

Enviroschools in New Zealand

Samantha Jackson

Abstract: Waitati Primary School is an ‘Enviroschool’ (a school whose entire curriculum is based around the main theme of sustainability) with a school roll of sixty-five pupils located approximately twenty kilometres north of Dunedin. The intent of this project was to examine the Waitati Enviroschool, and investigate the place that Enviroschools have within mainstream education in New Zealand. The aim was to take an indigenous approach towards health, well-being and identity, and study how the Enviroschool can facilitate better health, well-being and identity within a specific area. Three particular models of indigenous health and well-being were used to provide appropriate components for this investigation. These were the Te Wheke model (Pere, 2008), the Te Pou Mahutonga and Te Whare Tapa Wha models (Durie, 2008a, 2008b, respectively) and the land-based Te Pae Mahutonga model (Panelli & Tipa, 2007). Selected components of these models included whānau (family), marae (communal learning establishment), waiora (environmental protection), and taha wairua (spiritual health) to demonstrate the positive overall health and well-being which was apparent in the kaupapa of Enviroschools in general, and the opinions presented by the community members in regards to Waitati Enviroschool in particular. Interviews were conducted with three key members of the Waitati community who had both an involvement with the school, and wider community. They were asked a variety of questions based on their knowledge, and feelings towards Waitati school in particular, and Enviroschools in general. Their answers were compared with the basic philosophy and aims set out by Enviroschools in general and also in terms of indigenous perspectives of health, well-being and identity. The results emphasise the need to re-define the way in which we conceptualise health and well-being in New Zealand. They also reinforce the value of indigenous perspectives, especially within a quasi-mainstream educational institution. In addition, the project has demonstrated the value of engaging in research for communities.

Keywords: environment; enviroschools; health; identity; indigenous perspectives; well-being

The Enviroschools concept

In 1993, Hamilton City Council developed a trial programme with three schools (*“Enviroschools Guiding Principles,”* n.d.) in the Waikato region. The concept emerged because of the increasing worry about the state of the global ecosystem, and after a number of government and international acts, that made environmental protection dominate the thoughts of society. In 1999, after the success of the first three schools, the Hamilton City Council’s Sustainable Environment team, in conjunction with a number of local and national environmental partners developed the initial concept for the facilitated Enviroschools programme. The aim of this programme was to provide a framework for other schools to establish similar schools. In 2001 an Enviroschools kit and a handbook were launched, to give to schools who were interested in becoming Enviroschools, and a professional development programme was initiated to train Enviroschool facilitators. The kit and handbook, provided operational information for schools on how to establish a three year plan and how to implement the programme for the school, the community and the environment. In 2002, the Enviroschools programme was made available nationally under the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education. This included collaboration with local bodies and government agencies, training facilitators and establishing robust national management and support for regions. Subsequently, an awards scheme was launched as a result of a joint effort by the Auckland Regional Council, Ministry of Education and Enviroschools. At this point, the

awards were designed as an incentive to support schools that did not have access to the facilitated programme. In 2003, the Enviroschools foundation was formed as the governing body for the facilitated programme and awards scheme, and the national office opened in Hamilton. From this point onwards, schools could choose to be a part of the awards system, the facilitated programme, or both. Enviroschools are set-up regionally, so there may be differences on how the process is set-up in regions, and the handbook and kit provided guidelines to help the schools.

In this project, the interest was in examining the philosophy (kaupapa) of Enviroschools, as shown by their five guiding principles (sustainable communities, education for sustainability, genuine student participation, Māori perspectives, and respect for the rich diversity of people and cultures) and interpreting this kaupapa in the light of existing models of Māori health and well-being (“Enviroschools Guiding Principles,” n.d.).

The awards scheme

The Enviroschools awards scheme acts as an incentive for Enviroschools to continue with their sustainable ways, in collaboration with the wider community. Schools are rewarded with either a bronze, silver or green-gold award, according to specific criteria (“*Enviroschools Awards Criteria*,” n.d.). The scheme is made up of four key areas which are: Organisational management, Operational practices, Physical surroundings and Living curriculum. Organisational management is then further divided into: Envirogroup, Whole school and community development, Environmental care code and Environmental review.

Operational practices

These are the action projects that the schools choose to undertake within a certain year period. At Waitati school, some of the projects included making and selling organic cleaning products, and planting near the stream. One such project is ‘Physical surroundings’ which have to do with both the built and natural environments. This aspect of the awards criteria is about beautifying the area around the school. The final part of the criteria is titled ‘Living curriculum’ (teaching and learning). Living curriculum involves having at least one person in charge of environmental education within the school, which in conjunction with community wants and needs sets the curriculum, and includes a multifaceted approach to learning.

For a school to receive a bronze award, all of the elements in two key areas need to be completed. To receive a silver award, all of the elements in three key areas need to be completed. And to receive a green-gold award, all elements in all four key areas need to be completed. Waitati school currently has a bronze Enviroschools award, but were unsure of their intention of going for a higher award in following years, largely because they felt unsure about the Enviroschools awards scheme. Whilst they felt that the award was a good way to get the school and community excited, they felt that there was a lot of extra work that needed to be done to get the awards, raising the question as to whether there needed to be a set criteria in the first place, or whether schools could just apply in writing based on their own merits, and they could then be judged individually, and case by case.

Indigenous health models

There are four indigenous health models which are relevant for the purpose of this project: Rose Pere’s (2008) Te Wheke model; Mason Durie’s Te Whare Tapa Wha (2008a) and Te Pou Mahutonga (2008b) models; and Panelli and Tipa’s (2007) land-based identity model. These models recognise the importance of a multi-faceted approach to health by acknowledging specific and important cornerstones of health and well-being, which are closely integrated.

Each aspect of health within these models is fundamental to overall individual and group health and well-being.

Pere's model is conceptualised as an octopus, the head of the octopus is symbolic of whānau (family), and the eyes are symbolic of both individual and whānau total health and well-being (Pere, 2008). The basis of this model is that for us as individuals to be healthy, it is vital for our whānau and wider community to also be healthy. Already, we can see a divergence from a traditional Western approach to health and well-being, where it is often only the individual's mental and physical attributes that are taken into account. Within Pere's model, each of the eight tentacles represents a specific and interwoven dimension of health which is important in maintaining good health and well-being. These tentacles are; wairuatanga (spirituality), hinengaro (mind), taha tinana (physical), whanaungatanga (extended family), mauri (life force in people and objects), mana ake (unique identity of individuals and family), ha a koro mā, a kui mā (breath of life from forbearers) and whatu manawa (open and healthy expression of emotion). Important here is that physical and mental health are only considered as two aspects and are equally as important as all other aspects. There is a strong community and family based focus within this model, showing that it is not only individual health which is important for ones own health and well-being (Pere, 2008).

Durie's Te Whare Tapa Wha model of health has fewer components than that of Pere's model. It is based on the structure of a whare (house) which has four strong walls, with each representing a cornerstone of health. These walls are: taha tinana (physical health); taha wairua (spiritual health); taha whānau (family health) and taha hinengaro (mental health). Each dimension cannot be separated from another. In this model, physical health refers to the capacity for growth and development, which is not only important individually, but can be extended to family, and to community, and the need for a balance between environmental growth and development. Spiritual health is related to unseen and unspoken energies which determine who we are. This aspect is intimately linked with the environment which, within an indigenous perspective is believed to be the host of the spirits of our ancestors. This spiritual link, through the environment, is indicative of the relationship between our ancestors of the past, present and future. Whānau (family) health is referring to the stance we take within greater social systems, not only through our own immediate and extended family networks, but also through the relationships we have as the class 'humans'. The whānau aspect of this model also provides us with a link to our ancestors, who define who we are, and provides us with ties to the past, present and the future. Lastly, taha hinengaro is related to our capacity to communicate, and governed by the idea that to think and feel, mind and body are inseparable. To have strong mental health is reliant on one's ability to be able to express emotion. Through the indigenous perspective represented in this model, thoughts, feelings and emotions are integral components of the body and soul (Durie, 2008b).

The Te Pae Mahutonga model recognises six aspects for Māori health promotion within New Zealand (Durie, 2008a). Each aspect is described as a star, within the 'Southern Cross' constellation. The four central stars; mauriora (health of life force), waiora (environmental protection), toiora (healthy lifestyles), and te oranga (well-being) each represent a fundamental aspect of health promotion. Mauriora is dependent on a secure cultural identity. Health and well-being can be achieved through mauriora via culture, language and knowledge, through such institutions as the marae. Waiora relates to healthy sea, land and sky and importantly a harmony being kept between development, use and protection. Toiora focuses on personal behaviours and responsibilities, toward looking after oneself. Te oranga recognizes that health promotion (in particular increasing well-being) requires increased participation by Māori. The final two pointer stars, nga manukura (leadership) and te mana whakahaere (autonomy) recognise the importance of leadership and autonomy as key to achieving total and overall health and well-being (Durie, 2008a).

The final model is one discussed by Panelli and Tipa (2007) as a Māori health model which is centred on place-based identity, where each experience of well-being will vary from place to place and reflect different aspects which are important for health and identity. These aspects are: whenua (earth); turangawaewae (stand place); whanaungatanga (kinship); whānau (family); wairua (spirit); hinengaro (mind, heart); whatumanawa (feelings) and tinana (body). Having a mutual respect with the environment, where social and economic benefits are balanced with protection leads to a harmonious and greater sense of health and well-being (Panelli & Tipa, 2007).

In studying these models, there are a number of commonalities. All of the aspects are important, but within the present project I wish to see if the Enviroschool can be seen as a contemporary marae, and as a place where these wider health perspectives can be both nurtured and cherished. In doing this, the aspects of health and well-being to pay particularly close attention to are whānau, marae and waiora (environmental connection). Because the different health dimensions are closely interwoven, these are linked to the other aspects of health that have been identified.

Health of whānau is important for one's own health and well-being but in this context. The term is used here to extend beyond the immediate family to the community and further to the greater family of all humankind. In the model proposed here, mental health incorporates the significance of acting as a kaitiaki (guardian) and how this relates to having a place to stand, and to matters of leadership. The term 'marae' is used to refer to the Waitati Enviroschool, and in a broader context, to any institution that teaches indigenous values. These places are viewed as being important vehicles for teaching a holistic approach to health, and as places where culture can be nurtured. The term 'environmental health' refers to the balance of use, development and sustainability. Within the spiritual dimension of environment, reference is made to the close link that Māori have with the land, and how the land acts as a link to the past, present and future ancestors as shown through whakapapa. While physical health would be the final aspect of this model, it is beyond the scope of the present study. Taken together, all of these closely linked aspects lead to a greater overall health and well-being, and all are equally important.

The notion of identity has, for the purposes of this project, been defined as 'I am'. It is used here because it relates to aspects of health and well-being. For this project, three factors which help determine and create one's identity have been identified. These are whānau, environment and the marae. Whānau is central to shaping our identity for a number of reasons. Within an indigenous perspective, it is through whānau where we learn about our ancestors. Learning about our ancestors is an important part of our identity, it tells us who we are, and where we are from, and how we fit into the family. Whānau also provides us with a sense of belonging to a group, giving us something to identify with. Having a strong sense of whānau is also vital for having a strong sense of self identity because whānau acts as a framework for understanding overall identity because it is arguably through family where we first learn indigenous perspectives. Our families act as our first teachers, and it is through family that we learn about health and well-being, and learn the importance of aspects of indigenous perspectives such as being a kaitiaki (guardian), having pride and a standpoint, our roles within family and community. All of these elements are necessary for overall health, well-being and for a strong sense of identity.

Marae and institutions like them are key places for instilling identity, family and community values and cultural practices. In the case of the Waitati community, both the school and the neighbouring Karitane marae act as places where identity is nourished and secured; thus the definition of marae in this report also extends to the school. Lastly, the environment is also central to identity because of both its link with whānau, and the way in which it acts to socially organise groups. Within an indigenous perspective, aspects of the environment (such as mountains and rivers) act as markers of tribal affiliations. These features are identifiers of

family origins and ties. As noted by Moeke-Pickering (1996) such links also symbolise those between past, present and future generations through whakapapa (genealogy).

In summary, overall health and well-being is reliant on a good sense of self and community identity. In the following sections, the extent to which the key concepts of whānau, marae, waiora and taha wairua are manifested in the Waitati Enviroschool is addressed, through the eyes of both the community, and the kaupapa as set out by Enviroschools.

The philosophy (kaupapa) of Enviroschools

There are five main principles which guide the Enviroschools programme. They are derived from understandings about how environment, ecology, education, society and culture contribute to creating a sustainable school, community and world. The five main principles are: sustainable communities, environmental education, genuine student participation, Māori perspectives and respect for the diversity of people and cultures.

The first guiding principle, sustainable communities, is related to how sustainable communities act in ways that nurture people and nature, both now and in the future. This guiding principle acknowledges the fact that communities are made up of people, the ecosystem, and the landscapes that we live in, and a variety of native and non native animals and plants. To become more sustainable, schools need to understand the interconnectedness and interdependence of each element of the environment. This principle has a strong connection to the indigenous, environmental health perspective.

The second guiding principle views environmental education as an action-focused approach to learning that engages us in the physical, social, cultural and political aspects of our environment. Enviroschools provide education about sustainability in, for, and about the environment. This encourages a holistic and integrated learning approach, both inside and outside of the classroom (“Enviroschools Guiding Principles,” n.d.). The third guiding principle recognises that genuine student participation is a vital part of running a successful Enviroschool. Through active participation the students learn the importance of being a part of a strong and secure community (whānau) which is central to health well-being and identity.

The fourth guiding principle of the Enviroschools programme acknowledges the importance of Māori understanding of the environment. This acknowledges the unique relationship that Māori have with the land, in terms of organising social structures and in the spiritual dimension. Within this viewpoint, the land is seen to host the spirits of our past and future, thus the environment is sacred and needs to be cared for. The addition of Māori perspectives to the kaupapa of Enviroschools enriches the learning process by adding further layers of learning within a quasi-mainstream context.

The final guiding principle is respect for the diversity of people and cultures. It is integral to achieving a sustainable environment in New Zealand, one that is fair, peaceful and co-operative and makes the most of our rich cultural traditions (“Enviroschools Guiding Principles,” n.d.) schools Guiding Principles).

Methods

Three members of the Waitati community were interviewed. They were people who had both an intimate relationship with and knowledge of the Waitati Enviroschool, but were also closely involved in the wider community. The open interviewing technique was framed around the following questions:

- What is an Enviroschool?
- What is your involvement with Waitati school?
- How long have you been involved for?
- Can you tell me about Enviroschools?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having an Enviroschool?
- How important do you think the Waitati community is, for Waitati being an Enviroschool?
- What projects has the school undertaken?
- What perspectives do Enviroschools offer?

Results

In general, the participants held views which were very consistent with the broader health issues, which are offered within an indigenous perspective of health and well-being. They recognised the values of the principles of the Enviroschool movement and the need to educate for sustainability. The participants were very appreciative of the functioning of Waitati school as an enviroshool, and they personally supported a range of projects in the programme. These projects included, building, stream re-planting and general beautifying of the area. They found the concept of Enviroschools and environmental education to be extremely important but had reservations about the practicality of the awards system.

The school as a marae

In the three interviews, there were positive opinions about the school, and its links with the community's interests and needs. There were many responses in the interviews that highlighted these points, and a selection of salient ones follow. First, is the theme that the school is also the educational hub of the community. In this manner, the school functions as an urban marae because local knowledge is constantly being accessed and utilised by the school, and so it becomes more than just a building. The theme of tapping into local knowledge was highlighted by one of the interviewees as was the appreciation of sharing ideas.

Environment

The participant community members made it clear that they acted as guardians of the land and recognised the indigenous perspective and the role of a strong human-environment connection with forming a sense of identity and place. And that by maintaining the environment and keeping it beautiful, the children are guarding the spirits of their ancestors and also feel that they are a valued part of their area.

The three interviewees recognised the importance for environmental protection education to be taught at the Waitati Enviroschool, and they acknowledged this by such practices as "...picking up rubbish, replanting by the stream, making organic cleaning products and reducing the amount of energy they use". The importance of caring for the environment is showcased through the school's care code which is a part of the criteria for the awards system. The Waitati School's code, includes practices such as: conserving energy by closing doors; turning off appliances and lights when not in use; conserving water by turning off taps properly; respect and care for all other living creatures including trees and plants; and limiting the use of plastic packaging. The children are also taught to use compost and rubbish bins correctly. They are taught about use, and to not use too much of a given resource, so they are encouraged to limit the amount of paper used through photocopying and printing. They are also encouraged to make informed decisions about keeping the environment safe and beautiful for now and in the future. There were several responses that linked a happy environment to a happy self: "It's about beautifying the place, making it a pleasant place to be, a happy place". The words beautifying, pleasant and happy were used to describe the state of the land, and this makes them feel happy.

The theme of custodianship was also clear: “Kids seeing parents and teachers gardening and planting by the stream is a great example to them of how to look after plants and care about the stream.” The value in nurturing and teaching this type of behaviour was emphasised by participants, as was the role of the present children for future health and well-being. There was also a deeper understanding of the indigenous perspectives at work, for example “We were trying to connect people to their place. We were trying to get people to understand on a deeper level their own place. It’s really important to me that cultural perspectives and relationships with the land are well understood”.

The whānau approach

All of the interviewees acknowledged the role of the Enviroschool in the community. The school utilizes all forms of knowledge and skill from all members of the community, so the pupils are privileged with a rich understanding of their area and the environment. The school bases its curriculum on needs set out by the community at a public meeting and each year these needs are reviewed to see what was covered in the previous year and what needs to be taught in the upcoming school year. This flexible approach has helped with the schools success and it encourages community members to be involved, regardless of whether their children are at the school or not.

The awards scheme

There was one major point of contention with the interviewees. This was the concept of the voluntary awards. Each member recognised that while it is a nice feeling to receive an award, they questioned the potential influence on choosing projects. That is, whether the school undertook particular projects for the award, or whether they continued with planned projects which might reduce the chances of gaining an award. It was clear that a review of the award system would be appreciated so that there would be more convergence with the community needs and the requirements set out by the foundation of Enviroschools.

Conclusions

In addition to fundamental goals and activities for teaching and learning the Enviroschools concept is valuable for teaching and harbouring indigenous perspectives regarding land, health and well-being. This case study of the Waitati Enviroschool demonstrates that it is a place where such indigenous perspectives can be successfully applied. The reason for this is there are a number of members within the community who have a deep and rich understanding of these values and thus can be successfully applied in a broader sense. Community is one of the major driving factors for the success of the Waitati Enviroschool.

This project also indicates how valuable interpretations and re-interpretations of appropriate health and well-being models can be in our schools and communities; and also for our national identity as New Zealanders. An Enviroschool acts as a medium within a semi-mainstream context, to help keep these ideals alive and to keep relevant knowledge and practices from the indigenous world alive. The present investigation has also provided questions for future research. However, the work here shows that on issues with a community-research focus, it is necessary to work closely with key knowledge holders in communities. There is no room for the usual gap between mainstream academic research approaches and community-based traditional knowledge.

References

- Durie, M. (2008a). Māori health models: Te Pae Mahutonga. Retrieved November 20, 2008, from <http://www.Māorihealth.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesma/446>
- Durie, M. (2008b). Māori health models: Te Whare Tapa Wha. Retrieved November 20, 2008, from <http://www.Māorihealth.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesma/445>
- Enviroschools Awards Criteria (n.d.). Retrieved January 4, 2009, from <http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Council/Education/awards%20criteria.pdf>
- Enviroschools Guiding Principles (n.d.). Retrieved January 4, 2009, from <http://www.enviroschools.org.nz/>
- Moeke-Pickering, T. (1996). *Māori Identity Within Whānau: A review of literature*. Hamilton: University of Waikato.
- Panelli, R., & Tipa, G. (2007). Placing well-being: A Māori case study of cultural and environmental specificity. *Eco Health*, 4 445-460.
- Pere, R. (2008). Māori health models: Te Wheke. Retrieved November 20, 2008, from <http://www.Māorihealth.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesma/447>

Author Notes

The support of Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga through its Research Internship programme is gratefully acknowledged. Further thanks are also offered to the Waitati school and community, and to Dr. Pip Pehi and Anne-Marie Jackson.

Samantha Jackson (Ngāti Whātua, Ngā Puhi) is a physiology and philosophy student at the University of Otago.

E-mail: jacs869@student.otago.ac.nz