support may include reviewing documentation, refining systems, strengthening planning processes, and helping schools embed sustainable good practice across their organisation.

— Tailored Review and Support

Schools and organisations can access tailored support and review processes specific to their context and needs. This may include support with programme development, curriculum integration, EOTC systems, school camp revisioning, strategic planning, or strengthening confidence and capability within staff teams.

What We're Reading...

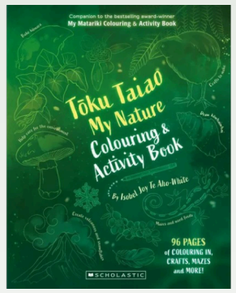
An Introduction to Rongoā Māori



Revised edition, Pā Ropata
Rob McGowan, 2026

"The First teacher of Rongoā Māori is the ngahere, te Wao Nui a Tāne, the forest itself." This 2026 revised edition of Pā Ropata's introduction to rongoā Māori is essential reading for anyone wishing to strengthen their connection with te taiao.

Tōku Taiao - My nature colouring and activity book



By Isobel Joy Te Aho-White

Discover te taiao, the natural world, through colouring, puzzles and creative activities designed to engage young learners. Featuring native flora and fauna, habitats and natural elements of Aotearoa, this book supports early learning while fostering a sense of kaitiakitanga and connection to the environment.

Visit your local bookstore to find a copy of this new book published on September 1, 2026.

Article: Nature on my mind

By Kerrie Waterworth, published by Forest and Bird, July 2026

In this age of constant technological distractions and notifications, Dr Marc Berman wants us to know that a walk in nature can lift our mood, sharpen our focus, and protect our brain.

Research: Learning that lingers: a retrospective study of an Aotearoa New Zealand high school's compulsory outdoor programme

Shannon McNatty and colleagues, 2026

This research asked 148 young women to reflect on a 28-day outdoor programme they had completed at ages 14 to 15. Five to eleven years later, many still identified enduring learning around friendships, independence, perseverance, conflict resolution, sustainability and confidence. Importantly, the study also includes uncomfortable and negative experiences, including exclusion and difficulties managing mental health or being without devices.

What We're Watching...

People, Cities and Nature Webinar series

Thriving cities: Reweaving ecology, culture and community

What makes a thriving city? This monthly webinar series explores the path to thriving cities in Aotearoa New Zealand by examining research from the People, Cities & Nature team on:

- Urban planning and design for biodiversity
- Cultural partnerships for urban restoration
- Protecting wildlife and managing pests
- Uncovering microbiomes in the soil and air that can impact human health

These events bring together researchers, practitioners, and communities to share knowledge and explore urban ecological restoration and design in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Documentary: Restoring the Balance

Open Planet Studies x Tahi

Produced by Open Planet Studios, the filmmakers behind documentaries such as Ocean with David Attenborough, Restoring the Balance tells the story of Tahi and through the 18 minute film explores a central question facing governments, businesses and communities worldwide: what is the true value of a forest? And, crucially, what happens when restoration efforts focus on speed and carbon metrics alone, rather than the complexity of whole ecosystems.

What We're Listening to...

DOC Sounds of Science Podcast

A behind the scenes look at how people care for Aotearoa's native species and natural environment, with a range of topics across more than 30 episodes.

The AskNature Podcast

Hosted by the Biomimicry Institute

At a time of unprecedented ecological and social challenges, people across regions, industries, and movements are asking: what happens when we look to nature to guide our way forward? The AskNature Podcast explores that question and the revolutionary answers it yields—bringing together diverse voices to uncover nature-inspired strategies for resilience, innovation, and systemic change.

Latest Open-Access Research: Who Gets to Feel at Home Outdoors?

Dr David Hill

Check out the latest open-access research from the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning (JAEOL).

Picture the start of an outdoor lesson. Some children are already exploring. Others hang back, unsure about the terrain, the activity or their place in the group. The teacher has planned an experience for everyone—but what will help everyone participate? Three recent papers in the Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning offer useful starting points. Read together, they suggest a practical question for teachers: how can we make outdoor learning an experience more children can enter, enjoy and feel part of? All three are open access, so readers can explore the research without a journal subscription. Check out these articles below and then we challenge you to pose the questions in purple to your colleagues on your journey to your next outdoor adventure!

What Gets in the Way?

Ida Lousen and colleagues' Danish national survey investigates constraints on children's visits to green spaces, drawing on children's and parents' perspectives. One revealing finding concerns boredom. Children's perception that green spaces were boring was associated with fewer visits in one model, but that relationship was no longer statistically significant when their preferences for green spaces were included. Preference itself was strongly associated with visiting frequency. These are associations, so they cannot establish whether liking green spaces leads to visiting more often, or vice versa. Read the survey.

The teaching implication is an invitation to listen. A reluctant student may offer information that an adult's explanation misses.

Before a session, ask what children would like to discover, try or change. Afterwards, ask what interested them and what made participation difficult. Their responses could inform the next visit: perhaps a shared investigation, greater choice or a different way into the activity.

The Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning (Taylor & Francis) is a leading international journal in outdoor education that publishes rigorous research in this dynamic field. The JAEOL fosters scholarship that not only advances academic understanding but also supports educators, researchers, and policymakers in promoting effective and transformative outdoor educational practices worldwide. Planning to publish an article in 2026? Check out the author guidelines and stay in touch with us for all of the latest research here

How do we Plan for Belonging?

Marion Sturges, Tonia Gray, T.A. Loeffler and Carolyn Galbraith's rapid review examines inclusive outdoor education in Australia and Canada. It identifies a limited but varied literature, documenting both opportunities and barriers. These include financial considerations, educator confidence and experience, cultural assumptions, and challenges surrounding belonging.

The review discusses Universal Design for Learning as a potentially useful framework, while identifying a gap in research on its application to outdoor education in these countries. That distinction matters: a promising approach still needs careful evaluation. Read the review. For teachers, a useful application is to build flexibility into planning. Could students approach the same learning goal through different activities or roles? Whose previous outdoor experience does the lesson assume? What support would make participation meaningful?

How do we notice how Children Feel?

Gemma Reynolds, Kirsty Neller and Tianna Henry studied 102 children aged seven to nine across three UK primary schools. Children completed measures before and after a single Forest School session. Positive affect and self-esteem increased, while negative affect decreased. The findings provide encouraging evidence of immediate emotional changes. However, a study of one session cannot establish lasting improvements, and its quasi-experimental design warrants caution about causal claims. Read the Forest School study. This paper offers a reason to pay attention to emotional experience alongside curriculum outcomes. A brief, optional check-in might help children describe how they felt during the session and what contributed to that feeling. Such classroom reflection would support listening; it would not replicate the researchers' validated measures.

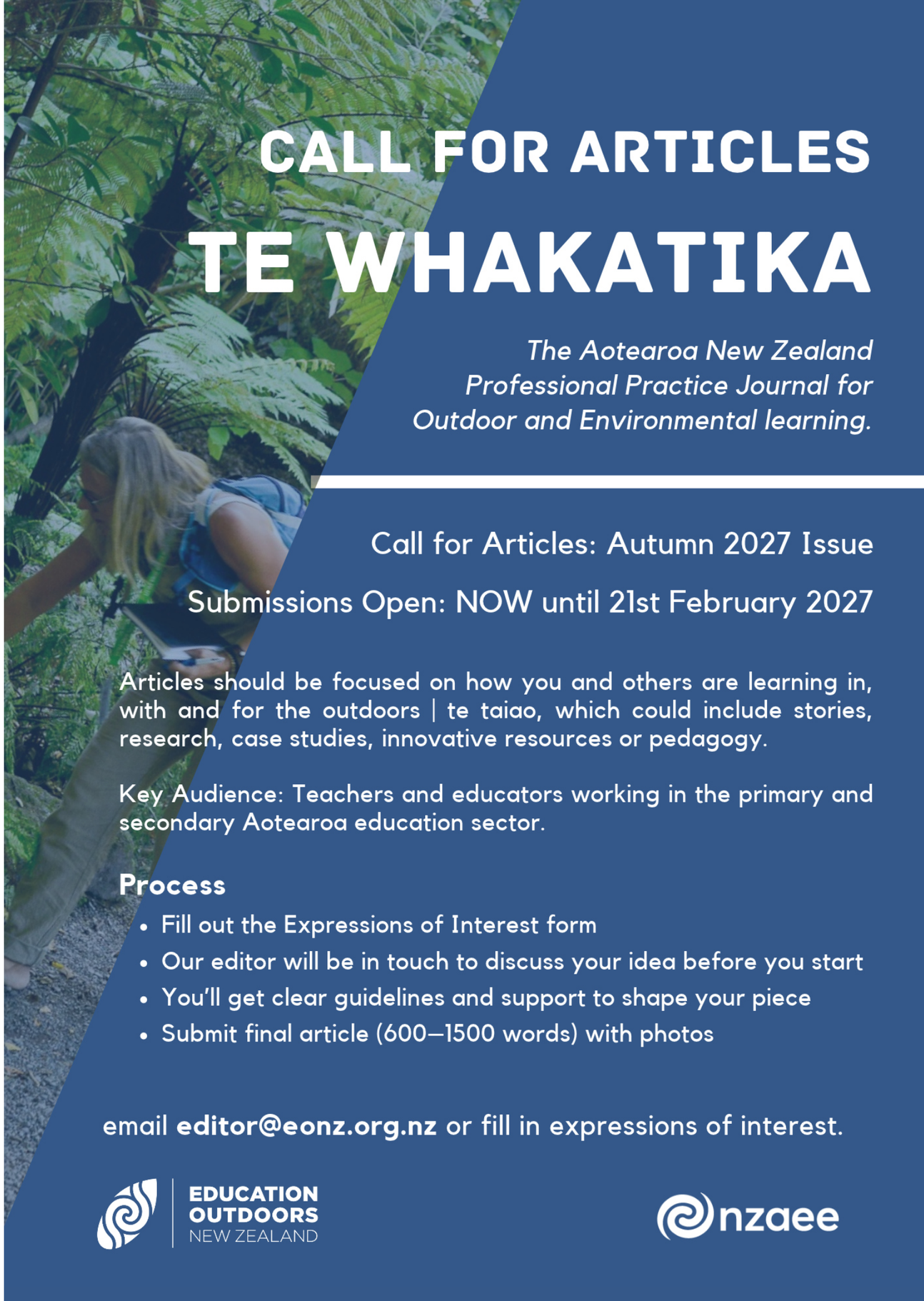
These studies investigate different questions, age groups and settings. Together, they offer a productive discussion starter: who participates, what helps them engage, and how do they experience the session? Read one paper with colleagues, select a small change to try, and seek students' feedback. The next useful development in your outdoor teaching might begin with making room for a child whose experience has been easy to overlook.

The suggested Q4 2026 open-access reading list on **Who Gets to Feel at Home Outdoors?**

Sturges et al. — 4 July 2026: Exploring the landscape of inclusive outdoor education in Australia and Canada: a rapid review.

Reynolds, Neller and Henry — 19 August 2026: Emotional benefits of Forest School programmes for primary school children.

Lousen et al. — 20 August 2026: Constraints on children's greenspace visits as perceived by children and parents: findings from a Danish national survey.





Te Whakatika (formerly known as Out and About) describes the start of a journey (to set out), but also means to make correct (to amend and prepare).

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