

My sabbatical report: Ali Turner  
October 2015

During the term of my sabbatical, I began by investigating the alignment of the Enviro-Schools philosophy with our current curriculum.

Ngatimoti School became a Green-Gold Enviro-School in 2010, and it was at this time that our revised curriculum also came in to action. Our community has continued their belief that environmental education is important for our students and a part of the Ngatimoti culture, and the BOT developed a strategic goal titled Identity, in 2013. I was keen to draw on learning from the past and discover ways to take the Enviro-Schools learning to a new level by incorporating this throughout our curriculum.

Our curriculum was based on perceived needs at the time, but we need to be mindful of continuing to gain input from the community whilst allowing students to draw on their strengths and interests.

The concept of well-being comes through in the Enviro-Schools programme, but has not been reflected strongly in our present Ngatimoti curriculum. From my research, I am beginning to understand the centrality of well-being to all environmental education. According to Ken Robinson, “Students need to feel safe first and the next step is to feel valued as individuals.”

Discovering Mā ori views of well-being should come to the fore in our curriculum. It is the relationship that Mā ori people have with the land and the sense of kaitiakitanga, that underpins so much of the enviro-schools philosophy. This is where a true sense of connectedness can arise.

During my sabbatical, I was able to visit and talk to a number of Principals, teachers and students who are currently involved with the Enviro-Schools programme. In considering our curriculum, I noticed that many of our Ngatimoti actions, including classroom units of work, special projects or timetabled enviro-groups, were strongly embedded. We are fortunate to have BOT and parent support for our enviro learning, as many schools do not enjoy this level of support. What I did notice from my conversations and observations though, is that many schools, including us, put priority on the visible actions, which is possibly because they are the most measurable. The value in the time for students to talk, collaborate, question or present to others is more difficult to measure, but should be a vital and integral part of any enviro activities. The ability for leaders to adapt to changes and to generate new ideas was mentioned by Ken Robinson, and these sorts of skills are what we need to factor in to our curriculum. Environmental education lends itself well to these.

In Ken Robinson’s book “Creative Schools”, key concepts that a curriculum could embrace were identified as: curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, compassion, composure and citizenship.

At Ngatimoti School our values underpin all that we do, and form a strong basis for our curriculum. I have compared our values with Ken Robinsons’ words in the chart below:

Respect	Critical thinking, citizenship, composure, compassion
positive	Compassion, composure

innoVative	Curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, collaborative
excellEnt	Creativity, citizenship, communication
Responsible	Compassion, collaboration, citizenship, communication

It seems we will get to be R.I.V.E.R. students and teachers by being curious, creative, communicative, collaborative, compassionate, composed, critically thinking and with an understanding of what it means to be a citizen. Our RIVER values are important to keep at this point in time, however it may be useful for teachers to refer to Ken Robinson's words to flesh out our values. For example, the word composure could be discussed with students and teachers as a coping strategy, and as a way to remain positive in times of trouble, or as a way of showing respect by being humble.

To strengthen the environmental component of our curriculum, we should ensure both a science perspective and a social science perspective. Eco-literacy is knowing about the consequences of our actions (or inactions) and this means for both the environment and the people in it. Ken Robinson said "*The actual danger is not to the planet, it is to the conditions of our survival on it.*" He is referring to life, and human needs. This puts a different perspective on our environmental education programmes, as it means that it is not about caring for the planet, but rather it is about caring for the people on the planet.

As a school, we now need to go back to monitor how effective our approaches have been. We should discuss with staff, parents and students the relationship between well-being and achievement, whilst facilitating the relationship between learning and place.

In "Eco Literacy", Stone argues that it is not about what we teach, but about thinking and being creative together. The NZ Curriculum has given us license to do this since 2008, but this has been a big shift in thinking for us as teachers. Everywhere is a learning environment, and so our curriculum can reflect this.

Through reading, visiting, discussing and thinking, I believe our curriculum could become more

- Future focused, so that learning is geared to be meaningful to our students – students actually USING the learning and being increasingly relevant to them, our community and our environment
- Cohesive, with many links between learning areas, across the year, from home to school and vice versa.
- Hands-on learning, which is a starter for minds-on learning.
- Responsive and flexible.

A future-oriented curriculum should aim to

- Engage students (and teachers) intellectually and emotionally
- Foster the development of science capabilities
- Build understanding of powerful science ideas and ideas about science itself
- Provide opportunities for creativity and knowledge building
- Carefully balance depth and breadth
- Provide opportunities for students to engage with complexity and uncertainty in real world issues

- Provide students with a wider range of adults to help them to decide how and what to learn

In 2016, the yearly plan has been revised to include concepts across the learning areas that are a part of our community. Learning about the local crops and farms and the stories of our area have been incorporated, but within a tuakana-teina approach, whereby buddy classes are working together.

To review our curriculum properly will take time and planning, but I am confident that after this sabbatical I have a clearer sense of direction about the opportunities Environmental Education can offer us, while building a sense of citizenship and community well being.

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References:

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