

SABBATICAL REPORT

Environmental Education **2009**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I consider it a privilege to have been granted sabbatical leave for Term 2 2009 and would like thank the organizations and individuals who made this possible. Thanks go to the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Educational Institute and also to the wonderfully supportive Board of Trustees, staff and school community of Mount Biggs School.

BACKGROUND:

Environmental Education has been a personal interest area of mine. For the last six years I have been Principal of Mount Biggs School where the Board of Trustees and parents have encouraged Environmental Education as a focus. The school is an Enviro school gaining Bronze and Silver Awards. This is largely due to some very supportive parents who have given their time to work with staff and pupils to assist with the development and maintenance of our environmental projects. Mount Biggs School has been a member of Enviroschools for five years and Trees for Survival for eight years. We have also had support from Horizons Regional Council. It remains a challenge to sustain momentum with projects and to find the time to commit as the work required is considerable. Money is always a concern and requests for funding are frequently being made. However we remain committed as involvement in environmental education projects supports a key goal at Mount Biggs School. We share the following belief outlined in the Guidelines for Environmental Education.

“Environmental Education is an investment in our future. If New Zealand is to have a sustainable future, increased understanding of the environment and environmental decisions is essential”
(Guidelines for Environmental Education –Forward p5.)

During my sabbatical leave I wanted to gain an insight into the thinking of other schools, how schools viewed the implementation of Environmental Education, to see if they faced the same barriers and frustrations and to make some comparisons with schools in the United Kingdom.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to consider how easy schools think it is to promote, and engage students and staff in, sustainable environmental education projects.

- Do schools have specific documentation relating to environmental education?
- Are schools that don't belong to outside organisations (e.g. Trees for survival, Enviro schools, Trees for Waste) able to maintain meaningful projects?
- How are programmes funded?
- What are the main barriers to environmental education?
- How do our programmes compare to those of schools in the United Kingdom?

THE METHODOLOGY

A simple questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 75 schools. I am grateful to the schools that returned their questionnaires – 56 were received back. The schools selected were completely random and I had no way of knowing the level of interest in Environmental Education. It may have been that the schools who did not reply were totally uninterested in the topic.

I was also able to travel to the United Kingdom where I visited some ECO Schools to compare programmes. ECO Schools is a similar organisation to our Enviro Schools.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

Results: 56 Replies

Rural 24

Urban 32

1. Does your school have specific documentation relating to Environmental Education ?

	Number of responses
Environmental Education Policy	///
Specific Guidelines for teachers	////
Written requirements to include Environmental Education in studies	/////
Set Environmental themes teachers must undertake	////////
No specific requirements for teachers	////////////////////////////////////

Thirty Five of the fifty six responses indicated they had no specific requirements for staff – yet all but one school (55 of 56) listed several examples of environmental programmes going on within the school. It is apparent from the responses that ‘no specific requirements’ by schools did not mean ‘no environmental education’. The projects listed showed a great variety of interesting ideas. Some schools noted that although no specific requirements were put on staff they were encouraged to integrate environmental education ideas into topic studies.

1. Does your school have a specific staff member with overall leadership of Environmental Education?

	Number of responses
Yes	////////////////////////////////////
No	////////

Over half the schools had a specific staff member in charge – it was noted several times that workload pressures meant time available was limited.

2. Who are Environmental education projects managed by?

	Number of responses
A selected group of mixed age pupils with a teacher	////////////////////////////////////
Individual classes	////////
Senior pupils	/////
Pupils with adult volunteers	////////

In most cases projects were managed by groups of students with a teacher.

4. Does your school belong to an outside Environmental Education support group or outside provider?

	<i>Number of responses</i>
Enviro Schools	////////
Trees for Survival	////////
Trees for Waste	////////////////
All of the above	///
None	////////////////
Other	////

16 of the schools surveyed did not have links with a support group – 14 of those schools were still able to list several projects underway in their school.

5. Does your school have a specific budget for Environmental Education?

	Number of responses
Yes	//////////
No	////////////////////////////////////

The majority of schools did not have a specific budget for Environmental Education – most indicated they gained funding or resources by applying to funding groups or using community connections.

6. What are the main barriers to pupils being involved in real hands on environmental education projects ?

	Number of responses
Staff attitude	////
Staff resistance to pupils being out of class	/
Availability of a staff member to lead activities	////////////////
Money to provide resources	////////////////
Lack of volunteers to help	////////
An already overcrowded curriculum	////////////////////////////////////
Lack of interest from pupils	//
No suitable areas in the school grounds for projects	/
Projects always vandalised	////////
No Barriers to environmental projects	///

The main barrier is the perception of an already overcrowded curriculum.

Summary of findings:

The majority of schools that responded did not have any specific written requirements that required staff to undertake environmental education projects. However notes on the response sheets indicated that in most schools staff were encouraged to integrate environmental themes and activities across other learning areas.

Thirty percent of the schools did not have any formal links with outside organisations or formal support from the community. The majority of schools did not have a specific budget allocation for environmental education studies and relied on creative ways to make projects happen. The main barriers identified were an overcrowded curriculum and lack of resources to support programmes.

Environmental projects are happening in our schools. Only one school out of the forty two schools did not list several projects that the school was involved with. This is despite a perception of lack of time, staff and or money for environmental education projects.

Responses indicate that the main barrier to implementing Environmental Education programmes was the perception of an already overcrowded curriculum. It is hoped that there will be a shift here as schools develop their own local curriculum plans that engage students in meaningful ways to explore future focused issues as is encouraged in our new curriculum document. Funding and available staff members to lead projects are concerns and this may be remedied as schools move more to integrated units where environmental education is a consistent part of the programme rather than being seen as an extra or add on. It is still a concern that funding continues to be an issue- most schools surveyed commented that they still had to be prepared to search for outside funding sources and to beg and borrow from the surrounding community.

It was encouraging that four schools indicated they considered there to be no barriers in the way to incorporating environmental education projects into their school life. Let's hope this is the way it will be in the future.

New Zealand / United Kingdom Comparisons.

Environmental Education and the New Zealand Curriculum Document

Environmental Education threads it way through the New Zealand Curriculum Document. This gives New Zealand schools the mandate to include it as an underlying theme in their local curriculum planning.

Within the document's vision it calls for young people who will seize the opportunities offered by new knowledge and technologies to secure a sustainable social, cultural, economic and environmental future for our country. One of the principles is 'Future Focus' -the curriculum encourages students to look to the future by exploring such significant future focused issues as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation. In the values statements we are told that students will be encouraged to value ecological sustainability, which includes care for the environment.

The New Zealand curriculum document, through its Vision, Principles and Values, emphasises the importance of Education for Sustainability. The document takes a future focused approach and acknowledges that future focused issues are a rich source of connections across the learning areas, values, and key competencies and they are relevant to students' futures. One such issue is

sustainability where children should be encouraged to explore the long- term impact of social, cultural, scientific, technological, economic, or political practises on society and the environment.

Within most schools education for sustainability will be largely developed through environmental education projects yet there is no real commitment from the Ministry in terms of funding support. Hands on projects involving pupils in education for sustainability happen largely through educators finding funding and support from outside the school. Very few schools are able to earmark funding from their operational grant for environmental education projects.

It is hoped that with Education for Sustainability such a prominent thread through our New Zealand curriculum document the ministry may view it as a vital component of education for the future and acknowledge it as an area for some serious development.

Enviroschools

The Enviroschools Foundation is a charitable trust that has in the past gained some funding from the Ministry of Education. It provides support and strategic direction for a nationwide environmental education programme. Approximately 600 schools are involved in the enviroschools programmes. Regional partnerships are developed with school support services, local government councils and community organisations. The Enviroschools programme gives a real direction and backbone to schools environmental programmes. The Foundation's vision is to foster a generation of innovative and motivated young people who instinctively think and act sustainably. Enviroschools supports schools through resource materials, professional development, and school awards

Environmental Education in the United Kingdom

Sustainable strategies in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom the Department for Children, Schools and Families has a strong Sustainable Schools strategy. The government aims to have every school operating sustainable by 2020. Their thinking is that empowering young people to take responsibility for their own future is not only desirable; it is a critical feature of their education. They are prepared to make a decisive move towards sustainable development.

The National Framework introduces eight 'doorways' through which schools may choose to initiate or extend their sustainable school activity. It focuses on ways in which sustainable development can be embedded into whole school management practices and provides practical guidance to help schools operate in a more sustainable way.

Each doorway may be approached individually, though schools will find that many of the doorways are actually interconnected. For example, an interest in food and drink may lead to the growing of fresh vegetables in the school grounds, composting and conservation, all features of the Buildings and Grounds doorway. In turn this may spark an interest in other activities such as waste and recycling (the Consumption and Waste doorway) or collecting rain water and renewable energy watering systems (the Energy and Water doorway). While a collective whole school approach is recommended, either approach offers opportunities for improvement across the school's curriculum, campus, and its relationship with the local community. Schools can come into sustainability via any of the doorways.

The eight doorways are:

- Food and Drink – improving pupils understanding of food and where it comes from
- Energy and Water – sustainable schools will showcase energy efficiency
- Travel and Traffic – Investigation of alternate travel arrangements
- Purchasing and Waste – adopting a reduce, reuse and recycle approach
- Buildings and Grounds – well designed and cared for schools
- Inclusion and Participation – inclusive atmosphere that values everyone’s participation and contribution
- Local Well-Being – focusing on local challenges and finding solutions to them
- Global Citizenship – developing a responsible international outlook among pupils.

Each doorway above is accompanied by a long-term expectation clarifying where government would like schools to be by the year 2020. While every school is starting from a different position, with different priorities and needs, all schools can take some immediate action to meet these targets.

ECO Schools

Eco-Schools is a programme for environmental management and certification, designed to implement sustainable development education in schools by encouraging children and youth to take an active role in how their school can be run for the benefit of the environment.

Joining the Eco-Schools programme is free and it makes tackling sustainable issues manageable and easy for all schools, whether they are children’s centres, nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools or schools with special status.

Once registered, schools follow a simple seven-step process which helps them to address a variety of environmental themes, ranging from litter and waste to healthy living and biodiversity.

Children are the driving force behind Eco-Schools – they lead the eco-committee and help carry out an audit to assess the environmental performance of their school. Through consultation with the rest of the school and the wider community it is the pupils that decide which environmental themes they want to address and how they are going to do it. Measuring and monitoring is an integral part of the Eco-Schools programme, providing schools with all the evidence they need to really shout about their environmental success.

Schools work towards gaining one of three awards – Bronze, Silver and the prestigious Green Flag award, which symbolises excellence in the field of environmental activity.

Two UK Schools Compared:

The range of environmental education projects in United Kingdom Schools varies as much as in New Zealand. It is largely dependant on having staff that have the passion to drive activities and the energy and drive to find support organisations and outside funding.

The two schools compared here couldn’t have been more different. One, a rural school, with gardens, green areas, a wooded area and a supportive community, the second is an urban school in an industrialised area with a huge vandalism problem and not a lot of space for development. In both cases the pupils were keen to show of their projects. The pupils were proud of their efforts and were committed to working to save the environment.



Upton Cross Cornwall
 A village school with 70 pupils. Great community involvement and outside help with setting up gardens and projects. Staff actively involved and a principal who made lots of funding applications. They had a windmill to help with power generation, an orchard, gardens and fabulous outdoor areas. All areas were open to the public.



Liskheard School – Plymouth
 An urban school of approx. 200 pupils. Huge vandalism and theft problems- outdoor areas that were planted did not last so two courtyard areas bordered by buildings were used for projects. Even then vandals often climbed over the roof tops to get at plants.



Environmental Education is an important component in the education curriculum in the United Kingdom. Schools are getting involved and the ECO Schools movement is blossoming. As in New Zealand there are huge differences between schools.

Conclusions

Environmental Education is alive and well in New Zealand schools. Despite a lack of direct funding for projects New Zealand teachers as usual find a way to make it happen. With the help of parents, local organisations and community support children are being involved in hands on activities.

In Cornwall I visited several schools that were ECO Schools. Their situation was no different. Although the DCSF (Department of Schools And Families) has come out with arguably a much stronger direction than that of our curriculum, it does not provide direct funding. The principals at the schools visited were always on the look out for funding opportunities, or support from outside agencies, and like many of us had become proficient at filling in and lodging funding applications.

ECO Schools in the United Kingdom has given the schools a structure to hang their projects on. The flags achieved for the completion of projects provide a visual display to all visitors coming into the school. The schools I visited had their Flags displayed with pride for all to see. The structure that the organisation provides is similar to our Enviroschools where schools can display certificates achieved.

Here in New Zealand the Enviro schools foundation gives us a structure to follow. However, survey responses indicated that schools were enjoying environmental education and had many interesting projects underway regardless of whether they were a member of Enviroschools. Over the last few years the huge growth in the number of Enviro Schools through out the country would indicate that schools like a structure to work in. Being able to achieve real results and have an acknowledgment to display gives all a sense of achievement.

The new curriculum does point to education for sustainability being a key thread in education for the future. This gives all New Zealand schools the ability to make environmental education a key component in its local curriculum plan. Environmental projects foster a love of the environment and a sense of caring for the world. Schools can now make it happen and have students developing an attitude that cares for the environment and helps to ensure its healthy future.