

PRINCIPAL SABBATICAL REPORT
TERM 2, 2014.

‘EOTC to Engage Learning:
Perceptions and Actions in New
Zealand Primary Schools.’

ALASTAIR SCHAW,
KAIRANGA SCHOOL.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to:

My loving and supportive wife – for encouraging me to apply and supporting me during this time, with ideas and shared experiences. A time that will not be forgotten.

Thank you to my very capable, and enthusiastic Deputy Principal who led the school so well in my absence, reminding me that I am not indispensable after all.

The wonderful Leadership Team and staff at Kairanga School – who really took on a lot of additional duties in my absence, doing this with initiative, empathy and professionalism.

The support of the Kairanga School Board of Trustees, who allowed me the time away to refresh and explore. Their on-going interest in my development has been much appreciated.

The principals and staff of the following Schools, who took the time to respond to my many requests for help and input. Their open sharing of information and collegiality in providing me with detailed and informative answers has been invaluable. My thanks goes to the teachers and principals of:

Kairanga School

Rongotea School

Te Anau Primary

Waipu School

Winchester School

The Ministry of Education, TeachNZ and NZEI for making the Principal sabbaticals available.

My sister and brother-in-law, both experienced educators and leaders, who have continually fed into my life and supported me, to whom I am very grateful.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was twofold:

To explore current effective practices of EOTC learning across a range of primary schools, finding ways in which EOTC enhances classroom learning and therefore improve progress and achievement of pupils. This was achieved by analysing feedback from practicing educators about any perceived barriers to doing EOTC

To inform Ministry of Education curriculum and professional development direction for the future, recognising teacher need in EOTC Professional Development opportunities. From this, to inform schools in developing their own curriculum in light of their school's context for EOTC opportunities.

Rationale and Background Information

I have experienced, over the last 26 years as a classroom teacher and a principal, the power that EOTC involvement offers. I have seen how EOTC enhances engagement in learning for all pupils and, therefore, encourages a child's achievement and progress. It has been my anecdotal observation over the years that there has been a decline in the use of EOTC by schools, which meant less engagement and achievement for some children. This conclusion has come from many observations and discussions in both local and nationwide events. I wanted to know if this was true, and if so, why?

The New Zealand Curriculum is clear in its desire to use contexts for learning, some of which can only be best seen in an EOTC context. The Vision of the NZC for Learners to be 'Confident, Connected, Actively Involved, Lifelong Learners', is borne out of a local curriculum that connects and builds on a student's previous learning and their local resources. EOTC, I believe, is unique in its ability to blend the curriculum together to provide links and meaning.

'EOTC is an essential part of school life in NZ. To extend students learning experiences beyond the classroom, schools need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the wider community and the environment.' (p3, EOTC Guidelines, MoE, 2009).

The EOTC Guidelines, published in 2009, have several aspirations for learning outside the classroom setting and reasons as to why EOTC is important:

- Learning at school should encourage young people to be capable and knowledgeable citizens, who are involved with the communities they live in and contribute to the wider community. Every young person should be able to participate in learning beyond the classroom, whatever their age, ability, or circumstances.
- Learning outside the classroom has the potential to support learning in ways that are consistent with the vision, principles, values, attitudes, key competencies, and effective pedagogy statements in the national curriculum (The New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa). In addition, EOTC can support the

aspiration for broad and deep learning in real-life contexts within and across the learning areas of the national curriculum.

- The school buildings and grounds are a rich resource on the doorstep, offering opportunities for formal and informal learning and play.
- Learners can develop the skills and confidence to explore their local community, which may be within walking distance of the school or accessible by car, local bus, or train ride. Exploring landscapes and streetscapes, scientific reserves, heritage sites, sports and recreation facilities, places of worship, and theatres, attending live music events, and involvement in volunteer and citizenship projects can enrich all areas of the curriculum.
- As young people mature, they gain confidence in and appreciate more distant and challenging environments that stimulate their curiosity and imagination.
- Staying away from home for a few nights or more is a powerful way of developing key life skills and provides opportunities for learners and teachers to strengthen their relationships. Such experiences contribute to deepening students' awareness of the key competencies, principles, and values while bringing the learning areas alive in real-life contexts over an extended period of time.
- The New Zealand Curriculum emphasises a vision for learners in Aotearoa New Zealand that has implications for the design of learning experiences beyond the walls of the classroom. If students are to be confident in their own identities, learning should occur in places where that sense of identity is strong and can be developed – and those places are not limited to the classroom or school. If students are to be connected to the land and environment, they need opportunities to engage in learning beyond the classroom walls.
- If students are to be actively involved participants in a range of life contexts and contributors to the well-being of New Zealand (social, cultural, economic, and environmental), they need opportunities to actively participate in those contexts during their schooling. Schools are not only preparing students to be actively involved later or when they are grown up – students are capable of participating actively in a range of contexts, including those beyond the school, now. This is one of the pathways to becoming lifelong learners.
- The principles of The New Zealand Curriculum can be embedded in the design and implementation of each school's own curriculum involving learning experiences outside the classroom. Many of the people and places that can strengthen students' understanding of and commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi are beyond our schools and classrooms, as are many of the sources of knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga. Through learning outside the classroom, we can reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity, and the places we take students to can signal the value of diverse histories and traditions.
- Similarly, the principle of coherence is fundamental to learning outside the classroom because any "beyond school" experience inevitably crosses learning areas and can potentially support transitions and pathways to further learning. The national curriculum emphasises the importance of dealing with future-focused issues, such as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation. Moving beyond the classroom, students are able to directly engage with key authentic resources that relate to those issues, including people, organisations, and places. Learning beyond the classroom also enables students to reflect on and gain insights into their learning processes so that they are learning to learn. Learning sites outside the classroom provide opportunities for high expectations to be realised. All students, regardless of their individual circumstances, can

- learn and can achieve personal excellence in the context of EOTC experiences.
- The New Zealand Curriculum identifies five key competencies: thinking; managing self; relating to others; and participating and contributing. Settings beyond the classroom are rich sites for developing, practising, and demonstrating the key competencies in a range of contexts within and across learning areas.

These aspirations are supported up by strong New Zealand research:

- (Alton-Lee, Nuthall, 1990) 'Links that students are able to make between the classroom and real world experiences can be critical to their long-term learning.'
- (Lynch, 2006) 'Taking students outside the classroom to learn has been a part of schooling in NZ for over a century.'
- (Haddock, 2007, a and b) 'EOTC is still a key component of primary and secondary school life in NZ.'

The EOTC Guidelines also make clear comments on the safety and planning of EOTC trips:

- Learning and safety are paramount in EOTC. While EOTC provides opportunities for positive learning outcomes in a student's education, alongside these gains is the potential for mishap if programmes are not effectively managed.
- Schools have legal responsibilities to keep learning environments safe for students and staff.
- The aim is to ensure quality EOTC learning experiences that are safe for all participants and are consistent with schools' statutory and best-practice responsibilities. Lists of responsibilities may be a useful starting point to develop job descriptions for some groups (for example, EOTC co-ordinators) and codes of conduct for others (for example, students).

New Zealand teaching has had a strong historical connection to learning opportunities outside of the classroom. In the past, through pre-service training and the Schools Advisory Service, there had been opportunities for Teacher Professional Development. This has changed and is no longer the case.

I am interested in what teachers think about

- the value of EOTC
- whether they are able to do as much EOTC as they thought was needed
- whether they are able to do EOTC in ways that best met the needs of their pupils
- what barriers, if any, there may be to offering EOTC, and
- how the Ministry might help.

Activities Undertaken (Methodology)

A series of activities took place while away on sabbatical and after the event. These included:

- Interviews with teachers and Principals;
- Case studies of schools with a strong EOTC background;
- Case studies of schools with a perceived lack of EOTC;
- Online Surveys – which makes up the bulk of my report findings;

- Visits to schools to view and reflect on EOTC curriculum;
- Professional Readings.

Findings

Purpose 1

To explore current practices of EOTC learning across a range of primary schools, finding ways in which EOTC would enhance classroom learning and therefore improve progress and achievement of pupils.

I invited ten specific schools to respond to the online survey. Those selected were schools that were identified as having strong EOTC vision, and traditions of rich learning environments. They were all primary schools, both Full and Contributing.

The results (graphs and teacher responses) are attached in the appendices.

Of those schools invited, five schools responded, with thirty-three different teachers taking part.

Kairanga School: 8

Rongotea School: 3

Waipu School: 2

Winchester School: 10

Te Anau School: 10

Of those responding, 82% were female and 18% male.

9% had been teaching for 0-5 yrs length, 15% for 6-10 yrs, 30% had been teaching for 11-15yrs, 9% for 16-20yrs, 12% for 21-25yrs and 24% over 25 yrs. It is interesting to note that 75% of the respondents had been through fairly traditional teachers' training methods, having been trained between 1955 and 2005.

In terms of PD exclusively for EOTC understanding and support, school based PD was 72% and 39% had had PD provided from the MoE or in their teacher training. 30% had done their own training in this area.

All teachers valued EOTC, with 100% of respondents saying that it was of medium/high, to very high value. 92% said that having EOTC experiences allowed schools to increase the children's experiences, 79% adding that they **strongly agreed** that EOTC gave breadth to learning and enriched the curriculum. One teacher commented 'Some children who struggle with formal classroom learning excel in an outdoor environment. It is wonderful for them to achieve and be seen as successful by their peers.' This kind of comment in support of EOTC was common.

Statements that were either Agreed, or Strongly Agreed with were:

- To increase understanding of classroom learning: 92%
- To better enjoy a healthy lifestyle: 99%
- To assist in forming positive relationships 100%,
- To take responsibility for own safety and equipment: 94%,
- To give breadth to learning and enrich the curriculum: 94%
- To increase children's experiences: 100%

In analysing the results of each survey response and comparing them, the following points were interesting to note:

- Teachers who had taught longer than 15 years (whom I classed as being 'experienced teachers') were more likely to have had EOTC training and Professional Development as part of their teacher training and also less likely to

- perceive any barriers to doing EOTC. Overall their confidence was higher than for less experienced teachers.
- Experienced teachers were more likely to have more EOTC organised during the year. Some of this is due to their school's expectations, but most seemed to be personal choice.
 - More experienced teachers were more likely to go further afield, outside of the local school environment, to enrich children's learning.
 - There was a fairly even split between the use of Park-like residential camps and Environmental. Those who mainly did Park-like camps cited the ease of organisation and the responsibility for Health & Safety being passed onto these camp owners, rather than all being placed on the teacher in charge.
 - All teachers perceived that organising and managing EOTC experiences was difficult to offer, due to increased:
 - Bureaucracy – both local school and Ministry of Education expectations;
 - Wariness of Health & Safety rules, responsibility;
 - Changing parental availability to help, due to work arrangements;
 - Teachers who had been teaching for less than 15 years had some interesting things to add:
 - they were less confident of their own EOTC leadership ability due to a lack of training;
 - They were more likely to do EOTC within the school grounds, rather than further afield;
 - They were more likely to perceive barriers than the more experienced teachers;
 - School bureaucracy was seen to be more of an barrier than for any other group;
 - They desired PD to help with EOTC planning and implementation more than other groups.

Full Primary schools seemed to have a more consistent approach and an EOTC component to learning than Contributing schools.

Purpose 2:

To inform Ministry of Education curriculum and professional development direction for the future, recognising teacher need in EOTC and opportunities to assist schools in developing their own curriculum in light of the school's context for EOTC opportunities.

Teacher comments, provided as part of my study, show that perception of the restrictions of the MoE guidelines and the lack of awareness of the value of EOTC as a learning experience, have become a stumbling block to providing EOTC for some educators.

This seems to come from a perception amongst teachers and school leaders that the balance between teacher responsibility, safety, and organisation; and the advantage to learning leans too far towards the bureaucratic. Therefore, EOTC becomes too hard to manage in a normal class or school programme. It is my contention that this does not need to be the case.

The perception that EOTC experiences has become too burdensome on staff is not backed up by the guidelines. Misunderstanding of the responsibility, of recent negative media events about injury during EOTC experiences, and of the bureaucracy seems to have become the main barrier for some schools to offering EOTC for the pupils.

This is a real concern. I believe pupils will miss out on valuable contextualised learning enrichment if this is left as it is.

Teachers coming out of pre-service training with little understanding or skill in offering EOTC to children, and schools who have not had recent PD in the value of EOTC and the guidelines, will naturally put EOTC into the 'too hard basket'. Judging from the results, and comments from schools I have contacted, there is a need for MoE to show leadership by offering PD in this area across the country.

Schools who showed a tradition of and strong leadership in EOTC for their school seemed to do more EOTC than those without this background and expertise. They were prepared to have more planned experiences in the local and wider area, and they organised these events more often in the school year.

These schools responded by saying how it was that they did more EOTC:

- there were more opportunities for teachers to plan collaboratively,
- there were established resources in the school and community to connect with
- that school leaders (Principals and Boards of Trustees), actively encouraged EOTC to happen,
- That processes and policies around EOTC were designed to reduce barriers, to make EOTC 'easy to do',
- that there had been either mentoring of experienced teachers with young teachers, or had been opportunity to experience PD in EOTC at their school

Summary & Recommendations

Given the feedback and responses from the schools, I see a need for a review of the support of EOTC for teachers and leaders in New Zealand schools.

The standout trend from the survey results and school comments was the clear distinction between experienced teachers' (those who have taught for 15+ years) and less experienced teachers' skill, understanding and willingness to do EOTC with their children.

Experienced teachers' understanding, willingness and ability to connect classroom learning to the real world through EOTC was significantly higher than those who had taught for a shorter time.

The reasons given for this seems to be around the difference in opportunities for teachers to learn about EOTC, either in pre-service, or as part of an advisory service professional development course(s).

The main points are:

The current EOTC Guidelines and Curriculum principles do not seem to be well-known, or understood by less-experienced teachers or school leaders. PD is needed to up-skill educators and leaders in this.

Understanding of the level of bureaucracy needed to run EOTC is not well understood. Communication is required about what is needed and what is not. These 'best practice examples' should be tempered with time constraints of normal classroom teaching.

On-going advice and support by experienced and well-regarded education facilitators may be needed to give direction, professional advice and understanding of what significant EOTC experiences could be offered by teachers and would engage children in classroom learning.

I recommend that the Ministry of Education review the EOTC Professional Development opportunities on offer for teachers and schools and explore ways in which modern teachers can be better prepared for offering EOTC experiences.

Alastair Schaw,
December 2014.