




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

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-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 comes 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: so 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

J: why do you pick up the rubbish?

Lachlan: uhhmm

J: does someone tell you to do it?

Lachlan: no I just see one, and I take it to you because thinking of the environment

J: so you are just doing it because you want to care for the environment, what makes you do it? ...Why do you think we should care for the environment?

Lachlan: because it's what we do because that's our job

J: you know that is so cool that you told me that because I was wondering whose job it is, but you just told me that it is your job. Do other people need to help you?

Lachlan: ahhh yep, Isabelle

J: Isabelle helps. Anybody else?

Lachlan: And my friends

J: All your friends help. I'm wondering is there something we could do to stop people from throwing rubbish on the ground.

Lachlan: Maybe, maybe...a sign

I can do it- attitude!

Stella Lamaze: I'll write a letter

Belle: can I help

J: that would be great thanks Stella Lamaze and Belle. We need a letter to go with the money. What shall we write to the WWF?

Stella Lamaze: thank you for looking after the kiwis


J: that's a good start. Do we know how they are going to look after the kiwis?

Belle: ummm no

J: so maybe we could ask them how they will be using our money to help care for the kiwis.

Stella Lamaze: yes

Belle: yes I can help.



J: what are you doing Nathaniel?

Nathaniel: I am the tap checker today

J: what do you have to check for?

Nathaniel: I need to check that everyone remembers to turn the taps off

J: oh so you are the water monitor today

Nathaniel: yes because the taps should be off

J: what will happen if the taps are not off?


Nathaniel: then I will turn them off, that's my job today.

J: that's being very responsible Nathaniel

Nathaniel: yes we need the water so I need to check all the taps

J: what do we need the water for?

Nathaniel: so we can have a river in the sandpit...uhm...(pause) we don't drink this water but other water we need for drinking.



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 Michael recycle...



Michelangelo: So maybe we can teach people about having a wrap free lunch box

J: how can we do that?

Tinkerbell: we could tell them

Michelangelo in background: My lunchbox is wrap free

J: we could tell them Tinkerbell, what else can we do?

J: has someone got an idea down there?

Sage: I do

J: What can we do to teach people about wrap free lunchboxes Sage?

Sage: Show them

Rose singing: Wrap free lunch boxes, she made up own song

J: We can open our lunchboxes and show them, is that what you thinking? That's a good idea I like that idea

J: what else can we use?

Amber: our words

J: write it... words Amber

Amber: Make a sign

J: is that what you're thinking, make a sign...How will we make a sign? What would the sign look like?

Amber: uhm...it will look like lunch boxes open with no wrappers on the inside, with no wrappers on

Rose: so a picture

J: so a picture of a wrap free lunchbox

Amber: yeah

J: that's a good idea, I like that idea then people can visually see what it looks like, a bit like Sage's idea of showing them.

Ellie: and you can make a big hand

J: you can make a what sorry Ellie?

Ellie: you can make a hand so people wrapping it free

J: So the hand will say stop putting wrappers in or what you're thought...can you explain your thought a bit more please Ellie

Ellie: uhm...it's a hand opening a wrapper

Tinkerbell: it will go like that puts hand up and then draws a line through the air with finger to cross over her hand and that means STOP

J: so stop no wrappers...yeah

Tinkerbell: yeah

Raceman: you might need a sign

J: yeah we are talking about the sign Raceman, we talking about what the sign would look like

Sage: Stop

J: Stop

Rose: Stop what?


Raceman: Stop, no throwing rubbish on the ground

Joyce: so have those word on it

Michelangelo: and go to the bin

J: so maybe a picture of a bin, so put it in the bin

Tinkerbell: and maybe a person putting it in the bin



Michelangelo: well I think it needs to be big like this, (draws a rectangle shape) and then in the middle it needs to have the earth because that's what we do

J: what do we do?

Sage: we look after it

J: what would you like your cape to say to people?

Sage: care for the earth

J: ok, why should we love the Earth?

Sage: up here...I'll write my name.

J: did you want words on it like Sage did or just the heart?

Kila: I want love the earth on my cape

J: ok, why should we love the Earth?

Kila: because we do (laughs)

J: I am wondering why though?

Kila: because this is our world and we care and live here

J: so we live on the earth so we should love and care for her?

Kila: yes



Safety- littering

J: 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 kindly 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
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?

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!

The children have a strong ethic of care

Sage: is looking at a dead butterfly we found on the ground
Sage: we need to look after butterflies. That is sad that it is dead.

J: why do we need to look after them?
Sage: because then they will not get hurt. They are important to our garden.
And the flowers. That is my job.

J: what is your job?
Sage: to look after them

J: why are you choosing to do this job, Lachlan

Lachlan: we don't like our kindy dirty

J: what are you doing with the leaves?

Stella Lamaze: we are putting them at Archiebachie's feet.

Tinkerbell: yeah, Rosie thought he could look after it.

J: what will happen to leaves there?

Lachlan: we are making compost.

J: what will we use the compost for?

Stella Lamaze: for the dirt.

Tinkerbell: I like this job

J: why Tinkerbell?

Tinkerbell: I like using the rake and getting all the leaves in a pile, then we can play with it!

Lachlan: no we put it on the trolleys

Tinkerbell: and play with it!

J: I like how you are using the rakes as tongs Michelangelo!

Michelangelo: yeah I am the picker upper!

J: it looks like you are picking up salad!

Michelangelo: my mum has big forks for the salad!

J: thanks for taking responsibility for this job, team.

Michelangelo: you're welcome!



Care and Protecting creatures

J: why did you want to refill the birdfeeders Sage?

Sage: because they were empty

J: could we not just leave them empty?

Sage: hooooo silly, they need to have food in them for the birds.

J: oh right so we are doing this for the birds?

Sage: Yeah they need the food

J: could they not get food from somewhere else?

Sage: no there is no food so we are helping. I like doing this.

J: you like feeding the birds?

Sage: yes, I like birds.

Lizzie- Eloise: me too

J: I like hearing them sing

Sage: (laughs) ...that's why we need food for them

J: so they sing?

Libby- Eloise: No so they come to us

Sage: and sing

J: is this a job you think that helps care for Papatuanuku and the creatures that live on her?

Sage: yeah, we care for the birds. Is there more?

Sage: be careful J there is a worm there, see.

J: I noticed there are a lot of bugs and worms in this area, they must like it in the leaves and dirt here

J: I'll carefully put it on your spade then you can show the others.

Charles: be careful J

Sage: Let's put him back here

Alex: Ok, here in this dirt

Sage and Charles kept a close eye on Alex to ensure he did put the worm back very carefully

after everyone had a good look at it. They continued to finish their work and helped fill the

pots with dirt so that later someone could plant some plants in them.



- 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 the task of caring for their environment or a small creature through being a monitor, taking charge or teaching a friend. The children seem to connect their 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 this 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 (and those around them) have an enthusiasm for their place and their environment, enjoyed meaningful, real purposeful work in their environment which meant that they are connected with their environment. The children are active participants with citizenship within this environment. This to me seems like strong prerequisites for children to want to care about and guard the Earth- they need to love it first and experiences in, about and for the environment all play an important part in this.

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



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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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/marautanga & 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

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"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...

