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# Outdoor Recreation-related Outdoor Education - Scope of the Research (1995-2010). Part Two.

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## Abstract

This is part two of an article on the scope of the New Zealand outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research published from January 1995 to June 2010. It draws on the literature covered the 2010 Sport and Recreation New Zealand-funded Outdoor Recreation Research Stocktake, which included outdoor education material. This part covers resources for outdoor recreation-related outdoor education, and impacts of and participation in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. It concludes with a summary of the scope of the research literature reported in both parts of the article.

**Keywords:** outdoor education, outdoor recreation, research, stocktake, scope

## Introduction

Part one of this article reported on the scope of the New Zealand research literature about outdoor recreation-related outdoor education management and delivery. This part follows with a focus on outdoor recreation-related outdoor education resources, impacts and participation. It concludes with a summary of the scope of the current outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature.

The stocktake was designed to provide a basis for development of a national outdoor recreation research agenda as well as to provide information to all researchers, policymakers and others on the state of the knowledge about

outdoor recreation. Outdoor education was included in the stocktake where it had relevance to outdoor recreation. In the stocktake reports, therefore, the outdoor education literature covered can be defined as only the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature (and not research literature relating to other aspects of outdoor education, as discussed in part one of this article). During the analysis phase of the stocktake study, the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature was analysed in some detail. Summaries of this detailed analysis are included in the stocktake report under each topic, however not all the detail was included for reasons of manageability. (This is consistent with the way the outdoor recreation material was treated.) This article provides the detailed analysis of the scope of the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education material in full. It comprises an overview of the scope of the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature alone - a 'birds-eye' view of the 226 research reports and articles produced over the 15 years from January 1995 to June 2010.

## **The Stocktake and the Outdoor Education Research Literature**

The purpose of the stocktake and the place of outdoor education research literature in it are outlined in part one. With that information in mind, it is sufficient to say here that the stocktake report was organised by a framework of three themes, each covering several topics. The first theme, covered in the previous part of the article, was the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education management and delivery system. The second and third themes, covered below, are: the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education resource and outdoor recreation-related outdoor education participation. The term 'outdoor recreation-related outdoor education' is used to distinguish the (arguably significant) portion of the outdoor education research covered by the outdoor recreation stocktake process from the wider body of outdoor education research. Notably, outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research does not include studies of learning psychology that are relevant to outdoor education, nor does it include research on environmental education except where it occurs in the context of outdoor education.

## **Resources and participation**

For each topic under these two themes an analysis of the scope of the research literature on that topic is provided. Topic definitions are included where these are not wholly self-evident or where they shed light on the way in which outdoor education literature was treated in the stocktake report. For cross-referencing purposes, the topic numbers given in brackets follow those used in the stocktake framework and report (Booth & Lynch, 2010; Booth et al., 2010), but the headings have been altered to reflect a focus just on outdoor recreation-related outdoor education literature.

## **Outdoor recreation-related outdoor education resource**

### ***Places (topics 8.1 - 8.10)***

In general terms, the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education literature has not been concerned with the particular places in which outdoor education is practiced. This is a major gap in the literature. In some cases, the place in which the outdoor activity occurs is not mentioned, although it can easily be inferred; these studies were included in the sub-topics below. Often, a general 'outdoors' is referred to, rather than specific locations or even types of locations; this research was not analysed under the topic 'place'. In some research, locations are mentioned but are either numerous or in other ways not sufficiently central to the study to warrant inclusion under the topic 'place'. A small number of studies refer to place in more than passing terms and these were included in the sub-topics below. In addition, there is an emerging line of research that begins with a focus on 'place' as a central element of outdoor education experience. Overall, there is very wide scope for place-oriented studies of outdoor education.

### ***Mountains (topic 8.1)***

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor education in mountain environments. Mountain environments include all places above the natural bush line.

We found only one study relating to mountains that could be included in the outdoor education literature. This dealt with decision-making in outdoor contexts, including mountaineering.

#### *Rural and Peri-urban (topic 8.2)*

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor education in non-urban environments that are not protected natural areas. Rural environments are defined as environments that are largely modified and in which agriculture /horticulture is the main human activity. We found two pieces of research relating to outdoor education in rural environments. One is small case study of rural primary school students and the other a national survey that had a low response rate. Follow-up studies in both cases would be useful.

#### *Coastal & marine (topic 8.4)*

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor education that occurs in coastal and marine environments. It includes all coastal and estuarine areas, but neither the tidal reaches of rivers nor fresh-water environments. Only one outdoor education study refers to coastal and marine environments and only by inference from the activity that is the focus of the study.

#### *Rivers & lakes (topic 8.5)*

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor recreation and outdoor education that occurs in the freshwater environments of river-ways and lakes. River-ways include streams, canals, and lakes include tarns. This topic does not include estuarine areas or river mouths that open on to beaches.

We found only four studies relating to rivers and lakes in the relevant outdoor education literature and three of these are included because they deal with learning of outdoor recreational skills (hence they deal with education in a broad sense). The research topics dealt with are: decision-making in outdoor contexts, including kayaking; development of confidence and competence in river recreation; the structure of subjective experiences in outdoor activities, including river surfing; and learning outcomes from a fresh-water ecology study (as part of an outdoor education programme).

### *Protected areas (topic 8.8)*

Protected areas include national parks and reserves, regional parks and reserves and other areas protected by legislation or regulation. Protected areas may be on land or at sea. This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor education in these protected areas.

We found two studies that referred to outdoor education occurring in protected natural areas. Both studies are limited by either relying on self-reports or having a low response rate and follow-up studies would be useful.

### *Wilderness (topic 8.10)*

This topic covers research relating to wilderness as a place. The concepts of 'wilderness', 'protected areas' and 'outdoors' overlap and we have not attempted to separate the research relating to one from the other; rather, we include in this topic any research that uses the word 'wilderness' in its title. This provides a guide to research focusing on the idea of 'wilderness' in particular.

We found three items relating to wilderness in an outdoor recreation-related outdoor educational context; all items focus on wilderness programmes for youth offenders. There appears to be little use of the term 'wilderness' as a key descriptor for other outdoor educational programme purposes. The research is robust but limited in sample size and control (no pre/post studies and no control groups). Larger scale, controlled, longitudinal studies are needed.

*Legal access (to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education resources) (topic 9.2)*

This topic deals with rights of public access to resources (primarily places) for outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. We found one piece of research on this topic. It is a small scale study and now quite dated. Follow up research would be useful.

*Facilities and services (topic 10.2)*

The focus of this topic is services provided for outdoor recreation-related outdoor education, including instructing services, other educational services, search and rescue, and transport services. We found only one relevant study, which is an evaluation of Learning Experiences Outside the Classroom provision. There is wide scope for research on this topic.

## **Impacts (Negative effects of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education)**

*Environmental impacts from outdoor recreation-related outdoor education (topic 11.1)*

The focus of this topic is the negative impacts that outdoor recreation-related outdoor education has on the physical environment.

We found no research directly focusing on environmental impacts of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education, but publications from two studies reported that environmental impacts of outdoor education tend to be the same as those of outdoor recreation. Comparative studies may be warranted. In addition, it may be beneficial to have a specific research focus on environmental impact of outdoor education, particularly at sites where outdoor education is the predominant use.

*Social impacts from outdoor recreation-related outdoor education:  
General (topic 11.2)*

The focus of this topic is the negative social impacts of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. It includes a diverse range of impacts that do not comfortably sit under other sub-headings, including economic impacts and the social impacts of loss of human life.

We found three relevant studies, all of which relate to safety in outdoor activities. With regard to studies of the social impact of loss of human life, the research to date focuses only on statistical analysis. Research into non-quantifiable social costs of fatalities in outdoor education is lacking. Studies of small outdoor centres and providers are also lacking.

## **Outdoor recreation-related outdoor education participants and participation**

*Youth participants (topic 13.1)*

This topic focuses on outdoor recreation-related outdoor education and young people, from preschoolers to age 18. It includes research on youth-at-risk.

Youth-focused studies dominate the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education literature, with two main sets of works. Just under half of the youth-focused material references youth but does not provide specific information about youth. This is often general literature about outdoor education in schools and other youth-oriented programmes. Just over half of the youth-focused literature consists of works that refer to youth in specific ways; it is often research in which young people are participants.

Over half of the literature that makes specific reference to youth reports findings from programme interventions, primarily with at-risk youth or young offenders. About one third consists of analyses of young people's views of school-based outdoor education programmes (usually at secondary school level). There are a small number of studies that fit neither of these categories.



We found very few studies that report findings about particular categories of youth. Apart from youth offenders, there is little distinction made between youth of different demographic backgrounds. Studies of therapeutic and rehabilitative programmes tend to utilise quantitative and evaluative methods while much of the research on school-based outdoor education is qualitative and exploratory. We found no comparisons of similar young people across different outdoor programmes despite large differences between programmes (e.g., long-duration residential programmes versus short-duration non-residential programmes).

### *Māori participants (topic 13.2)*

This topic covers engagement of New Zealand Māori in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education.

A small number of items discuss, but do not analyse, inclusion of Māoritanga in outdoor education programmes. We found only a few studies reporting on aspects of Māori engagement in outdoor education. The majority of the research that references Māori focuses on Māori as represented in social issue statistics (unemployment, youth-at-risk, offenders).

There is a clear need, and wide scope, for research into: cultural elements of outdoor education programmes; cultural effects on participants; culturally appropriate research approaches; and programme effects on, and experiences of, people who identify as Māori.

### *Participants of other ethnicities (topic 13.3)*

This topic addresses research on the engagement in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education of people who are neither Māori nor (European) Pakeha New Zealanders. This includes immigrants and those identifying as 'other ethnicities' who were born in New Zealand.

We found only two pieces of research on this topic. Both are preliminary, exploratory studies. There is wide scope for further research.

### *Gender & sexuality of participants (topic 13.4)*

This topic addresses issues of gender and sexual orientation in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education.

We found 3 studies on this topic, two on gender and one on sexual orientation. One of the gender items is a position paper. There is wide scope for further research on this topic.

### *People with disabilities as participants (topic 13.6)*

This topic addresses the engagement of people with disabilities in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education.

We found two items on this topic, one of which is a position paper. One field study reports findings from a specific geographical location and a small sample, so much more research is required before general findings can be made. There is very wide scope for research on this topic.

### *Incarcerated people as participants (topic 13.7)*

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor educational programmes for imprisoned (or otherwise confined) offenders.

We found 6 items on this topic. They relate to male youth sex offenders and mainly women prison inmates (one study included male prisoners). Only one of the studies provides results broken down into demographic categories. Repeat studies, particularly longitudinal, mixed-method studies, are needed in order to test the existing findings. Research on other categories of incarcerated populations is also needed, as is research into what makes these programmes effective.

## **Types of participation**

### *Commercial recreation/tourism (topic 14.1)*

This topic deals with research on activities and services that operate commercially, for profit. With regard to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education, it deals with commercial educational enterprises, including those that generally operate on a not-for-profit basis but have – or appear to have – some for-profit programmes (such as corporate client programmes). It does not include research that involved commercial operators as respondents in investigations of other topics (e.g., decision-making).

This topic is not a major focus for outdoor education researchers. We found two, quite different, position papers that are relevant. One deals with Outward Bound programmes and the other with corporate adventure training. Further research would be useful, especially research that extends existing critiques.

### *Educational institutions (topic 14.2)*

This topic deals with participation in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education via education institutions. Education institutions encompass early childhood education centres, kohanga reo, schools, kura, all tertiary institutions, and include private and public sector education institutions.

About half the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education literature relates to education institutions. Of the relevant literature, the majority (some two thirds) refers to education institutions only obliquely, by mentioning school students, for example, in a discussion of outdoor programme processes.

The literature that deals directly with education institutions does so with regard to: qualification structures, education for sustainability, particular institutional programmes, institutional responses to safety concerns, curriculum content and processes, and teacher preparation. In the main, it relates to schools. There is a small amount of literature relating to tertiary education institutions

and a few pieces on early childhood education institutions. We found no literature that deals specifically with outdoor recreation / education in Māori immersion education institutions.

We found no comprehensive analyses of institutions with regard to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education yet such analyses would be instructive in understanding how outdoor education is, or can be, organised and supported.

### *Instruction programmes (topic 14.3)*

This topic deals with outdoor recreation-related outdoor education participation in programmes or courses run by organisations that are not education institutions (as defined above). Activity included in this topic is generally focused on some sort of learning activity and this distinguishes it from the more recreational activity.

Two thirds of the literature on this topic deals with particular programmes or courses, or with courses and programmes run by particular organisations. The other one third references courses and programmes indirectly. None of the literature provides information about overall participation in programmes/courses, nor about overall participation in any one programme/course. Some information can be discerned about participation in particular types of programmes. Programmes/courses that involved central government agencies or had public funding have received much greater research attention than less conspicuous programmes/courses. Consequently, there are many programmes/courses about which we found no research on participation. Some of the literature focuses on programmes that no longer operate, making the body of literature now somewhat out of date.

### **Activities (topics 15.1 - 15.21)**

In general, the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education literature does not include studies of specific outdoor activities. Many outdoor education studies mention specific activities but the activities themselves are not significant features of the research; such studies are not included under this broad topic. Where specific activities are a significant focus in the objectives and/or findings of a piece of research, they are included under this broad topic. Most of the outdoor education-relevant items that are included here do not have activities as the main focus of investigation but refer to them in a significant way.

There is wide scope for research into specific activities in outdoor education.

#### *Environmental activities (topic 15.6)*

This topic covers environmental activities in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. It includes research that has a distinct focus on environmental activities, rather than just noting such activities in passing or referring to environmental education / environmentalism in general.

We found only a small number of items on this topic, three relating to schools and one relating to tertiary education. There is a paucity of research on this topic.

#### *Kayaking and Canoeing (topic 15.10)*

This topic covers kayaking and canoeing in all water environments. It includes out-rigger canoeing (and waka ama) and river surfing. It does not cover motorised boating.

We found three main studies relevant to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education on this topic. These investigate development of decision-making and judgement in outdoor leaders, psychological theories relating to outdoor recreational activities, and learning outcomes from recreational river activities.

### *Mountaineering (topic 15.12)*

This topic covers recreational mountaineering, including amateur ice climbing and alpine rock climbing and guided mountaineering (recreational for the client).

One study dealing with the development of decision-making and judgement in outdoor leaders is pertinent to outdoor education. It drew on a relatively large sample of a small population (expert mountaineers in New Zealand) so the findings can be considered relatively robust.

### *Play (topic 15.13)*

The scope of the Outdoor Recreation Research Stocktake (Booth & Lynch, 2010) did not extend to literature on recreational play because most of this refers to highly modified urban environments (such as playgrounds). However, there is an emerging body of research on early childhood outdoor education through outdoor play and this was included in the stocktake.

Two case studies focus on early education centres as outdoor education 'spaces'. Further research on outdoor activity and young children is warranted, especially studies investigating links between early experiences of outdoors and later recreational lifestyles.

### *Sailing (topic 15.16)*

This topic covers sailing on sea and inland waterways.

We found one major study of psychological effects of sailing. This relates to learning and development through outdoor educational experiences. Follow-up studies using control groups would advance this line of enquiry.

### *Tramping & walking (topic 15.20)*

This topic deals with tramping, bush walking and other walking in outdoor contexts as part of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. There is a large body of literature than mentions tramping and/or walking but we found only one, small scale, study that makes significant mention of tramping in outdoor education.

## ***Social & Demographic Dimensions of Outdoor Recreation-related Outdoor Education***

### *Population-based studies of outdoor education participation (topic 16.1)*

There are very few population-based studies of participation in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. The studies that do exist focus on schools and so do not provide comprehensive coverage of the outdoor education sector. There is a clear gap in the literature with regard to outdoor education.

### *Barriers & constraints to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education participation (topic 16.2)*

There is very little research specifically on barriers and constraints to outdoor recreation-related outdoor education participation. The most comprehensive and recent information available covers participation in school programmes. The data is focused on providers (i.e., barriers to provision of programmes) and participant-focused research is still needed. It is not clear that potential participants rely solely on school programmes for outdoor educational experiences.

We found no studies of barriers and constraints to skill development and personal development programmes run by organisations other than schools,

but we did find some commentary on barriers faced by some specific groups of people to outdoor programmes generally. More research is needed on barriers and constraints faced by all groups, including those mentioned below but extending to many others (such as recent immigrants and other ethnic minorities).

Some programmes, such as those that are therapeutic and rehabilitative in purpose, may be less obvious targets for this sort of research because clients are often referred to them, but there may be issues regarding access to these programmes by referring agencies. We found no studies on these programmes.

#### *Participants' values (topic 16.4)*

This topic focuses on research into values and meanings participants' ascribe to their outdoor recreation-related outdoor education experiences.

There is a small body of research literature that reports participant understandings of school outdoor education experiences. This recent work uses qualitative methods and more studies are required to broaden the scope of participants studied to date and refine research techniques. There is an emerging debate among researchers about the extent to which participants can separate values associated with outdoor education from values associated with related roles, such as school pupil or youth.

### ***Skills & Knowledge of Outdoor Recreation-related Outdoor Education Participants***

#### *Participants' skills (topic 17.1)*

This topic relates to the learning of leadership qualities and skills by participants in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education programmes, potentially but not exclusively for the purpose of becoming outdoor leaders themselves.



This topic does not cover leadership skills in outdoor programme leaders (because this is covered under the workforce topic). It does not include research that mentions leadership skills in passing. Leadership qualities and skills includes physical skills and attitudes relevant to leadership.

There is very little research specifically on leadership skills and skill development in programme participants in general. Most of the research on leadership relates to outdoor programme leaders and trainee outdoor programme leaders. Some of this research points out implications for general participant learning and development. There is, however, a large gap in the literature.

#### *Knowledge about outdoor recreation opportunities (topic 17.2)*

This topic deals with outdoor education participants' knowledge and awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities. We found only one study on this topic. There is a clear and significant gap in the literature with regard to this topic.

### **Benefits of Outdoor Recreation-related Outdoor Education**

#### *Benefits: Health (topic 18.2)*

This topic covers the benefits arising from outdoor recreation-related outdoor education for personal health. It includes physical health and mental health/mental illness, as well as specific psychometrics (such as self-confidence and self-esteem). It does not cover general social and personal development.

There is a small body of research on this topic. It includes studies that report quantitative data on psychological variables and more general studies of the types of health effects programmes are likely to produce, in roughly equal proportions. Physical health benefits of outdoor programmes have not attracted research attention.

The populations that have been studied are young adults in general outdoor activity programmes, youth at risk (including specific studies of substance abusers, sex offenders, and the unemployed in this age group), and incarcerated adults. The majority of the research is on groups implicated in social issues. Health benefits for the majority of outdoor programme participants, including those in school-based outdoor education, have received very little research attention.

The general effects of outdoor programmes on psychometric measures such as self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence appear to be well-established, though there is a need for more work in this area because controlled (experimental design) studies measuring long-term effects are still not common, and we found no comparative studies across different interventions.

There is some research into the relationships between programme effects and programme elements (for example, programme content, duration, staffing, timing, number of participants) but much more of this is needed. We found only one study comparing a shorter-duration with a longer-duration programme of a similar style.

There are only 2-3 outdoor programmes that have been studied multiple times, using different approaches and/or different foci. For these programmes, more robust claims about programme outcomes can be made. There is wide scope for health benefit research on programmes running in schools, at smaller outdoor centres and in youth and community organisations.

Overall, there is insufficient high quality research on any one specific group of participants to draw generalised conclusions.

### ***Benefits: Social (topic 18.3)***

This topic deals with the benefits arising from outdoor recreation-related outdoor education for social issues such as employment, crime or social integration. It covers individual social development (i.e., interpersonal development such as respect and tolerance for others) only where social development is specifically implicated in social issues.

There is very little research on this topic. Most studies relate to youth-at-risk or offenders and the social issues of crime, violence, unemployment. We found very little research on social integration of different ethnic groups; the studies we did find are preliminary reviews of relevant literature only. Two studies address integration of people with disabilities into mainstream outdoor activity programmes. Just one article addresses inclusion of diverse sexual orientations in outdoor programmes. We found no studies comparing effectiveness of outdoor programmes with other interventions for social outcomes. There is wide scope for research on this topic.

### *Benefits: Learning (topic 18.4)*

The topic deals with cognitive development and knowledge acquisition of any sort. Learning is influenced by affective factors (attitudes toward learning, for example) and environmental influences; where reported, these factors are included in discussion under this topic.

Overall, the research on learning benefits from outdoor recreation-related outdoor programmes is patchy and disjointed, with few clusters of studies on particular programmes. Some non-school programmes are building comprehensive research results from multiple studies. There are many outdoor centres and programmes not represented in the research literature at all.

More recent studies attempt to discover links between specific curriculum elements, including physical environments, and particular outcomes. Much more of this type of research is needed before generalisable results emerge. Research is needed on negative outcomes from outdoor programmes. Research comparing learning effects of outdoor and other programmes is needed.

There is little research on learning outcomes for specific groups (youth-at-risk is an exception, though more research on that group is also required). We found very little research targeting particular learning outcomes; for

example, we found no studies specifically targeting physical fitness or skill learning and only one study reporting academic outcomes from school outdoor education programmes. There is wide scope for research on learning outcomes, particularly targeted studies that build on prior research.

### **An addendum: Environmental learning.**

We found no literature on the direct environmental benefits of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. That is, we found no literature on how outdoor recreation-related outdoor education directly leads to environmental enhancement. This is a gap in the literature. However, we did find literature on the role of outdoor education in environmental learning. This was not considered to be sufficiently relevant to the stocktake to be included in its final versions, but because it was collated during the stocktake process and may be of interest to many outdoor education researchers, it is added here.

The literature on this topic falls into three main categories: half is made up of literature about the role of outdoor education for environmental learning which, it is argued, ultimately benefits the physical environment. These are mainly position papers. Research about how to implement education for environmental learning within outdoor education programmes (mainly case studies by one of two authors) makes up one quarter of this literature. Research about the environmental learning effects of outdoor programmes makes up just under one quarter.

There are many gaps in this literature, notably: no controlled, longitudinal studies of the environmental benefits from outdoor education programmes at any educational level; few other studies of environmental learning benefits from outdoor education programmes, especially at tertiary level, early childhood level, or beyond natural environments; no studies into the specific experiences that bring about environmental learning effects in outdoor programme participants; and no studies of what constitutes effective environmental learning in terms of content, duration, activity, timing.

## Conclusion

This overview of the scope of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature highlights what is known and not known about relevant outdoor education with respect to each of the topics included in the Outdoor Recreation Research Stocktake (Booth & Lynch, 2010) and one additional topic (environmental learning). Overall, the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research literature can be described as:

- not particularly large but fairly diverse
- highly fragmented - there are many gaps and many topics need to be studied at much greater depth
- neither cohesive nor systematic - there are few programmes of research on outdoor recreation-related outdoor education topics and little apparent strategic direction in the body of literature overall
- generally concerned with singular, specific, often short-term, educational programmes
- limited in scope and outlook: there are few interdisciplinary or international studies and there is more focus on the what goes on within outdoor recreation-related outdoor education than on connections between that outdoor education and other aspects of society.

Issues of risk management dominate the literature on the outdoor recreation-related outdoor education management and delivery system. Much less attention has been paid to sector structure and coordination, legal issues (apart from those relating to risk), policy and planning, organisational governance and leadership, workforce development, research coordination and processes, promotion, investment, considerations of social change and future-casting, management tools, sustainability and cultural interactions. 'Product' development is under-researched, too, though to some extent the substantial body of literature on curriculum planning might be considered to cover it (if curriculum is considered a 'product' as well as a process).

There is very little research on specific places and types of places in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education. Similarly, there is almost no work on access to places for outdoor recreation-related outdoor education, on specific activities in, nor on facilities and services for, that outdoor education. Negative impacts of relevant outdoor education have received almost no attention. There is no outdoor recreation-related outdoor education research relating to wildlife.

Participation in outdoor recreation-related outdoor education has received some attention, though major gaps still exist. Most of the research does not distinguish between types of participants; exceptions are youth-at-risk and incarcerated populations. There are significant bodies of literature relating to educational institutions and instructional programmes but in both cases it usually relates indirectly. That is, the literature refers to educational institutions or instructional programmes, for example, but does in most cases not make those institutions or programmes the focus of study.

The social and demographic dimensions of outdoor recreation-related outdoor education are not well covered by research, nor are the skills and knowledge that participants might accrue from their outdoor recreation-related outdoor education experiences. Some of the benefits of relevant outdoor education have received research attention, notably learning and, to lesser extents, social and health benefits. Economic and environmental benefits have not been studied.

There is wide scope for research on all outdoor recreation-related outdoor education topics. Future research may benefit from strategic approaches that make good use of existing knowledge and build on it.

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# Student perspectives of a place-responsive outdoor education programme

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## Abstract

There is a growing recognition of the role that places have in influencing learning in outdoor education. Being aware of the importance of place encourages the development of outdoor programmes that respond to the uniqueness of the locality and the community. This article investigates student perspectives of a place-responsive outdoor education programme. The findings indicate that this approach is a viable form of outdoor education practice that has the potential to foster positive interpersonal relationships and strengthen participants' appreciation of, and attachment to, place(s). These findings contribute to a growing body of literature demonstrating that place-responsive outdoor education has the potential to enrich participants' understanding and enjoyment of places in addition to providing a challenging and enjoyable outdoor experience.

**Keywords:** Place-responsive, student perspectives, curriculum.

## Introduction

Advocates of a more place-responsive outdoor education have tended to draw on tertiary students' written and oral accounts to substantiate the value of such an approach (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). This paper builds on the emerging body of work by investigating secondary school aged students' perceptions of an outdoor education programme that was designed to engage in and with local places. In doing so it seeks to add to a small, but growing body of literature focused on students' perspectives of their outdoor education experiences.



This paper draws on data generated as part of a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) involving Ngaruawahia High School and Mount Maunganui College during 2010-2011. The TLRI project investigated student and teacher perspectives of place-responsive outdoor education programmes. I have discussed various aspects of this project in other publications; teachers' understandings of outdoor education appeared in a case study published in *A pedagogy of place* (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) and perspectives of students from Ngaruawahia High School was published in *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Irwin, Straker, & Hill, 2012). The data used in this paper is drawn from student interviews following the year 12 outdoor education camp conducted at Mount Maunganui College.

The specific questions that framed this research were;

1. What were the students' perspectives of participation in a journey style place-responsive programme in their local environment?
2. Did this programme encourage new perspectives of local place(s) to emerge?
3. Is a place-responsive approach a feasible way to conduct outdoor education experiences in the secondary school context?

As a new or different approach to the provision of outdoor experiences both the teachers and I were keen to understand how a more place-responsive programme might be received by the participants. The study is important in that it adds to the nascent body of research on place-responsive outdoor education and in doing so it responds to Zink's (2011) request to hear student perspectives of place-responsive programmes. It also aims to highlight the value of student perspectives as a means to enrich curriculum development.

The paper begins with a brief introduction to place-responsive pedagogy and the importance of student perspectives in curriculum development. A brief description of the programme is included followed by analysis of the interviews and discussion of the emergent themes.

## The concept of place

On a practical level we know that different places are associated with different activities; for example, our workplace, our home, or the local shopping mall involve different ways of interacting based on the physical and social context (Relph, 1976). Cameron (2003b) has suggested that place has to do “with the relationship between people and their local setting for their experience and activity” (p. 3). For example, many of us will have strong attachments to places that resonate with a special event or time in our lives. Places such as a lakeside camping spot, a swimming spot in the local creek, or even the school ground, may all bring to light different emotions and sense of connection or belonging.

According to Relph (1976) the concept of place is not restricted to a location, rather it is the integration of elements of nature and culture that form a unique fingerprint. This fingerprint distinguishes a particular place from all other places. As Relph (1976) states, “A place is not just the ‘where’ of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon” (p. 3). This combination of culture and nature means that places are not merely backdrops to learning but are an integral element in what might be taught and learnt and how this learning might occur. Gruenewald (2003) states that “places *teach* as about how the world works and how our lives fit into spaces that we occupy. Further, places *make* us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped” (p. 621). The pedagogical role of place has, until relatively recently, been silenced in discussions of teaching and learning in outdoor education. Outdoor education does have the potential to play an important role in connecting people and places in a way that can enrich learning for both individuals, communities, and the places in which they live (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

## Place-responsive pedagogy

There is a growing body of literature on place-based educational initiatives (e.g., G. Smith, 2007; Sobel, 2005; Tooth & Renshaw, 2009). Place-based

approaches include community gardens, local ecological restoration projects, writing of community histories, and involvement in local social action programmes. Place-based outdoor education programmes may not necessarily be place-responsive. For example it could be claimed that residential programmes are place-based outdoor education, which in a limited sense is correct. However being based at a residential centre does not necessarily elicit a place-responsive approach. Outdoor centres that conduct activities such as a ropes course, abseiling or tubing regardless of geographical or seasonal variations exemplify this decontextualised approach to outdoor education (Brown, 2008, 2012). Being in a specific location does not necessarily require an empathetic response to the particular cultural, historical, or ecological conditions. As Cameron (2003a) reminds us, "the word 'responsive' carries with it the impetus to act, to respond" (p. 180). To respond is to enter into a relationship of mutual interdependence that requires sensitivity and empathy for place(s) and those who dwell there; both now and in the future (Brown, 2012). Being place-responsive has the potential to be inclusive of Māori students' world-views given Māoridom's long and "well rehearsed traditional and historically affinity to place based education practices" (Penetito, 2004, p. 18).

If places, and our relationship with them, contribute to individual and communal identity how might outdoor educators encourage and enable students to feel safe and comfortable in place(s)? How can we expect students to care for place(s) if they have no attachment nor commitment to place(s)? These are challenging questions for outdoor educators if it is believed that learning outcomes are best achieved in remote or wilderness environments far removed from the everyday lives of most students. Brookes (1994) described such approaches as being "short raids on the 'bush' as strangers" (p. 31) which may hinder rather than aid in developing a sense of connection. If we believe that outdoor education requires a wilderness experience, which frequently involves travel from the urban environment in which most of us live, are we destined to remain "strangers" thus limiting the opportunity to develop connections that are central to the formation of personal and communal identity? An alternative approach is to conduct

outdoor education experiences in areas that are closer to the students "everyday lives" so that this sense of being a stranger is replaced by a sense of belonging and connection.

## **Student perspectives**

It has been argued that insufficient attention is given to student perspectives in the educational process (Dyson, 2006). In the outdoor education context it has been suggested that students' comments about their experiences have not always been accorded sufficient merit (Zink, 2005). The voice(s) of students often go unheard in outdoor education research yet there is potentially much to be gained from listening to the experiences of students in informing curriculum design and implementation (Brown, 2012). Whilst research on student perspectives is relatively limited there is a growing recognition that students' experiences are worthy of consideration in understanding both what they learnt and what they thought of their outdoor education experiences (e.g., Beames & Ross, 2010; Brown, 2012; Carlson & McKenna, 2000; Davidson, 2001; Dyson, 1995; Hastie, 1995; Johnson & Wattchow, 2004; E. Smith, Steel, & Gidlow, 2010; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Zink, 2005).

Biddulph (2011) has noted that whilst student voice has become integral to many aspects of school life such as student councils, "students have had little opportunity to express their perspectives in the school curriculum" (p. 381). Taking students' perspectives into account opens up possibilities for students to be actively engaged in the construction of the curriculum (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). Pissanos and Allison (1993) have urged teachers to inquire into "students' construction and reconstruction of meaning" (p. 434) so that they are better informed and more able to meet the needs of learners.

One way to ascertain students' perspectives is to conduct interviews thereby assisting educators to gain an insight into how students understand both content and pedagogical strategies. Graham (1995a) suggests that this approach may act as a catalyst to modify content and teaching practices to

more fully engage students. There is solid body of literature that acknowledges the value of seeking to understand how students' perspectives might inform teachers' practice (Dyson, 1995, 2006; Graham, 1995b; Pissanos & Allison, 1993). Taking account of students' perspectives, as a way to enhance learning, is one of the signposts of effective pedagogy outlined in The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Whilst attempts to ascertain student voice(s) are admirable the notion that "true" or "authentic" perspectives will emerge is not without its problems. As Brooker and Macdonald (1999) have noted "the notion of securing and understanding all students' consistent voices across time and contexts is flawed" (p. 88). They noted that a number of research traditions (e.g., liberal, critical, feminist and post-structuralist) have problematised the issue of power differentials in interviews and what constitutes, and legitimates the voice(s) that will be heard. Thus in considering student perspectives it behoves us to be mindful of the multifarious and complex nature of interpreting interview data gathered for a specific purpose in which interviewees and interviewer adapt particular roles and identities. It is one of the hallmarks of a place-responsive approach that participants are encouraged and given the opportunity to enter into a relationship with people and places where the outdoor education programme occurs. Taking students' perspectives seriously will hopefully enrich future programme development and be illustrative of a responsive approach that accords value to students' experiences.

## **The place-responsive journey**

The journey was devised by Jane Townsend, a teacher at Mount Maunganui College, and was developed after discussions and readings around place-responsive approaches to outdoor education. Jane had read extensively around these issues as a participating teacher in the TLRI project and as part of her postgraduate studies. The year 12 students on these journeys (n=42) were enrolled in a 24 credit National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Outdoor Education course. Students on the journey were assessed on Achievement Standard 91334; *Consistently demonstrate*

*social responsibility through applying a social responsibility model in physical activity* (3 credits). The elements of the journey were selected on the basis of geographical location, (in relation to the school), mode of transport (e.g., walking, cycling or kayaking) and cultural/historical connections. The journey incorporated multiple ways of experiencing or getting to know place(s); embodied experiences (cycling, walking, kayaking), scientific explanations (e.g., geological explanations of land formation), social history (e.g., farming practices in the Papamoa Hills), and Māori world views (that provided an alternative explanation of geological features and the meaning of these for local people).

Mauao ('The Mount') is a defining feature of the regional topography and Jane was conscious of constructing a journey that incorporated physical, visual and metaphorical connections to this 'guardian' of the journey. The journey was run on two occasions in response to logistical constraints. Each group was accompanied by two teachers, two support staff and a vehicle.

### *Day one.*

Leg 1: A walk from the school to Matapihi Peninsula

Leg 2: Kayak from Matapihi Peninsula across the Maungatawa tidal flats to Welcome Bay.

Leg 3: A cycle ride to Romai marae. On the way students rode to Summerhill Farm Park, where they walked to a pa site in the Papamoa Hills. They then rode to Kaiate Falls for a short bush walk. They then rode around Kopukairua to Tahuwhakatiki (Romai) marae which overlooks the harbour. Kopukairua and Mauao (the guardians of the journey) were clearly visible from the marae. The group participated in a Powhiri and stayed in the whareniui overnight.

### *Day two.*

Leg 1: A walk from the marae to the kayaks followed by a paddle to Sulphur Point which included paddling under the Maungatapu, Matapihi and Tauranga Harbour bridges.

Leg 2: From Sulphur Point the group cycled around the Waikareo estuary, over the harbour bridge, and finished at school.

Due to unsuitable weather aspects of the second journey were changed. For example, on the last day the group cycled to Mauao ('The Mount'), walked to the summit and then rode back to school.

As part of the journey students were tasked with preparing a small presentation on a physical or cultural feature that they would encounter on their travels. Students had some class time prior to the journey to prepare and they made their presentations individually or in groups of up to three. Students could choose their own topic or select from some examples supplied. Options included;

Māori legends of Tauranga Moana

How did Welcome Bay get its name?

What is the impact of the wharf on the Tauranga Harbour?

Pre-colonial history of the Papamoa Hills/Pa site

The history of Kaiate Falls

The environmental impact of the Te Puke Quarry.

These presentations encouraged students to research places that they may not have visited before or to uncover new information about familiar places that they may have taken for granted.

## Data generation

Data was generated via interviews six weeks after the conclusion of the journey. Students who completed the journey were invited to participate and ten indicated a willingness to be involved. Interviews were conducted in pairs by a research assistant who also transcribed the audio-files. The interviewer was known to some of the students as he had accompanied them on their journey. Spending time accompanying and building rapport with the students was an attempt to break down the barrier of researcher and researched. Admittedly this cannot be achieved quickly nor does it guarantee authentic voice but it is an acknowledgement of the need to build trust and some sense of commonality through shared experiences. The style of interview was informal yet guided by an outline of topics for discussion. This approach has been described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Wheaton, 2000, p. 257).

The study employed a hermeneutic approach to the generation and analysis of data (Hill, 2010; Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998). The transcripts were read numerous times and were inductively analysed to ascertain emerging themes. This initially occurred at the level of an in-depth examination of individual interview transcripts, which Patterson et al. (1998) refer to as the idiographic level. This process was repeated across the five transcripts to then develop a "nomothetic (across individuals) understanding of the data. In a nomothetic analysis the goal is to identify themes that are relevant beyond the unique experience of one individual" (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 429). The "reasonableness" of the identified themes was confirmed by a secondary analysis conducted by another researcher.

## Findings and discussion

The following themes emerged through the data analysis phase of the research.



### **Opportunities afforded by connections/familiarity.**

Conducting the journey in the local environment allowed students to incorporate their out of school knowledge into the school setting. For example, one student explained how,

*we went kayaking and the kayaking was pretty good for me cause where we went kayaking is where I go fishing and stuff so I knew the area quite well and I was the leader of the group, so I got to lead the way. (1: S2)*

Perhaps one of the more significant manifestations of connection was evidenced during the overnight stay at the marae. One of the students (pseudonym Andrew) on the trip had family affiliations with this marae. Andrew had spent considerable amounts of time there and was familiar with protocols and day-to-day practicalities of being on the marae. He expressed pleasure at being able to share his knowledge of his "home" with his peers. It was his place and he felt comfortable there. In the several of the interviews the other students referred to it as "Andrew's marae". They appreciated his guidance and they saw him in a different light. When speaking about the marae stay one of the other students stated, (referring to Andrew);

*That this is like where I am from, this is me, and for us it was cool to learn about that, in like our group, that was cool. (2:S1)*

Several students spoke about knowing where they were at all times, about being in places that some of them knew well. As one student stated;

*Yeah you could always see your home, like always the place that you live... you still knew that you were away from home but it was still like, you kind of feel home in this area... you could always see the Mount... I think that was really good. (4:S1)*

The value of being in a familiar environment disrupts notions that an unfamiliar environment is an essential element of effective outdoor education

programmes. These students' ability to see connections and continuity between their everyday lives and their outdoor journey finds support in outdoor learning literature. For example, Beames and Ross's (2010) research also gives weight to the viability and value of programmes that take place in local communities "as opposed to far-off landscapes that have little personal relevance for participants" (p. 105).

While some students had an existing connection with specific locations visited during the journey, others recognised that this might be the start of an ongoing relationship with places with which they were not familiar. Several students realised that, given the accessibility of the places that they incorporated in the journey that it would be possible to return on another occasion.

*And you can actually go back and visit them so that's pretty good.(1:S1)*

*And because it is not that far, we can go there again... you can because it is not that far away and now you know where those places are. (3:S1)*

Whether or not the students will return to these places with family or friends remains to be seen. However students know that it is possible to revisit these places. In my case study of tertiary students (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) some students did return to places that they visited on their outdoor education journey. At the other end of the educational spectrum Beames and Ross's (2010) research revealed that some of the participants (8-11 year olds) did "undertake their own adventures outside of their formal schooling" (p. 106).

Interestingly several students adopted a fairly pragmatic approach in regards to the potential positives of a locally based journey. One student commented that she thought this programme would be *a bit cheaper, like if it was something else I think we would have paid a little bit more* (1:S1). Whilst another (perhaps more pragmatic student) noted that,

*if anything went wrong you are not far away from help or you are like just close to things you may need, if something did go wrong... so that's probably good for a school camp idea. (3:S2)*

The concept of staying close to home was not initially greeted with enthusiasm by all students.

*At first I was kind of thinking oh we are not going anywhere for our camp it was like why aren't we going somewhere cool? but when you were actually doing it, it was, ... it was actually quite good. (3: S2)*

This initial disappointment mirrors a comment made by a tertiary student in an earlier study (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In both instances the initial hesitation was replaced by an acknowledgement that engaging with the local and being open to what is possible on one's back door step can be both educationally valuable and "quite good".

### ***Discovering/appreciating new places in their locale***

One of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the journey was the discovery and appreciation of new "hidden away" places in the local area. In contrast to travelling by car or public transport students encountered places at a slower pace that enabled different experiences. By cycling, walking or kayaking students gained access to places they may not have visited previously, or had rushed passed on their way to somewhere else. Students expressed surprise at the beauty in the normal or everyday environment where they lived. One student described finding new places as *like the best thing* (3:S2).

The following quotes convey sentiments that were mentioned by a number of students.

*Yeah, the main thing for me, it was like, it was just really good to be close to home. All this surrounds you and you didn't even know it. Experiencing it - it's pretty wow. (2:S2)*

*We saw like a lot of the area here where we live. Like I didn't see any of it before so it was pretty cool. I think without a camp I wouldn't have seen all that stuff that we saw, so it was pretty good. (3:S1)*

*This trip kind of taught of the meaning of the place that we live in and we should actually appreciate it more. (1:S1)*

One student stated that her experiences on the journey had led to a different perspective on the local landmarks. She described how prior to the trip she would travel around the harbour and *just take it for granted* whereas:

*now that we have biked it or walked it ourselves you really have a feeling for it. And even now like when we drive over the harbour bridge I'll say oh I biked that it was pretty cool, you have a different feeling for it. (3:S1)*

This student captures the sense of the embodied experiential aspects of learning that is a potential strength of outdoor education. Encouraging and valuing sensual and embodied ways of knowing is central to developing place-responsiveness. As Wattchow and Brown (2011) contend, "It is the learner's bodies that remain the ultimate centre of their learning. Learning cannot be considered separate from their embodied interactions and connections with place" (p. 73). Having a "different feeling for it" is made possible by the rich interplay of the senses and the body in a particular place. Another student commented that the learning was enriched by how places where encountered ... *the way you did it was the new experience not where it was...* (3:S2). The slower, physically active modes of moving also appeared to bring the 'everyday' into focus or to recast it in a way that encouraged students to think about the places in which they live.

*I have lived here forever, like all my life but I still haven't paid any attention whatsoever to like, where I live, which I had not even bothered to think about before that, so that was pretty cool, just actually realising that. (3: S2)*

Learning more about their locality might be seen as a modest accomplishment. However assisting students to understand more about the world which they inhabit is arguable one of the educator's primary tasks (Beames & Ross, 2010). For example, Berthold-Bond (2000) has suggested that one of Leopold's greatest legacies was to encourage a love and respect for place, whilst Cameron (2001) argued that "the task of the educator is how to foster an inclusive sense of place in students so that their love of wild places can extend to care for all places, even neglected city spaces" (p. 28). While developing an affinity and attachment for a place is a complex and multidimensional process (Smaldone, Harris, & Sanyal, 2008) it would appear that the journey facilitated opportunities for the participants to see familiar places in a different light. In doing so this journey contributed to the multi-layered experiences of the places they inhabit. One potential benefit of this approach is the possibility that students' environmental attitudes and behaviour might be altered. Whilst explicit mention of an enhanced environmental ethic did not feature strongly in the interviews, research with similarly aged young people has shown that "attachment to a local natural resource can influence environmentally responsible behavior (ERB) in an individual's everyday life" (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001, p. 16).

### ***Stories in context: Enriching learning***

As mentioned previously, students were required to make a presentation about the places that they visited. Often these presentations involved the sharing of story about how particular places got their names. Students frequently drew upon narratives that explained the significance of places to the local people. Several students raised this 'in context' story-telling as being a meaningful way to remember why places were important and as a means to connect various places with myths/legends. This "storying" of the landscape offered an alternative way of connecting apparently disparate elements. For example one of the students researched the stories of the whales in Tauranga harbour and commented on how *it's really cool to actually go to the marae and see the carvings*. The student went on to say that *yeah just even listening to everyone's things (talks) have made it a bit more meaningful, like actually gave it a bit more purpose to being there (3:S2)*

The inclusion of "other" ways of knowing, in this case Te ao Māori, was a conscious pedagogical decision on the part of the teachers. The linking of stories that were researched with physically being in those places provided a strong learning experience.

*And finding like more out, like more about ourselves, like where we live, like I said I have been here all my life and I had never been to any of those places or heard any of those stories. So I think, to me the main idea behind it was like, getting to know more about my culture and where I live and the stories behind it. (4:S2)*

*There was so much things that I didn't even know that were down here, and got to understand the history around it. (1:S1)*

*And then to like hear the stories behind it, that was pretty cool too. (4:S2)*

In another interview the following conversation occurred;

*(S2) I really like how we each had to like research something, because then it was cool, we all kind of got a chance to*

*(S1) Learn something*

*(S2) Yeah to learn something and to like as students talk to other students about what we learnt*

*(S1) I think it was a good idea to actually like do some research and talk at the place where actually all this history happened, so you could actually see and listen to the stories... Because sometimes you just hear the stories and you are like after a while you don't know it any more like. But I can still remember like nearly all of the stories because I saw it and listened to it, I think that was really good.*

The role of stories in fostering a connection to place has been discussed at length elsewhere (Baker, 2005; Stewart, 2008). However it is important to reiterate that "storytelling is not a frivolous or fanciful endeavour, it is a serious attempt to connect and make sense of where we and who we are" (Watthow & Brown, 2011, p. 190). The students' presentations were designed to elicit a range of different stories; Māori creation stories, accounts of European settlement, and scientific narratives of geology and botany. Each has a role to play in deepening an appreciation and understanding of place and peoples role in creating places. For as Park (1995, p. 11) reminds us, "A landscape whose story is told is harder to dismiss."

### **Social interaction**

This was frequently mentioned as being one of the highlights of the journey. Working or being together appeared to be valued by the students. Examples came up several times;

*yeah I think it is the best group thing that you can do, when you get a trip like that.(4:S1)*

*The stay at the marae was also another highlight for me because our group, we all got along quite well, so we were all just chilling which was, after the long day our group just got along, which was real cool. (2:S1)*

The importance placed on friendships and social interaction is consistent with Smith, Steel and Gidlow's (2010) findings that highlighted how students associate outdoor education experiences with enhanced opportunities for social engagement. Their research with year 10 students showed a consistent pattern of belief that "camp was about social interaction" (p. 144). Zink and Burrows (2008) research revealed that while camp activities might be fun, "many of the things that were important to the students occurred in-between the activities.... The in-between times were also the spaces where they made friendships they felt could last a lifetime" (p. 157-8). The students clearly

enjoyed the opportunity to mix with their peers in a supportive and informal educational environment. Creating opportunities for interaction over meals or outside structured activities might be considered lost opportunities for learning by an instructor or teacher but this is not necessarily the perspective of students.

### **Challenge**

Several students spoke of the physical challenges presented during the two days. Reid Road, a steep ascent in the Papamoa hills came in for special mention. It provided both a mental and physical challenge for a number of students on the cycling leg of the journey. Despite being difficult, the elation at completing the ride and taking in the views was also mentioned by several students as a highlight of their trip. One student commented that successfully riding up this hill was one of the highlights of the trip and it gave her *"more confidence in what you can do"*.

Another student talked of the bike ride as a lesson in *"not giving up"*. The challenge of the hills coupled with the encouragement from her peers led her to believe that she was more capable than she initially realised. This experience reinforced for her the importance of attempting what might initially appear to be difficult, if not impossible tasks. The trip confirmed her belief that the overall theme of the class was about *"trying new things and pushing yourself"*. One student also spoke of the challenge of looking *"beyond yourself"* and adjusting your pace to match that of the group.

*You have to work as a team, it's not just about yourself... you see other people aren't coping with it so you hang back a bit with them and stuff. You know you should. It makes you aware of others. (5:S1)*



The lack of overtly 'adventurous' activities (e.g., those involving height or technical equipment) might suggest that this style of programme lacked uncertainty and risk which are often seen as central elements of outdoor education (see Brown & Fraser, 2009). However as Beames and Ross (2010, p. 106) state,

It is arguable that these journeys in local neighbourhoods might actually have a much higher degree of authentic adventure than highly regulated ropes course and rock climbing sessions that are common at traditional residential centres. After all, Outdoor Journeys are unpredictable ... and involve real-world risks that need to be managed (e.g., cars, exposure to cold).

This move from highly orchestrated outdoor challenges, which require constant supervision, towards more "real world" encounters where students can be involved in the decision making process has stronger educational foundations (Brown & Fraser, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

This small case study sought to ascertain students' perspectives of a journey style place-responsive outdoor education programme. Of the five themes that emerged, three were related to the concept of place and are linked to the particularities of the Mount Maunganui/Papamoa area: Opportunities afforded by connections/familiarity; discovering/appreciating new places; and stories in context. The other two themes: social interaction and challenge are less context specific and have been identified as being valued by students in other residential camp settings (e.g., E. Smith et al., 2010). As the students reported, a place-responsive approach did not mean that the programme lacked challenge, which is perhaps a concern of advocates of more activity focused programmes. Similarly social aspects of a communal experience are not lost through the absence of a wilderness experience.

The three themes relating to place are likely to be the result of the pedagogical approach purposefully employed by the lead teacher. Whilst this is a small sample of the overall number of participants, the findings indicate that the programme did encourage positive perspectives of local places to emerge. This is encouraging as research supports the benefits of emotional connections to the local environment as a means to improve responsible environmental action (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). In addition elements of personal and social development were also reported by students. Although I am conscious of not overstating the case for a place-responsive approach I am mindful that while, "the primary emphasis of this hermeneutic research approach is on understanding the nature of experience in the specific context in which it occurred, the possibility for gaining more general insights... exists" (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 446).

Given the findings presented above and the results of a similar case study on secondary students (Brown, 2012) it is reasonable to assert that a place-responsive approach is a feasible way to conduct outdoor education experiences in the secondary school context. These findings illustrate how a place-responsive outdoor education programme aligns with the vision, principles and key competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The New Zealand Curriculum gives schools the opportunity to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of their community. This journey style programme was developed by the lead teacher with the students,

community, and local environment very much at the forefront of her mind. As a new initiative the perspectives of the students has the potential to shape the formation of a modified and refined curriculum in future years. Responsiveness lies at the heart of place-responsive pedagogy, thus incorporating student perspectives in the process of curriculum development can enrich the experiences of future participants. The findings of the case study indicate that place-responsive outdoor education has the potential to engage students in different ways of thinking, knowing and being in places. Acknowledging the pedagogical role of place facilitates opportunities to develop outdoor programmes that have the potential to enrich the learning experiences of students.

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