Review programmes which work alongside schools to engage at-risk young people.

Background

Having worked in a variety of areas of education I have been struck by the challenges of engaging some of our most challenging students in particular when the formal education pathway 'does not fit' or where the student may disengage because of reasons which exist entirely outside of the control of the school.

In preparing this report I have been presented with some unique learning opportunities. The first came when I was invited to attend a production of 'Cool or Fool' a short, interactive play produced by inmates at the Otago Corrections Facility. This highlighted the need to have positive relationships between students and teachers.

Following the production, the prisoners talked about their own education experience. Consistently they spoke about falling out of school by the age of 10-13. This prompted the question of what does it take to get them across the threshold and into school. In the weeks following the production, I was granted the opportunity to visit the prison and interview four of the participants in the play.

These young men, of differing ethnicity and background, spoke candidly of their backgrounds and what lead to their incarceration and how they had been educated. Through their time in prison, they had been presented with the opportunity to learn. When asked why they could learn in prison and not when they were at school their answers included:

- There were no distractions (they identified girls as a significant distraction when at school!)
- They were working in small groups with more personal attention
- That learning in a prison classroom was better than sitting in a cell which was the alternative for them
- The teacher wanted them to succeed

They contrasted their prison education with the 'main stream' education they had experienced as teens. The message they wanted teachers to hear was that they wanted:

- Teachers who were enthusiastic about wanting students to learn
- Teachers who asked, 'What is it you want to learn?'
- They acknowledged that some of them had 'learning difficulties' and they wanted early interventions to support them so that they did not feel like they were being left behind.
- They wanted to learn at a pace that allowed them to learn and master skills and yet allow them to feel as though their efforts were acknowledged
- A school that understood their background and was willing to support them to achieve. They felt that motivational interviewing would be of assistance as they

started on their path through high school education. Also to provide a greater understanding of the individual.
- That they valued relationships with teachers who cared about them as individuals.
- For some, they had struggled with identity and until they had found this they lacked a sense of belonging and so to engage in education was always going to be a struggle. They did want to feel that they were supported in their quest for identity.

As the discussion developed it became apparent that there were, for these men, so many issues outside the control of the school which had conspired to lead them down the path that has now found themselves. For some they talked about a struggle to survive as being their primary focus and so being at school and participating was not a priority.

Whilst viewing this as an outsider and having seen some of these traits that these men raised in some of the students that I have encountered it is apparent that some of the beliefs that I hold do need to be revised. As an example; there is the young man that presented back at school after a summer holiday and who quickly found himself in trouble at school. When discussing with him what was going on he described a summer break of criminal offending which had then caught up and a dysfunctional family where he had moved between parents and then to other family associates. In his words school was 'the least of his worries'. There was the frustration as a caring adult as to why he could not be placed into care. A scenario that was similar to a number of the prisoners spoken to who said that their own move to foster homes or residential facilities was what had 'ruined it' for them and set them on a path to prison. One of those prisoners described a similar situation to the student. He had the ambition to be a pilot. He had started flight training with the ATC and had a promising future (in his words) until he was taken into care. Then he learnt to be a criminal.

Whilst these social issues do exist the school and care that is shown is critical. As part of my research, I wanted to see what other organisations, internationally, we're doing to engage some of our most vulnerable youth. What follows is a description of some of the programmes and schools that I encountered during my study.

Falconer School (London, UK)

This school is on the outskirts of north London and receives students who have been excluded or who demonstrate such behaviour as they would be likely to be excluded. The Headmaster described a school of 80 students, all boys, who had difficulties such as Autism and Asperger's. The school, five years previously, had been under special measures, the equivalent to having an LSM or commissioner and additional support to bring the performance back up to an acceptable standard.

At the time of the visit, I was able to see students from Y9+10 in class and also see some of the work opportunities for older students. Students followed a typical high school curriculum such as Maths, English science. As they progressed through the school they were able to engage in automotive engineering, building and construction courses and learning trades related skills. There were also opportunities for students to learn to ride motorbikes

in a very controlled manner. Some of these practical activities were used as an incentive and reward for positive behaviour.

At the conclusion of their schooling at the end of Y11, most students continued on to either employment or entered into trades-related training.

In the five years that the headmaster had been appointed, he had made significant changes to the school. This saw students achieving their potential, as judged be government review systems, improved quality of teaching and learning for students. It would also appear that there were also improved outcomes for the students once they left the school.

During a tour of the school, I saw students who were engaged in their learning and who were provided with opportunities to relate their learning to work and life beyond school. As might be expected, the ratios of students to teachers were low at about 6:1. In addition, there were a number of teacher aides to work alongside students.

The day was very structured including a time when the students broke for morning interval. A snack was provided (cheese and ham toasties on this particular day!) and all staff were expected to join students in the hall and sit with students during the break. Lunchtimes were similarly structured although there were activities set up for students. There was an aim to limit the time available for students to misbehave.

It was obvious during the visit that all staff had a strong desire to see the students do well. There was a high degree of respect and order about the school. There was evidence of students who had had a 'melt down' with a noticeboard pulled from the wall and another young man who did not cope well with changes of routine. Both of these incidents were managed in a quiet manner without drawing excessive attention to the behaviour.

When students were not able to cope with the classroom environment they were able to either self refer or be sent to a safe area where they had the opportunity to reflect upon their actions. When one student returned to class he spoke to the student he had had an altercation with, apologised and shook hands. The teacher made a point of congratulating the student on his good self-management and also highlighting his actions to the headmaster when we visited. There was a sense that the positive was emphasised and that everyone knew what was expected. I saw great similarities between this approach and that of the New Zealand initiative of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L)

It was obvious that positive relationships were the key to the success for students. Having very small classes was a great assistance in this and the provision of further support through TA's and supervision for the reflection was also instrumental in providing a supportive and organised learning environment.

Finally, when asked what had made the biggest difference in the outcomes for students during the last five years the headmaster stated that it was an emphasis on the teaching and learning for staff. There had been an investment in professional development and conscious recruitment of the right staff who believed in the ethos and vision for the school. This had resulted in a lift in the success for students. The development work saw the school move from 'special measures' to a school where students were able to move on and continue

their education beyond the high school setting. There was also support for students to make this transition but it is unclear as to what the long-term outcomes for learners may be.

Norpro training (Plymouth, UK)

My second visit was to a private training provider who provided training for young people in the automotive engineering area. A subsidiary site also offered an equivalent course in marine engineering whereby students would work on inboard engines and the structures and mechanisms of a vessel.

The automotive programme had initially been set up in a socially deprived area of Plymouth not as a training provider but as a means of providing something worthwhile for young people. The scene was described as a series of abandoned garages where young people would steal cars, vandalise the garages and strip or destroy the stolen vehicles. As a community, the decision was made to turn this negative into a positive by providing a controlled outlet for a group of young people who had fallen through the cracks!

Initially, students were drawn from the local community. Schools and the local education authority saw the potential for the development of the programme and after a few years, the community group transferred to a private training provider. As a result, staff were employed and the opportunity to draw upon education funding became a reality. The provider is now operated by a trust to maintain direction and develop a strategy. The provider reports to a board four times a year.

Students typically started at age 14 or 15 and maybe with the programme for up to three years. In exceptional circumstances, students as young as 13 may be enrolled in the second half of their Year 9.

This venture relied upon ‘bums on seats’ for its funding but also worked closely with the host school. Typically, a young person was referred to as they were either removed from a school (expulsion or exclusion) or were at a significant risk whereby the next step would be permanently removed from school. Students were then in a part-time study programme usually for 2-3 days per week and two days at school.

When students were initially accepted into the programme the tutor made contact with the family and highlighted the expectations for the young person. It was expected that the family would support the student in meeting these expectations. The aim was to be clear that this was a partnership and a great opportunity. I wonder if some families and students would see this as their one last chance!?

Whilst at school there was an expectation that students would work towards ‘Functional Maths and Functional English’. (The New Zealand equivalent would be an NCEA L1 English and Maths programme achieved through Unit Standards and which had some relevance to employment)

There was no health or physical recreation/ exercise component in the course but the provider noted that this would be the responsibility of the school. It was noted that they did take a strong interest in the health and safety component and the impairment of drugs and

alcohol. A situation was described where a student was under the influence of cannabis and was withdrawn from the workplace and then how this situation was managed. The formal discipline of this incident was managed by the host school whilst a more informal (yet direct) approach was managed by the provider. They were also very clear that drug use was a reason to decline entry on the basis of a risk to health and safety.

During the student's placement on the programme, they did work towards national qualifications. Typically a student would spend two years in the programme and exit with L2-3 qualifications which would set the student upon a path to employment and a subsequent apprenticeship, typically with an employer.

However, not all students followed the paths that were offered. During my visit, the provider heard from a student that he would not be returning for the new school year but was going to be accepting a place in a training programme related to the catering and hospitality industry. It was obvious that the environment the student had worked in had provided the 'self discipline' and 'real life experience' necessary for him to be able to prove that he was 'worth the risk' for his next training provider. This was viewed as a good outcome for the student and also highlighted the transference of skills beyond the initial industry training.

With the success of the programme and with it now drawing from across the city the provider was honest and stated that they could afford to be selective about who they accepted. This would suggest that some of the 'high risk' students who would follow the path of expulsion/ exclusion and who do not 'fit' in the formal high school situation may be declined entry based upon the success that they have created. Similarly, those that are 'high demand' students may be turned away. The provider was now, as a result, able to set higher standards of achievement for course participants.

The manager spoke frankly about the work environment. This was not a school and so some of the conversations were frank! This was very much designed to prepare young people for the workplace. There was also an expectation that students were aware very early on that there was a high degree of supervision and monitoring. As a new trainee starting the programme their first activity was to identify and locate the safety equipment (eg first aid kits, fire extinguishers and also CCTV cameras) The aim was to highlight that they were being carefully watched and monitored!

The work was aimed to be hands-on and practical where ever possible. There were two classrooms available and these were scheduled for students to complete 'book work'. The NZ equivalent would be Unit Standard workbooks. This 'classroom' environment was sparse and very functional.

Talking with the staff there was a high degree of enthusiasm for the work and the social benefit. The trainers were a combination of time served garage mechanics and younger men who enjoyed the challenge and instructional work. During the visit, there were professional discussions regarding the moderation of students work and also discussions regarding the welfare progress of individual students.

It was obvious that the tutors knew their students well and could identify their strengths and abilities. Although there was no formal pastoral care in terms of the young person background the tutors did know about the young people they were working with and they obviously cared for them.

All the staff talked with pride about the students who would return to the programme, sometimes years after leaving and talk about their success and where they were working. This appeared to be an indication of the young person finding a place of belonging where positive relationships had been able to grow and flourish.

Urban Pursuit (Bristol, UK)

This programme operates is a very different environment and has no academic focus whilst the students participate. It is however aimed at building self-confidence and personal growth where students are then supported in their school life.

Initially, the programme was set up to take young people for Y7+8 who lacked confidence and who were not coping with the demands of school. Some students may have displayed this through the development of behavioural issues in school. More recently older students are being accepted into the programme at Y9 and Y10.

The programme is offered for one school year. Students are referred at the start of the school year and the expectation is that they commence with their one day a week development work within the first few weeks of the new school year. In exceptional circumstances, a student may be referred later in the year on the condition that they return for the following school year.

Students are drawn out for one day a week to follow a variety of activities which will see them working outside the confines of the school environment. The activities fit broadly into outdoor pursuits that a kiwi student may encounter on a school camp. These include kayaking, climbing, abseiling etc. In addition, there were other 'urban' activities which were included such as skateboarding, scootering and trampolining.

The activities were selected so as to introduce the adrenaline and perception of risk. Students were encouraged to work together. The activities were also expected to build confidence so that students could appreciate what 'success feels like'. There was also a strong relational trust between the student and the tutor or instructor. As the relationship developed there was an opportunity to start to work with the student to determine how they behave in the programme can be transferred to their life at school and how they work and act at school.

The manager was very clear that this was a time-consuming process and it may take weeks or months for the relationship to develop. This could be a frustration to the school who may want an instant result.

I was interested to know if the schools ever tried to refuse to let a student attend if their behaviour at school was such that the student was withdrawn for a week. The programme is not a reward for positive behaviour and in establishing a working relationship between the

school and Urban Pursuit there is an agreement whereby the student will be released each week to be able to attend the programme. This is regardless of what may have happened in school during the week. Poor behaviour may open the opportunity for discussion and reflection during the day out on activities.

A key aspect of this programme was that a relationship develops between the student and the instructor/tutor. It was important that this relationship is with an adult who is not a formal teacher. To assist in this development groups were kept small with staff-student ratios at 1:3 or 1:4 At times groups would combine to give a staff-student ratio of 2:6/ 2:8

Group ratios certainly assist with relationships and also the supervision during activities.

The tutors were drawn from a variety of backgrounds. Few are trained teachers but all have qualifications in leading outdoor activities.

As the relationship between instructor and tutor develops there is an opportunity for support and guidance on a regular basis for students back within their host school. This was done by tutors visiting students on site in their own school. These tutor sessions were an opportunity to discuss with the student how they are progressing at school and for them to share and review how their experience on the programme can be transferred back to the school situation. There was monitoring by the tutor as to how the transition into the school environment was working. This drew upon information provided by the school. Students were counselled to provide support and encouragement and to seek additional support for issues which may exist beyond the school environment.

This programme was unique in that there was no focus on academic achievement rather a desire to change behaviour at school. The reliance upon the development of a relationship and positive role modelling is essential to this progress. Through this work, it was expected that the student would have greater success and increased engagement in their education.

Community Environmental Education Program (Daly City, San Francisco, USA)

The Community Environmental Education Program (CEEP) or Wilderness School as it is known, was established in 1967 by Dr Reno Taini who continues to take an active interest in the work undertaken. The current teacher is Ed Lopez and between both Ed and Reno, I have gained an insight into the programme and the development over the last 50+ years.

The programme was founded on the principles of Kurt Hahn (founder of Outward Bound). There is an emphasis upon striving to be the best that a student can be and to achieve their full potential. Students are also expected to work together for the benefit of themselves and the group as a whole. There is also an element of ‘giving back’ in terms of community service and the ongoing work of the programme itself.

Students are drawn from a range of schools in the South San Francisco area and are based at Thornton School in Daly City. Daly City (Pop. 110,000 approx. 2018) is described as a work class community and appeared to me to be a community of migrants. The majority of students were first or second generation migrants from Mexico, Latin America (Nicaragua, El Salvador etc.) and the Philippines. During my visit, there were 15 students engaged in the

programme and I was fortunate to join them for a 10-day wilderness phase of the programme.

The programme runs for a semester with two intakes each year. Upon completion of the course, students re-integrate back into the high school setting. There has been a trend with referrals coming through for students to engage in the programme at a younger age. Education is compulsory for all young people up to the age of 18 in California. Students do see this as an opportunity to be engaged in education but in a very different format.

There are four phases of the course which are summarised as:

- **Urban Service**
- **Farm Projects**
- **Wilderness exploration**
- **Independent study projects**

The programme is not linear in that students do not move from one aspect to another, rather they are presented with opportunities which fit within each aspect. This means that there is a large degree of fluidity and unpredictability about the programme.

Students are well supported and encouraged to undertake personal and group reflection. Students are expected and supported by staff and peers to take ownership of their actions. This includes being clear and explicit about what has led them to be a participant in the programme. There is a greatly reduced emphasis on academic study. As Ed explained it, 'there is little point trying to teach algebra if they cannot sit in a classroom'.

CEEP seeks to model and teach many of the skills and attributes young people need both currently and in the future through active participation. The students' success in gaining these skills is directly linked to the success of the programme. As such it is in everyone's (Student, teacher and volunteer) interest to ensure that students develop and ideally master these skills.

Students are inducted into the programme and one of the first tasks is the 'hot seat'. Parameters and expectations are agreed before each student takes the hot seat in front of their peers and the teacher and asked to describe what has led them to become a participant in the 'Wilderness School'. Students are remarkably honest and open about why they are there. The reasons are varied and can include:

- Truancy
- Poor academic performance (Not realising their own potential)
- Poor behaviour (in class and or school)
- Offending in the community
- Court appearance and or proceedings both as an offender or victim
- Engagement in counselling for self-esteem, abuse (physical, emotional, drug or alcohol) etc.

Many of the students would qualify for Alternative Education funding if they were to present in a New Zealand School. One significant and consistent difference is the level of

violence which students have experienced. (This will be explained later when discussing 'cultural differences')

During my visit, students had spent three weeks preparing for their 'wilderness exploration' which I was able to join them for. This wilderness component has evolved and is now both a learning exercise and a further induction into the programme. For many of the students, this was their first time going into a rural environment where they were going to be self-sufficient for 8 days in the 'wilderness'.

Students spend their 'classroom time' learning camp craft, such as how to operate the stoves, setting up tarpaulins for sleeping, basic first aid training, navigations skills, preparing camp fires and making their own 'billy tins' for the communal cooking. In addition, there is physical training with day hikes to local mountains on the outskirts of Daly City.

Students are given specific responsibilities which may include:

- Medic (Preparing first aid kits)
- Sleeping equipment manager (Preparing and checking tarpaulins and associated gear)
- Catering manager (Preparing the food for the patrol)
- Communications (Preparing and learning how to set up and use the two-way radios)

Whilst there is quality instruction and advice the students also learn from experience. Eg, some students 'drifted' during the navigation training. Those who did not listen learnt an important lesson when they had to navigate to their campground late in the afternoon! Peers stepped in and took the role of the teacher in this situation.

Students travelled as a group to the Sierra Nevada Mountains and were then divided into two patrols. Each patrol would be an independent unit following a different route during the following 8 days. Patrols were accompanied by at least one leader who would ensure safety and provide guidance to the group. Leaders would also support reflection by individuals and the group.

Typically leaders are former graduates of the programme who volunteer to support the ongoing work. Former students are enthusiastic to return to the programme and give back. Many seek support from their education provider or employer to be released to participate in the programme which has undoubtedly changed their lives. The leaders for the two patrols were:

Patrol A

- Sam (20 years old), currently employed as an instructor in City of San Francisco Recreation and Parks
- Hazel (19 years old), a graduate of high school currently in a state university studying to be a legal assistant with the aim of qualifying to join the FBI
- Kenya (19 years old), a graduate of high school currently in higher education
- Roger (50+ years old), Drug counsellor and volunteering with CEEP course to de-brief groups.

Patrol B

- Wes (30 years old), Veteran from armed services having served in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Syd (60+ years old), a former teacher, retired

The individual stories that these volunteers shared demonstrated that they had been no different from the students they were mentoring but that the programme had provided a different pathway for them and as a result, they had been successful. Their knowledge and voice carried the weight of experience and was not that of a 'teacher' so provided greater power and meaning for some students.

Experiential learning

Aside from the navigation experience students also learnt other lessons through their experience. For example:

- Setting up the 'tarps' for sleeping on the first night. One patrol could not remember how to tie the knots and had to ask for help from the other patrol. Students learnt the importance of listening to instructions and practice
- Independent thinking: by the third night I witnessed one patrol arrive at their campground and without being asked by the leaders set about working as a team to set up the 'tarps', start a campfire, fetch water and start preparing a meal for the group and preparing a sump hole for green waste to be buried. (A month prior and the patrol was a group of individuals who, working together was an alien concept)

During the 8 day trip, each patrol developed a common purpose, to get each person up the hill, to the next lake, to complete the expedition. Even if this meant carrying extra weight or physically supporting a peer.

I questioned how, in such a short space of time these students had learnt to be compassionate, caring and so willing to support one another. Ed explained that he had drilled the mantra of 'How can I help you' into the students during the first weeks of the programme. This was even reflected when I walked into the classroom on the first morning. Students greeted me and asked if there was anything they could do to help and appeared to have a genuine interest in why I was there. This extended to Jorge, a Mexican-American student, guiding me through ordering food at a 'Taqueria' (which is a general purpose name for a restaurant that serves basic "street" food. The word "taqueria" is derived from the work "taco" a place that makes and sells tacos but other simple basic meals. A burrito is only one of the items they make

Reflection

Each evening once the meal has been finished and the clear up is completed the students meet around the campfire. This is a time for reflection upon the performance of the day. Sometimes this is an individual reflection or maybe as part of a group. All students are expected to contribute to the discussion. I did initially wonder if this was a 'Californian thing' but believe that it is part of the culture of the programme. It is grounded in both self-improvement and improvement of the group.

Upon completion of the 'Wilderness Exploration,' the students return to Daly City and are rewarded with a late start the following morning. The students return the equipment and take care of maintenance and repairs. Following the clear up there is a final reflection as a group. Typically this includes:

- What was the hardest thing you did?
- What do you need to work on?

Students are also presented with a highly valued T-shirt. These are only available to students who have completed the 'Wilderness Experience'. They are significant and each intake has a unique design created by the students. (As an example of how valued these shirts are; I was stood at the train station when a young Latino man came up and asked me about my trip, where I had gone? What had I seen? Who had been with me? This was a former graduate who was now employed as a retail manager and contributing to his community. We were both strangers yet he had the confidence to speak to a European 'older' male and speak enthusiastically about his experience)

Urban Service

The following week the fifteen students on the programme were going to learn the skills to run and manage a ropes course. This meant that they first had to experience the ropes course as a participant. Then to learn how to manage and run the course. Their clients were the new recruits into the San Francisco Police Department. (Ironic that many of these students had a history of youth offending)

Students used their strengths which had been identified during the first month of the course. The outgoing, extrovert Filipino student, Joco, would be the person who would meet and greet the recruits, talk about the history of the site and the course. Other students were identified as safety instructors, belayers, support etc. The Police recruits were instructed to address the students as 'Instructor Joco' or 'Instructor Maya' etc. This provided a high level of respect to be delivered to the students. It was also a role reversal where the students got to appreciate the skills needed to be a 'teacher' and to receive the respect of others especially older people who they may be intimidated by, by reason of their new profession. (I am aware that some police recruits also found this challenging, taking direction from a teenager, and some have been removed from the police training programme as a result)

The students were also drilled in the appropriate way to speak and conduct themselves.

Feedback from the day was that it was very successful. During this semester the students would also be providing similar programmes for members of the Fire Department. Other community work which the students would be engaged in was providing an adventure experience to primary aged students. This would include a camp out where students would use the skills they had learnt during the wilderness aspect of their course.

Other programmes have included supporting blind students in a ski programme, playing team sports with handicapped groups etc. Through these experiences, students are exposed to a broad range of people with differing needs and expectations. I am sure that this will

also provide personal reflection for what their life is like by comparison and also what their life could be like in the future.

Farm Projects

Considering this course runs in an urban high school where there is no green space for students to play and even tension over the siting of a basketball court within the grounds, a farm project must appear incongruous! However, the school has a series of raised gardens where students grow vegetables and other produce and care for chickens which provide eggs. The eggs and produce is sold to teachers and neighbours, donated to community groups and used to provide a shared meal for students. The purpose is to:

- Show where food comes from
- Take responsibility for tending their own crops
- Appreciate the ease with which they can produce their own food and use them in the kitchen
- Responsibility for the feeding and care of the chickens

There were interesting lessons learnt such as the importance of locking the chicken coup closed at night after a racoon killed some of the chickens, organising for plants to be watered if students were away etc.

The students learnt about the importance of the environment through these types of hands-on activity.

Independent study projects

The study projects that were undertaken were varied. Typically the student would select a topic of interest and prepare a talk to inform and 'teach' their peers. Topics are varied from news events, historical events to sporting endeavours and individual players. The students would research the topic, prepare a report and then deliver to their peers.

Towards the end of the semester, the students final topic was work exploration. They would consider the type of job they would like to follow in the future. In pairs or threes, students go into the community to interview people who are working in these careers. Through this type of activity, students are able to set goals which they will use on their return to mainstream education.

In conclusion, this programme is focussed less on immediate academic success but more on teaching students the skills they need to be successful and guiding them to be part of the community. The involvement of the police and fire departments, as well as other community groups, also provides a network and 'a place where they belong' These students no longer become isolated from their community and have a significant support network within the group.

In discussion with Reno, we talked about the success rate of the programme. No data was available but the criteria for success was seen as contributing to society, employed and out of prison. (1 in 30 people in the USA is involved with the criminal justice system, either

prison or on parole!) Based upon these criteria of success the rate would be ‘pretty high and certainly well over 50%. I suspect that based upon the numbers attending the 50th-anniversary celebrations the success rate would be significantly higher.

Reno was also very clear that part of the founding principle of the programme was to provide opportunities for students to ‘learn by doing’ (Dewey). In so doing, students gain confidence in their abilities and in developing new skills. Students are exposed to ‘high risk, high gain’ activities. They learn to feel the reward for this type of risk-taking behaviour. This is in contrast to their previous experience of ‘high risk, low reward’ such as negative or attention seeking behaviour or illegal activities and drug use. For nearly all the students the wilderness experience was their first taste of real adventure. Soon afterwards they would be leading and guiding others through their ‘risk taking’ activities on the ropes course.

The impact of this type of learning is significant.

However, this does come at a cost. These costs could be considered as the loss of academic study time. As stated previously, these young people were not in a frame of mind to learn so there was no loss of academic learning time but there was a great deal of community learning taking place.

Another significant cost is that of time, both for the students and the teacher. For the wilderness experience alone there were 10 consecutive days, 24 hours a day that students devoted. Similarly, the staff devoted that time and more. There is the additional cost to staff as they work with students ‘after hours’ to keep them engaged and liaise with outside agencies such as police and social workers.

Ultimately these students gained their self-respect and enjoyed success as young people.

Whilst the programme is officially known as The Community Environmental Education Program it is commonly referred to as the Wilderness School. The presentation of the T-shirt for students who complete the wilderness component is really emphasised. Students who receive the T-shirt have pride and it is almost like an induction to a unique tribe or very exclusive club. It does provide a sense of belonging which is treasured long after the trip, the course or even school. I believe that for many students this sense of belonging in a positive way is the first step to belonging to the school.

I was presented with an opportunity to address the students at the conclusion of my time on the programme and presented my Mihi and talked about the significance in New Zealand culture of knowing where you come from (interesting as I am a migrant myself!) I then explained the significance of a hongi and invited the leaders and students to hongi. I had no idea of the impact that this would have. Two months later the students are still talking about this simple act.

Cultural differences

I have stated that there were cultural differences. These both shocked me and provide additional challenges. In summary, these cultural differences are:

- **Common access to drugs (cannabis)** California has legalised access to cannabis. Many of the students were open about their use and access. Interesting they saw alcohol as a bigger concern with many saying that they did not drink or would be very limited use. This is a contrast to many 15-16-year-old students in New Zealand
- **Violence** One night I sat with a patrol following a review session and the discussion ventured into the violence that they had witnessed. Each student could name one or more friend or associate who had been either shot, stabbed or murdered. These were confirmed by the teacher with some graphic details of what he had experienced whilst caring for past and present students. Many of the students knew or would be at risk of being 'gang bangers' (Prospects for criminal gangs) Ed and I reflected that the students in Daly City would not be significantly different from the students in NZ in terms of behaviour. The biggest difference was the level of violence that they had been exposed to in their lives.
- **Youth Justice/ parole/ prison** A number of the students were working through the justice system. Some had already had time in 'Juvenile Prison'. Of the students who opted not to join the trip, the parole officer was contacted for one female and she faced the prospect of being locked up for breach of parole. Since the conclusion of my participation, I have heard that another 15-16-year-old male student is facing jail time. It is worth noting that some students liked prison as it was 'good food and a routine'. It was disturbing how many of these young people had been locked up and I compared their experience with the prison inmates I met at the start of my research.
- **The use of language:** Whilst I found the way the students addressed each other at times challenging. Considering of the twelve students there was only one who I would consider if presented in New Zealand as Pakeha, 'white European', all the others were Mexican, Latino or Filipino. Yet they would use what I would deem as derogatory N***r to address each other. I questioned this with the teacher. In NZ we would take offence and shut down such terminology the cultural difference accepted this and was not seen as offensive. As an explanation: There is a difference between the N***er (often referred as using the " hard 'r' which one never uses unless its purposeful") and " Nigga" which is what the students use, often in the same vein as the term " brother" or " friend". The latter being a very nuanced word, which properly used isn't considered offensive. BUT MUST BE USED CORRECTLY. An example being used in the final seconds of Larry Wilmores monologue. The former being offensive and the latter not.

- **Relationships between teacher and student:** Similarly the language and the way in which the teacher and students worked together was very different from a typical teacher/ student relationship. This included the way in which students addressed the teacher by the first name. I would even wonder if they knew who was being referred to if he was called Mr Lopez! What was very evident was that Ed wanted the students to be successful and shared part of himself with the students. This would certainly challenge the typical teacher, student relationship.

In conclusion

Each of the programmes that were visited had a very different emphasis. Each provided opportunities for at-risk youth to be successful. There are some commonalities which are worth looking which are summarised as:

- Change of belief and ensure that there is more support for families and for students at risk. As the school sector, we need to be better resourced to provide closer support and care for students. This does also require the opportunity to employ the right people who care and want to see students be successful.
- Keep young people with whanau as long as possible. Whereas we may place our values of what a good home may look like the young person as they grow and develop appreciates the care and 'love' of the family/ whanau situation. Not always does this fit our perception of what care and love should look like.
- Some programmes offer the same opportunities we have through the vocational pathway programme. The Norpro training would be an excellent example of this. The difference is that the students are able to access these opportunities at a younger age. The entry into the courses has not been set as an academic level to be achieved but rather support provided to enable students to achieve.
- The outdoor education component of urban pursuit is similar to the offerings of Adventure Development in New Zealand but does not rely upon students having a drug or alcohol or mental health concern for them to be able to access the course. Through participation, students learn to rise to challenges, experience success and be supported to transfer this experience to different settings.
- Where programmes are a support to students to change behaviour the supporting school needs to be clear that this is a long-term initiative which is aimed at looking to change behaviour for a long-term effect and change. It cannot be seen as the student is away having fun and so being rewarded for 'poor behaviour'.
- Students were encouraged and supported to take ownership of past behaviour and being earnest in their desire to change. Unless there is ownership and taking responsibility the alternative is to blame others for why things have gone wrong. Whilst in the Wilderness School there is a high degree of reflection I wonder how adept at such levels of reflection Kiwi students would be or is this a 'Californinan' trait! A further inquiry would be to see how this is developed and supported for students.
- Community connection has both enabled some of the programmes to be developed and to provide a connection for students. For Urban Pursuit, Norpro and the Wilderness School these each grew from within their community by people who cared and wanted something better for the young people they work with. The programmes provided a link and a sense of belonging.
- A common theme for each of the programmes was the pride in their success and the fact that 'graduates' popped in to share their success and remain connected. It was in varying degrees becoming part of a 'tribe' which connected the students to the

programme, to each other and to their community. To hear stories of students returning to Norpro to share their success or the garbage truck driver who 'popped in' as the Wilderness School students were preparing to leave or the volunteers who returned to 'give back' to the programme year later.

- The use of restorative practices was evident at both Falconer School and the Wilderness School and is something to be incorporated into successful programmes.
- The most significant and common factor and which undoubtedly has the biggest influence is the relationships formed by students and those they worked with. The biggest influence upon the achievement of the individual student success was the relationship between the student and the teacher/ instructor. If the relationship was not formed there was little or no chance for the students to succeed.

Whilst undoubtedly some of our at-risk young people will challenge those who seek to provide an education for all, there is an opportunity to review our practices. Whilst for some students the traditional education model will not fit there is an opportunity to take some of the opportunities from each of the providers listed above and adapt to a New Zealand context. By reason, the length of service the Community Environmental Education Program would have to be one of the most successful. But this does rely upon community support and adequate resourcing.

A worthy inquiry would be to see if this would work as an early intervention for students who are identified as potentially 'falling by the wayside' if they continue in the traditional education model.

Freedom to do is more important than the freedom to do nothing

(Dr Reno Taini, founder of the Wilderness School)

Thank you:

- TeachNZ for granting and supporting my sabbatical
- Ruth Ratcliffe, produce of 'Cool or Fool'
- Otago Corrections Facility
- Falconer School
- NorPro Training
- Urban Pursuit
- Reno Taini and Ed Lopez of the Community Environmental Education Programme (CEEP, Wilderness school)
- The students and volunteers who allowed me to join them for an unforgettable journey through the Emigrant Wilderness Area