



Developing a place-based approach to outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction

This project will work with teachers to ascertain their existing understandings of outdoor education pedagogy. Working collaboratively the research partnership will explore possibilities made available through localising teaching and learning in a manner which is responsive to the schools' particular contexts. This place-based approach has the potential to reshape current outdoor education practices.

Aims

Outdoor education has a long history in schooling and it is generally believed that it can contribute to students' personal and social development. To this end programmes are often conducted by specialist providers with technical expertise at purpose built centres. Featuring activities requiring a high level of technical skill or equipment (e.g., a ropes course) such centres continue to serve a role in outdoor education provision. This project seeks to reframe how outdoor education is often practiced by working with teachers to implement programmes that are contextualised to take into account the 'places' within which the school and their community are situated. Drawing on the local, the project seeks to understand how teachers can be empowered to conduct programmes that engaging, provide opportunities for ongoing involvement, are easily accessible, and are affordable.

This study involves four teachers and 20 students from two secondary schools in the Waikato/Bay of Plenty area. It aims to:

1. Understand teachers' existing conceptions of teaching and learning in outdoor education;
2. Work with teachers to explore where they commonly conduct outdoor experiences and investigate how these places may be made "more visible" in the teaching and learning process.
3. Jointly develop, implement and review a programme that is conscious of, and responds to, place;
4. Gain an understanding of students' experiences of a place-based approach.

Why is this research important?

The project not only addresses current gaps in the research literature, but it seeks to move beyond existing practices which have dominated outdoor education in New Zealand.

This project does not replicate an existing study in a different context nor does it intend to impose on teachers a model "from on high". It aims to work with teachers to understand the local context and develop teaching and learning practices to enrich students' experiences and broaden the outcomes of participation in outdoor education. The proposed project moves beyond theorizing about the benefits of place-based approaches and engages with teachers in their practice.

What we plan to do

Data

Data will be collected from:

1. Initial teacher-researcher discussions. These conversations will focus on current practices and the principles and beliefs that teachers hold;
2. Student-researcher discussions: Discussions with 10 students who have participated in existing programmes and 10 with those who have participated in a place-based programme;
3. Journals kept by researchers and teachers. These journals will provide an opportunity to record thoughts, frustrations, challenges, and successes as both parties work through the project;
4. Programme review sessions with teachers. An opportunity to highlight successes, areas for improvement and mutual feedback; and
5. Concluding teacher-researcher discussions. This co-operative dialogue will revolve around potential changes in practice and reflection on the research process.

Analysis

A qualitative research methodology will be utilised which will focus on teachers' and students' experiences and accounts of

their engagement in the project. Transcripts will be analysed based on constant comparative analysis.

The project will be divided into three phases. These phases address different aspects of the research project and provide a framework for ensuring that the research questions can reasonably be answered. Phase one maps out the existing "terrain" prior to leading into phases two and three where there will be greater collaboration and on-going reflective dialogue between the research partners (teachers and researcher).

Our partners:

The two partner schools are Mount Maunganui College and Ngaruawahia High School. These schools find it challenging to fund "traditional" outdoor education programmes that often involve high transportation, accommodation and specialist instructor costs. Both schools value the benefits of outdoor education within the curriculum and are looking for ways to make these experiences available for all their students. Both schools recognise the value of the community in learning and are looking to explore practices which are inclusive of cultural diversity, are environmentally sustainable, affordable and provide the opportunity for teachers and senior students to take on leadership roles.



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