Sharpen up, shake up and stand up!
Young children as agents of change!

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NZAEE 2014

-Whakatauki-

He iti kopara
Pioi ana te tihi o te kahikatea

“The bellbird may be small
but it has the strength to shake the very top of the kahikatea tree”

Size is not an accurate indication of one’s strength
Though small in stature, enormous in strength
Do not under estimate anyone’s capability

Enviroschools
- empowering students
- learning for sustainability,
- Maori perspectives,
- respect for the diversity of people and cultures
- and sustainable communities.

Then...
- Observed and picked up on children’s interest but - teacher lead
- Environment - teacher lead and set up
- Teachers brought in resources to extend interests
- Changes to the environment - done by staff, committee and work people outside of operation hours
- Planting - teacher choice
- Little parent and community involvement in decisions
- Protected children from learning through inquiring mind - safety first especially around use of equipment
- Minimal education for sustainability - only gardening, seasonal interests, worm farm but teacher cared for and did this
- Based around science and nature

Now...
- Education for sustainability is integrated throughout Holistic
- Children have a voice - collaborative approach
- Any changes in the environment come from the children and in consultation with all involved, and happens with the children - policy change
- The children are responsible for our environment and the sustainable practices
- The children are able to set up their environment with moveable resources, able to teach each other, be involved in inquiry learning, real meaningful work, and are leading their learning.
- Children have a stronger awareness of who they are and their contributions
- Discourse of shared meaning making where we are all learners and teachers - Ako.
- Enhanced whānau/ parent and community involvement
- We continue to explore and learn more - we allow time to WONDER and PONDER

Question for reflection...
Where did your environmental journey start and how has this possibly impacted on your beliefs, interests or practices?
Education for Sustainability in ECE?

- “...it is becoming clearer that living sustainably is essential, not optional. There is no negotiation, education for sustainability is critical” (Sue Elliott, 2010, p.34).

- Davis (2009) exposes this research ‘hole’ in a preliminary survey of early childhood education for sustainability.

Four key tenets...

- The child is a right holder
- That ECEfS is much more than environmental education
- That diversity and democracy are key issues for sustainability and that children acquire an identity while developing a sense of themselves as world citizens
- That ECEfS requires people to think critically about things that are taken for granted, and to find creative solutions and alternatives to unsustainable habits and practices (Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008)

Research Questions

Main question
What are children’s perspectives on their role as ‘guardians of the Earth’?

Sub questions
What are children’s understandings about being ‘guardians of the Earth’?
What are children’s understandings about being ‘agents of change’?
How do children co-construct and enact their understandings about these roles?
What importance do they give to these roles?

Methodology

- Research design
- Accessing and recruiting participants
- Research instruments
- Ethical implications
- Context

Preliminary Findings...

It’s a team effort - we are all responsible...It is a BIG important job!
Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much...- Helen Keller

J: yip, why do you think we should?
George: it doesn’t get messy
J: so it doesn’t get messy. Why don’t we want a messy environment?
George: because then it won’t look good
J: because it won’t look good and do you think we would like living in a messy environment?
George: Nah
J: so who’s job do you think it is to tidy up the environment?
George: all of us
J: all of our jobs, we have the responsibility to do it.
George: yip
I can do it! – attitude!

Shinda Lamaze: I'll write a letter.
Belle: can I help?
J: that would be great thanks Shinda Lamaze and Belle. We need a letter to go with the money. What shall we write in the letter?
Shinda Lamaze: thank you for looking after the letter.
J: that's a good start. Do we know how they are going to look after the letter?
Belle: write a poem.
J: so maybe we could ask them how they will be using our money to help care for the kiwis.
Shinda Lamaze: yes.
Belle: yes, I can help.

I can teach others: Ako

J: Do you know what? I'm really impressed about Michelangelo are all your ideas about how we could teach the school kids about being conservationist about putting their rubbish in the bin and even not having rubbish by having wrap free lunch boxes.
Michelangelo: I could be the king of rubbish couldn't I?
J: you could be the king of rubbish, you could be the king of rubbish collection, and making sure you tell everyone. We could make you a crown.
Michelangelo: Yip
Ellie: and on the crown it could have pictures of rubbish
J: it could it could have all sorts of rubbish
Michelangelo: And a bin
J: a bit like Micheal recycle....
Care and Protecting creatures

- Why did you want to refill the birdfeeders Sage?
  Sage: because they were empty
- could you not source these empty?
  Sage: yes, but we need food for the birds
- could you not get food from somewhere else?
  Sage: no, it’s more convenient to make the birdfood
  Sage: we need food for the birds
  Sage: I like hearing them sing
  Sage: so we need food for there
  Sage: we need food to keep them alive
  Sage: so we need food for the birds
  Sage: it’s the same reason

Michelangelo: you’re welcome!
J: it looks like you are picking up salad!
Michelangelo: yeah I am the picker upper!
J: I like how you are using the rakes as tongs Michelangelo!
Tinkerbell: and play with it!
Lachlan: no we put it on the trolleys
J: why Tinkerbell?
Tinkerbell: I like this job
Sage: because then they will not get hurt. They are important to our garden.
J: why do we need to look after them?
Sage: because then they will not get hurt. They are important to our garden.
J: what is your job?
Sage: because then they will not get hurt. They are important to our garden.
J: why are you choosing to do this job, Lachlan?
Lachlan: because we don’t like the birds eating it
J: yip and you care for the environment, is that the reason?
Michelangelo: yes
J: and are you thinking if you leave it there what could happen?
Sage: because then they will not get hurt. They are important to our garden.
J: that’s great that there is hardly any rubbish found in our kindergarten playground.
Sage: we don’t want animals to eat the rubbish
J: why don’t we want animals to eat it Lou?
Lou: They will die and then the earth will die!

Safety- littering

- you are it is part of our environment, but I am wondering what is making you pick up the rubbish, because lots of people walk to and fro and they just walk past it, they don’t pick it up so what is making you pick up the rubbish?
Michelangelo: because it is part of our environment
- you and you care for the environment, is that the reason?
Michelangelo: yes
- and are you thinking if you leave it there what could happen?
Michelangelo: it might cause a fire

J: that’s great that there is hardly any rubbish found in our kindergarten playground.
Lou: we don’t want animals to eat the rubbish
J: why don’t we want animals to eat it Lou?
Lou: They will die and then the earth will die!

Working theories...

- The power a sign has to teach others
- To be a Earth guardian you need a cape
- A job that requires a badge is important!
- That the earth is up there...
- Guardians are ‘Care Bears’
- A robot can clean up all the rubbish but it will take 100 years
- If there is no earth there will be no place to go on holiday
- You can build another earth from hard rock, wood and logs but it would take ages

The children have a strong ethic of care

- Overall the data is showing that the children have a strong sense of responsibility and ethic of care towards their environment. The children have put a lot of importance on this role and there is a consensus amongst the group that it is a job that they share with all their friends. Several of the data recordings showed children taking responsibility or commenting on their role as the person who has this task of caring for their environment or a small creature through being a monitor, taking charge or teaching a friend. The data recordings showed children seem to connect the role of guardianship strongly to reducing rubbish and cleaning up the litter in their environment. This was also where a theme of safety was prominent in the data as the children connected the mess and litter to being unsafe and a danger to them, the environment and creatures. Something that is very noticeable in the data is the fact that the group of children has a strong appreciation of nature, they identify with it, they are intrigued and wonder about what is around them, they showed empathy, they used these around them. Some children use an inspiration about and guard the Earth. They need to love it first and experience it, about and for the environment all play an important part in this.

In the long term children must genuinely value the environment and this requires a holistic vision of education for sustainability, including a focus on ecological knowledge and understanding, environmental attitudes and behaviours, building a sense of place and forging connectedness within our communities. This deep ecological understanding needs to begin in early childhood. It is also vital that children build strong self esteem, interpersonal relationships and positive attitudes towards learning (Elliott, 2007).
Teachers empowering children to be agents of change

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NZAEE 2014

The Research Context

- Participatory case study
- A Christchurch Kidsfirst Kindergarten
- Enviroschools programme integrated into Te Whāriki
- Data gathered from participants – 35 children, 3 teachers, 3 parents and 1 education services manager.

Whole Centre Approach
(Enviroschools Foundation, 2011).

- Tangata – People & Participation (organisational management and decisions making)
- Tikanga – Practices (day-to-day operational practices in the centre)
- Kaupapa Ako – Programmes (curriculum/maraautanga & approach to teaching and learning)
- Wāhi – Place (physical surroundings: buildings and whenua/grounds)

Living the culture of sustainability in ECE

- Teachers and children planning and creating the vision
- Teachers seeking ideas from children
- Meaningful participation by children
- Wider collaboration with whānau & community
- Undeterred by barriers – safety & risk
- Children influencing others

Teachers who create a culture of hope and collaboration

- Focus on hope and working together to move thinking away from doom and gloom to thinking about positive action with young children
- Children being informed about and involved in the everyday life experiences – the celebrations and the issues that impact on their lives
- Allowing children to become agents of change
- Promoting democratic principles and processes

These children are:

- Knowing
- Experienced
- Wise
- Protective
- Reliable
- Strong
- Rational
- Competent
Because they have teachers who...

- Share their knowledge and experiences
- Allow children freedom to express new ideas and explore possibilities
- Actively engage with parents, whānau and community
- Are open to new ways of enquiry and transformative action with children
- Recognised the importance of democratic process and purposeful pedagogies

If we ignore the voices and the competence of our very youngest citizens then we ignore some of the most important people who can make a difference now and in the future.

Further reading

- Enviroschool foundation (2011). Enviroschools in the early years. The Enviroschool Foundation
- Enviroschools NZ

"For the child...it is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused- a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. It is more important to pave the way for a child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts that he is not ready to assimilate."

(Rachel Carson, cited in Hayward, B. 2012, p.1)

Questions or comments...