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Outdoor Classrooms in the Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project

Working towards the implementation of a unique and
beneficial outdoor learning experience



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Executive Summary

The research question which emerged throughout the project was: *How can outdoor classrooms in the Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project provide a unique and beneficial learning experience that caters for the needs*

Introduction

The Anzac Drive Reserve in Eastern Christchurch has been deemed residential red zone land after the Christchurch earthquake sequence of 2010-2011. The Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project was proposed for this area as a result of the Natural Environment Recovery Program for Greater Christchurch which stated that one of their 17 projects would “act on opportunities to restore and enhance mahinga kai” (ECAN, 2013). The Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project aims to produce exceptional, well used learning resources and outdoor classrooms situated on residential red zone land either side of Anzac Drive. The current proposal is to have 11 classrooms sites spread throughout the area as visible in Figure 1. Each of the classrooms will be based around a different topic including both physical and social science topics, as shown in Appendix A. The chosen topics have been selected with the intention of being adaptable to as many areas of the curriculum as possible (Bates & Smith, 2014).

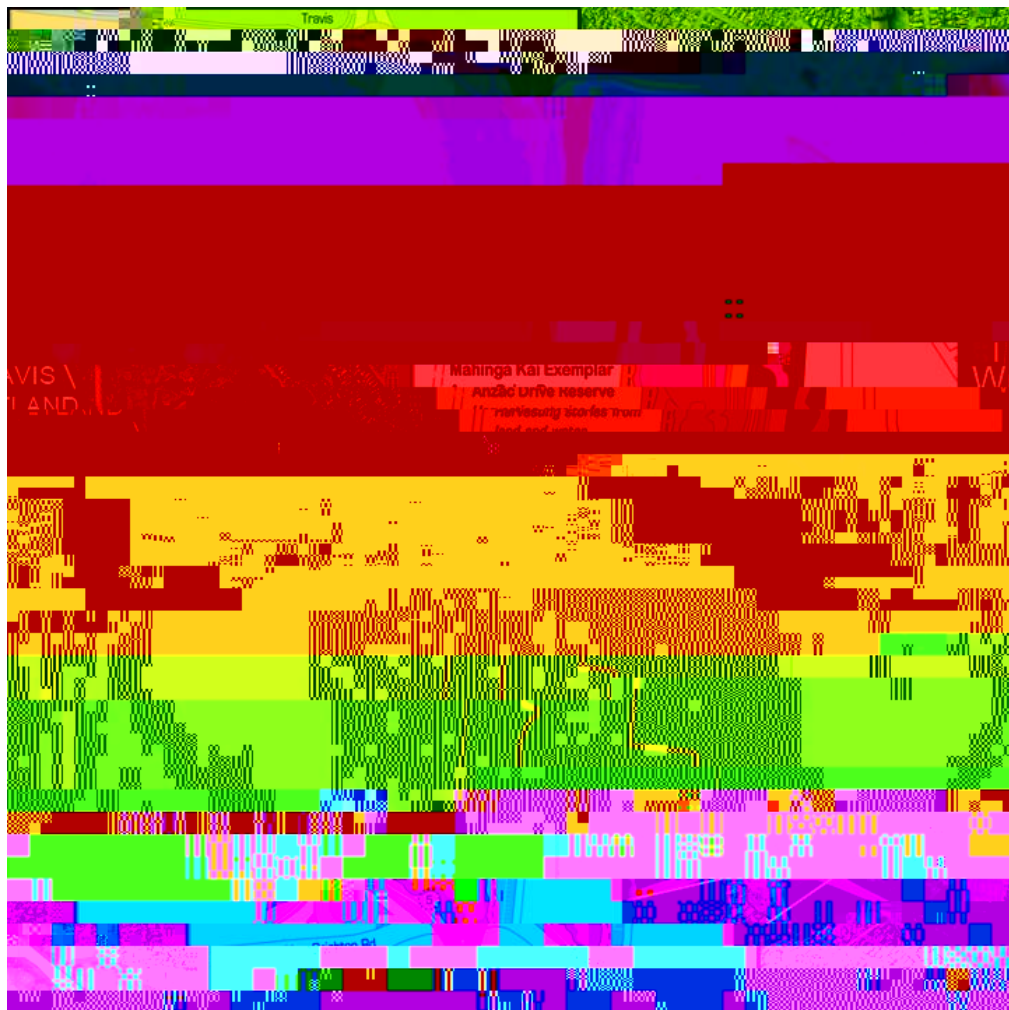


Figure 1. A map of the Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project (Avon Otakaro Network, n.d.).

The research builds off that undertaken by previous Geography 309 students

Historically, gathering was both a social and economic activity, as engagement in mahinga kai practices created opportunities for learning about ecosystems, species and the spiritual and physical connection to M

learning (Legge et al., 2012).

Figure 2. A map of Christchurch with the schools selected to hold focus groups marked with red (from left to right) Ilam, Wait kīri and R whiti Primary Schools. The Mahinga Kai Exemplar Project is indicated with a green marker.

The initial step at the focus group was to explain the research project and to get participants to sign the consent forms prepared to comply with ethics approval. In order to answer the research question classroom topics were introduced, teachers were asked to select their top three topics as a group and issues of implementation were discussed. Recordings were made with audio capable devices and written notes of the general discussion were taken to complement the recordings. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 60 minutes and delivered a wealth of information that a quantitative survey could not have.

Data Analysis

Once the data had been

teach skills that can be applied at home or in the community.

Each focus group contributed a unique perspective when considering the eleven classroom topics. There were conflicting

Multipurpose start-up site

There were concerns over the proposal of there being multiple sites due

Accessibility

R whiti stated that they would have no accessibility issues if they did not have to cross Anzac Drive and are within walking distance. Wait kiri expressed that they would prefer to have a site on the left side of Anzac Drive as it is closer to them and they could avoid crossing Anzac Drive which has a 70km/h speed limit. Ideally they would like to walk or scooter to the site saying that *"by walking it is more of an excursion, but in terms of taking cars there it seems ridiculous."*

enough point of difference to use this site as an outdoor education area, but there would have to be a high level of education provided for it to be worthwhile taking students there.

There is a clear indication that the learning environment in the Travis Wetlands area already provides a range of education catering to some of the needs of the teachers. However, a multipurpose site with the main element of mahinga kai that provided a significant point of difference, gained real enthusiasm from the teachers and the potential of this was clearly understood.

Hands-on Activities

There was a clear consensus that there must be an element of hands on activity involved in the outdoor classroom experience. When asked how to make the experience as valuable as possible, tactile and hands on participation was suggested as necessary to fully engage children, especially younger students. Ilam said, *"all kids love doing, but especially the younger ones"*. This was illustrated in the chosen top three topics, showing hands on activity would be a desired option, such as with harakeke weaving. Incorporating kaupapa M ori ideas with practical science experiments that can be established or completed on site and taken back to the classroom would be a desired option.

especially for the junior children. They would also prefer a site away from traffic and for any hazards to be brought to their attention during the planning stages, *"Those in themselves [hazards] aren't barriers as long as the teachers know about them"* (Ilam). R whiti and Ilam both stressed the need for somewhere to sit, write and to eat their lunch. R whiti felt that the walkways needed some work before they brought their classes there as not all of their students have access to sturdy shoes or gumboots. The needs of local teachers can be catered for by giving information on hazards prior to the school excursions, bettering walkways and the addition of facilities such as toilets and seating.

Limitations

Several limitations challenge the utility of the research. Cultural subjectivity had a profound effect on the research. The concept of mahinga kai and the cultural significance of the Anzac Drive Reserve was initially unfamiliar and challenging to understand. All group members are P keh and had to undertake their own extra research to educate themselves on these M ori concepts.

The timeframe in which to conduct the research has been narrow. By the time focus groups were decided as the research method, schools were preparing for their parent teacher interviews which meant staff were extremely busy. Consequently researchers were unable to source a large number of teachers to

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