

Tenuous Affair: Environmental and Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

David Irwin & Jo Straker

CPIT, Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract

The relationship between outdoor education and environmental education in Aotearoa New Zealand has undergone many changes since formal education began in early colonial times. Discussion draws from qualitative doctoral research undertaken by the authors that investigated education for sustainability in outdoor education and how meaning is ascribed to outdoor experiences. The article describes how environmental education and outdoor education had common historical roots in nature studies that eventually were teased apart by the development of separate agendas for learning and assessment, coupled with the political context of the 1970s and 1980s. The article finds that contemporary forces relating to the economy, society and the environment are now driving a re-engagement of the two discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand at a variety of levels, from schools to national bodies, and that this re-engagement signals a positive outcome for addressing key environmental issues and engaging students in the outdoors.

Since early colonial times, teaching young people about the natural world and their relationship with it has formed a special part of formal education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Nature studies, personal skill acquisition, social development, and just having fun have justified taking children and young adults into the world beyond the classroom — pedagogical practices that would eventually morph into what is now called ‘outdoor education’ and ‘environmental education’. The history of both is fascinating (see, e.g., Eames, Cowie, & Bolstad, 2008; Lynch, 2006), but of specific interest in this article is the way they have at times interrelated in mutually supportive ways, while at other times they have each developed elements that are less compatible.

Currently, there is no curriculum requirement to teach environmental education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is entirely at the discretion of individual schools and their Boards of Trustees, although the Environmental Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1999) recommend using a whole-school approach across multiple learning areas. Thus, while the future-focused theme of sustainability is present in the vision, principles, values and learning areas of the current curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), environmental education has struggled to maintain momentum in schools, since it is easily overlooked in favour of the more explicit learning outcomes in traditional subject areas

Address for correspondence: David Irwin, Department of Humanities, CPIT, PO Box 540, Christchurch 8140, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Email: David.Irwin@cpit.ac.nz

(Irwin, 2010; Straker, 2014). Outdoor education, on the other hand, which the Ministry of Education defines as ‘a broad term describing education in the outdoors, for the outdoors, and about the outdoors’ (Ministry of Education, 2004, para 4) holds an official place in the national curriculum as one of seven key areas of learning in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). So, while environmental education operates both within and outside the national curriculum, it is bound to outdoor education as it is to other curriculum areas. This is because the vision and future focus of the curriculum requires all subjects to integrate key socio-cultural and environmental aspects relating to sustainability into learning (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Taking a different perspective to Eames and Barker (2011), who signal but do not explore a link between outdoor education and environmental education, and Hill (2013), who explores the values and attitudes of outdoor educators regarding sustainability, this article traces the significant events and discourses in the development of, and the relationship between, environmental education and outdoor education. This relationship has been uneasy but enduring, and remains full of potential (Irwin, 2010). The article begins with an exploration of the common roots found in the Victorian era fascination with nature, the growing concern for children to experience and learn about nature, and the increased focus on physicality in out-of-school learning. The discourses of environmental education and outdoor education are then teased apart, and the place of environmental education and outdoor education in the curriculum is explored. The influences of neo-liberal politics on curriculum, with a particular focus on the effect of the outdoor ‘industry’ on formal education, are discussed as mechanisms driving environmental education and outdoor education apart. It is argued that these drivers have resulted in a pervasive focus on risk. In addition, two recent multiple fatality accidents have drawn into question the role of adventure in outdoor education and prompted calls for a need to reconsider what constitutes outdoor education. The article concludes with discussion about a repositioning of outdoor education, and identifies examples of a strengthening synergy between outdoor education and environmental education.

This article draws from qualitative doctoral research undertaken by both authors. *Weaving the Threads of Education for Sustainability and Outdoor Education* (Irwin, 2010) employed a participatory action research methodology and draws on data from a range of sources, including interviews with environmental and outdoor educators. *Meanings of ‘The Outdoors’: Shaping Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Straker, 2014) uses an interpretive narrative framework to unpack participants’ beliefs and experiences of the outdoors and outdoor education. This article was written by Pākehā tertiary environmental and outdoor educators from a Pākehā perspective. Other cultural positions, and particularly that of Māori, will have different interpretations of events as they are portrayed here, their stories to be told by others at another time.

Common Roots

From the beginnings of European colonisation, Aotearoa New Zealand was framed as a natural paradise; a place to live in harmony with nature (Mitchell, 2002; Park, 1995). The romanticism that underpinned the worldview of the colonists was present in early formal education through nature clubs and nature studies in the late 1800s. According to Lynch (2006), nature study was initially a part of primary schooling as a precursor to learning about agriculture and forestry, and as ‘an indirect means of inculcating Christianity’ (p. 23). This followed a trend to take children outside of the classroom, which developed first in the United States and spread to Britain, Australia and Aotearoa

New Zealand around the same time. In 1904, the primary school syllabus cemented out-of-classroom nature studies into widespread teaching practice and ‘From the ages of 5 to 14, children collected specimens of leaves and seeds, observed seasonal changes, and produced art, prose and verse to [quoting the Education Board] “applaud the wonders and beauties of nature”’ (Lynch, 2006, p. 24). Such was the perceived value of nature study at this time that specialists were appointed to assist teachers.

By the early 20th century, the majority of the population in Aotearoa New Zealand was located in urban centres, and concerns were raised about urban corruption and the loss of the hardy pioneering spirit (Statistics New Zealand, 2008). In 1923, prominent educationalist Shelley wrote that children ‘should not be educated in town ... I do not think you realise how destructive it is’ (Goodyear, as cited in Statistics New Zealand, 2008). These sentiments underpinned the progressive development of nature study outings in primary schools through the 1920s and 1930s, although the influence of individual passionate teachers was a key driving force on the amount of practical nature study that actually occurred (Lynch, 2006, p. 25). Given this trend, it was no surprise that the 1937 Syllabus of Instruction for Public Schools advanced the place of learning in the outdoors in geography, science, and nature study (Stothart, as cited in Boyes, 2012).

Out-of-school excursions for nature studies in post-primary education was initially linked to biology and geography, but the advent of the World War II saw a shift in the focus of outdoor experiences to encompass activities that encouraged physical fitness and a more active engagement with the outdoors. From 1942, school camping became a feature of outdoor learning, and according to Stothart (as cited in Boyes, 2012, p. 28), 7,000 students participated in school camps in that year alone. There was by now an intriguing weaving together of subject matter; for example, geography trips to the mountains were embellished by skiing (Lynch, 2006) and there was a trend in school trips to visit well-known tourist destinations. By the 1950s, the increasing engagement in physical activities as well as nature studies in out-of-school teaching was highlighted by the appointment of specialist teachers in both subject areas. However, in the years that followed, the increasing engagement with practicality and physicality in the outdoors, coupled with a poor alignment with traditional school subjects, saw nature studies struggle to retain a presence in the formal curriculum. Nature study was eventually replaced by elementary science in the formal curriculum for primary schools in the late 1950s (Lynch, 2006).

The 1960s and 1970s saw environmental education and outdoor education closely aligned. For example, according to Lynch (2006):

From the late 1970s, arguments in favour of outdoor education echoed the conservation education arguments of the 1950s: outdoor learning experiences were deemed to ‘help motivate students to extend their involvement with environmental issues and ... help develop personal values and codes of behaviour’ (Department of Education, 1981, as cited in Lynch, 2006, p. 147).

In 1978, District Advisor Lonsdale proposed a syllabus for outdoor education that had three main areas: environmental education, outdoor pursuits, and aspects of the curriculum in the outdoors. His concern lay in offering education that could help people come to terms with their environment and look beyond the materialistic developments of the 20th century (Lonsdale, 1978). Yet, by the early 1980s, Lynch (2006) noted that references to environmental education within outdoor education rapidly diminished as interest in outdoor pursuits increased. This is not to say that environmental education was not occurring in outdoor education, but that pursuits were more prominent — especially so in the marketing of programs. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s,

although the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre had three main goals for student learning that included enhancing knowledge about the conservation and preservation of the natural environment, marketing images tended to frame learning around adventurous activities.

The Discourse of Environmental Education and Education for Sustainability

As Palmer (1998, p. 5) discusses, the term ‘environmental education’, while first used in the 1940s, did not become popular until the 1960s, paralleling changes in the political landscape that reflected a growing concern for human impact on the environment. Since then, many books, such as *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1974), and academic papers such as the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (UNESCO, 2004) have addressed economic, socio-cultural and environmental issues, and called for urgent action to address the negative impacts caused by over-population, consumerism and pollution. While environmental education has traditionally focused on scientific and ecological studies of the natural environment, as well as conservation issues, in the past two decades there has been a trend towards integrating more social, political, and economic concerns (Eames et al., 2008). This has led to a shift from teaching the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to protect the environment towards encouraging a more reflective and critical stance that challenges normative approaches to teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 1999). To help clarify this trend, some environmental education has become more commonly referred to as education for sustainability (Efs), where the key goals of sustainability are defined as living within ecological limits, achieving social justice, and fostering economic and social progress while developing a quality of life for all (Ministry of Education, 2009, pp. 70–71).

However, the term ‘sustainability’ is highly contentious (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007), and this is reflected in the way the term is used within different contexts; Chapman (2004) asserts there are as many as 300 definitions of sustainability. This is problematic, for in education, sustainability is about the exploration of economic and social development in the context of environmental and social justice, an interpretation that can be in opposition to other definitions, such as sustainable economic growth. At other times, the term ‘sustainability’ has been used so often and so broadly that meaning and relevance is diluted. The contested nature of sustainability within education has supported the rise of place-based education (Gruenewald, 2005, 2008), which has gained some traction in Aotearoa New Zealand (see, e.g., Brown, 2012).

Currently within Aotearoa New Zealand, there appears to be no single clear version of, or vision for, environmental education. In our experience, some environmental education has links to critical social and political agendas, but much has remained focused on ecological science, with a developing trend focusing on place and community. This breadth provides ample opportunity for environmental education within outdoor education contexts.

The Discourse of Outdoor Education

In the 1970s, outdoor education expanded, and in 1974 a national conference on outdoor education was held at Wallis House, where a broad and encompassing definition of outdoor education was presented:

The term ‘outdoor education’ does not indicate a body of subject matter, but rather a range of learning experiences designed to reinforce the development

of abilities which help pupils understand the world about them and their place in it. (New Zealand Educational Institute, 1978, pp. vii-ix)

During the 1970s, however, New Zealanders became increasingly aware of the way global issues affected them. The oil shock in 1979 certainly drew into focus the dependence on petroleum products, to be followed by increased concerns about issues such as poverty and famine, acid rain, nuclear testing and ozone depletion. Increases in public debt, coupled with substantial increases in the cost of government services, led to closer scrutiny of how money was spent in schools. Among other things, this resulted in a critical evaluation of the value of taking children out of schools on trips and camps. Outdoor educators were required to provide justification for their programs, which highlighted the emerging and increasingly competing philosophical strands within outdoor education. Although some argued outdoor education was any activity that occurred outside the classroom, others interpreted outdoor education as outdoor pursuit activities that occurred in (and possibly enhanced an understanding of) natural environments, while others saw outdoor education as environmental education. Lynch cites the recollections of Joe Hughes, then a school inspector with national responsibility for outdoor education:

... the gung-ho outdoor pursuits people didn't want OE to become an academic subject, they wanted it to stay gung-ho outdoor pursuits ... the environmental education people wanted to do their thing and the science advisors were doing their thing with natural history; various departments in schools were quite happy to do field studies but didn't see that as outdoor education. (Lynch, 2006, pp. 153–154)

Given this diverse range of competing perspectives, it is not surprising the overarching Wallis House definition did not suit all programs. With increased scrutiny, outdoor educators began to differentiate the purpose of their programs more acutely, which created a proliferation of terms, each of which tried to promote a clearer purpose. Lynch (2006) maintains that this semantic confusion became increasingly problematic since outdoor education became increasingly associated with outdoor pursuits, eventually leading the then Director General of Education to formally launch the term 'Education Outside the Classroom' (EOTC) in 1981. This term created a conceptual structure under which out-of-school activities could be used to enhance learning across the curriculum, while still including pursuit-based outdoor education (Lynch, 2006, p. 157). A participant in Straker's (2014) research who had been a geography and outdoor education teacher noted that 'when EOTC came into the vernacular it certainly gave some clarity — in the sense that it captured a lot of what teachers like myself were doing'.

However, because EOTC recognised such diverse opportunities to learn, Boyes (2012) notes that this has sometimes resulted in 'the dilution of the pervasiveness of the context of the natural environment' (p. 31). He suggests this has marginalised elements of environmental education and resulted in nebulous environmental goals. Furthermore, the launch of EOTC did not alleviate the tensions that had emerged between the various strands of outdoor education described above, tensions that were present in other countries as well. For example, Scottish researcher Nicol (2002) suggests that many authors writing about outdoor education privilege aspects of personal and social growth over environmental education when using the term 'outdoor education'. This is supported in Hattie, Marsh, Neill, and Richards' (1997) meta-analysis of outdoor education, which identified 39 outcomes relating to personal and social growth, but only one relating to the outdoor environment. This attention to personal and social growth eventually led to questioning the role of outdoor education approaches that promoted

a competitive approach to using the environment, and resulted in some environmental educators in Aotearoa New Zealand disentangling them from outdoor education. For example, an interview undertaken by Irwin (2010) recalls a key example of tension between environmental education and outdoor education:

In the mid 1980s Graeme Scott was very keen to get environmental education recognised within the New Zealand curriculum. He lobbied the Department of Education around outdoor education being a waste of time, and the money should be spent on environmental education. A lot of people said they were doing outdoor education and claimed it had an environmental strand — in, about and for the environment, but let's be honest the emphasis was probably in the environment and using the environment. So while outdoor educators were aware of the environment and some environmental issues, I don't think they were prominent in teaching and so Scott to an extent was right.

In an effort to untangle these contested discourses, Boyes (2000) suggested there remain two general perspectives that dominate outdoor education. The first perspective is EOTC as curriculum enrichment activities across all subject areas; and the second is outdoor education as adventure education with a subtext of environmental education (Boyes, 2000), that sees a number of activities (such as climbing and kayaking) as stable features of Aotearoa New Zealand interpretations (Payne, 2002). More recently, Boyes (2012) notes that over the past two to three decades, the practices of challenge and adventure inherent in adventure education have tended to swamp the subtext of environmental learning that was earlier present.

The EOTC perspective of outdoor education encompasses the breadth of curriculum characteristic of the historical initiative of taking students outside the classroom to study topics related to nature. In this way, EOTC can be regarded as a teaching methodology. Boyes (2000) maintains that it was the intent of the now Ministry of Education to encourage this perspective, and to refocus outdoor education back to the wider teaching and learning premises in the broadest sense to ensure the credibility of all learning opportunities outside of the classroom (Abbott, as cited in Boyes, 2000). *The EOTC Guidelines – Bringing the Curriculum Alive* (2009) 'support the direction and contribute to the breadth of learning described by the national curriculum' (p. 3). This document provides a framework for approaching teaching beyond the classroom and issues such as 'sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, and globalisation' (p. 8). Outdoor education is contextualised within this framework.

Outdoor education is currently one of seven key areas of learning in Health and Physical education in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). There are four underlying concepts, including hauora, attitudes and values, the socio-ecological perspective, and health promotion, with an overriding goal being the promotion of wellbeing. This wellbeing extends beyond self to encompass 'the well-being of those around them, of their communities, of their environments (including natural environments), and of the wider society' (Ministry of Education, 2010, para. 3). One key achievement objective that further adds to the link with environmental education is embedded in the 'healthy communities and environments' strand, which states 'students should contribute to healthy communities and environments by taking responsible and critical action' (Ministry of Education, 2010, para. 6). In order to do that, students are encouraged to develop an understanding of lifestyle and economic, social, cultural, political and environmental factors, and take critical action to promote the wellbeing of New Zealanders. The curriculum document recommends that this can be achieved by building resilience, strengthening self-worth, and engaging in responsible decision making.

Exacerbating the problem of duality between EOTC and outdoor education is the ad-hoc way that outdoor education and EOTC have developed. There has not been a consistent approach, method, or practice, and the two perspectives described by Boyes (2000) are not always distinct in every situation. For example, a school camp might include aspects of adventurous activities as well as study in other curriculum areas. Lynch (1999) suggests the history and development of outdoor education in this country is characterised by a variety of practices, local enterprise, self-help and cooperation. Boyes (2000) adds further uncertainty to the practice with his assessment that an unacknowledged theoretical base also contributes to confusion about the defining characteristics of outdoor education.

Different Directions

It is our contention that the increasing awareness of environmental issues arising in the late 1970s and 1980s, coupled with a shift toward the pursuit activities increasingly undertaken in outdoor education over that same timeframe, reduced the synergy that had previously existed between environmental education and outdoor education. For example, several participants interviewed by Irwin (2010) maintained that environmental educators in particular were disenfranchised by the lack of depth applied to environmental education in the context of outdoor education through this period, and envisaged a stronger and more critically focused environmental education agenda to be delivered in schools. However, we have observed that many outdoor education programs still retained elements of conservation, learning about natural environments, and environmental care codes; suggesting historical models of environmental education within outdoor education were maintained by some practitioners.

A key event that highlighted the contested underpinnings of environmental education and outdoor education occurred in January 1981, when a conference (called 'Environmental Education across the Curriculum') was convened at Lopdell House in Auckland by the Department of Education and the Commission for the Environment. This conference helped create a foundation for environmental education in schools. A set of aims developed at the conference included:

1. *Develop an awareness of and sensitivity to the total environment;*
2. *Develop a basic understanding of the total environment, particularly the interrelationship of people and environment;*
3. *Develop practical, personal, social and valuing skills necessary for investigating the total environment and resolving environmental issues;*
4. *Clarify their values and develop a personal code of behaviour towards, and life-long concern for, the environment;*
5. *Make informed decisions about the environment by considering alternatives based on ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and other relevant factors;*
6. *Become motivated for active participation in environmental management, including both protection and improvement;*
7. *Create and respond to opportunities to be actively involved in working towards the resolution of environmental issues [emphasis in original] (Scott, 1984, p. i).*

These aims clearly signal an emerging engagement with sociological aspects of human-nature relationships that had not been present in the mainstream interpretations of environmental education (the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to protect the environment) that had been incorporated into outdoor education. Since this time, and particularly in the past two decades, the trend towards integrating more social, political and economic concerns into environmental education has increased (Eames et al., 2008).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, such environmental education as described by Eames et al. (2008) is becoming more commonly referred to as 'Education for Sustainability' (EfS), with key goals of living within environmental limits, achieving social justice, and fostering economic and social progress while developing a quality of life for all (Ministry of Education, 2009). Thus, experiences and activities in the outdoors that do not consider the wider impacts of society have little in common with current conceptions of EfS. Irwin (2010) maintains it is highly likely that the emerging EfS began to distance environmental education from outdoor education, because while practices of environmental care and conservation blend easily with outdoor education, assuming a natural synergy between EfS and outdoor education is problematic. This is because outdoor education should be considered part of the dominant paradigm with content and pedagogy that likely normalises the dominant world view much of the time (Irwin, 2010). The problem is that EfS within an outdoor education context will be co-opted to the dominant perspective; described by Marcuse (as cited by Jickling, 2004, p. 12) as 'flattening out of the antagonism between culture and social reality through the obliteration of the oppositional, alien, and transcendent elements'. For example, the acceptance of pursuits as central within outdoor education obscures the paradoxes that arise (such as long distance travel and conquering nature) that become apparent with the application of a socio ecological framework underpinning EfS.

In addition, there was also a shift to a more technical focus within outdoor education. This was furthered indirectly by the *Education Act 1989*, which promoted the development of a national framework for qualifications (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2005). Part of that initiative was to forge closer connections between education and industry, which resulted in the formation of Industry Training Organisations (ITOs). The ITOs were required to standardise vocational qualifications and break them down into units that would become the building blocks of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). These unit standards contain very specific learning outcomes and competency-based assessments, and in the recreation domain, addressed technical skill acquisition and risk management associated with recreational pursuits, in line with the needs of industry to quantify the skills of employees.

These vocationally focused unit standards were widely adopted for assessment in senior high school (Years 11–13) outdoor education. This was because the Physical Education achievement standards provided by the Ministry of Education offered little scope for assessment in outdoor education and the ITO's unit standards initially attracted government funding to providers to encourage uptake. However, according to Jones (2004), the adoption of unit standards to assess outdoor education undermined the breadth of the subject as defined by curriculum. This was because assessment of the prescriptive unit standards became the primary focus of teaching, as revealed by one of Straker's (2014) interview participants, who noted, 'You don't want to be, but you are directed by assessment.'

In a parallel process, the focus of assessment on technical skills in senior high school required teachers to gain vocational qualifications to support both assessor requirements of the unit standards and to meet health and safety requirements. The key providers of the relevant vocational qualifications have, ironically, not been an ITO, but rather the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors Association (NZOIA) and the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (NZMSC). Both frameworks are based around pursuit activities (such as rock climbing, abseiling, tramping, caving, white water kayaking, and alpinism), and discourse produced by both organisations is strongly focused on risk and safety. The qualifications framework of NZOIA, in particular, has become the default standard and has been actively promoted by the organisation. For example, in a letter to schools, the Chief Executive of NZOIA warned principals:

If your outdoor education staff do not hold NZOIA qualifications and do not hold a New Zealand Outdoor Registration Board card then you and your [Board of Trustees] are exposing yourselves to a degree of risk; not only in that your students may be being led by someone of unproven competence, but in terms of exposure to criticism in the unfortunate event that an accident occurs. (Cant, 2009)

As Straker notes, this attention by NZOIA and the NZMSC contributed to the normalisation of risk and challenge as being necessary for outdoor education (Straker, 2014, p. 67), and was justified within curriculum as personal development. However, recent multiple fatality accidents at the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuit Centre (SEHOPC; seven fatalities in 2008) and the Taranaki Outdoor Pursuits and Education Centre (four fatalities in 2012) have shaken the sector. While these accidents have undoubtedly contributed to increased safety standards and legislative compliance that has maintained focus on adventure aspects of outdoor education, other voices are more critical. For example, Spotswood College principal Mark Bowden has observed there was now a great need to publicly discuss the issues surrounding outdoor education in schools (as cited in McMurray & Flemming, 2013). The accident at SEHOPC (one of the country's oldest and largest outdoor education centres) resulted in the significant changes discussed later in the article. Although these accidents were politicised, the influence of politics in both environmental education and outdoor education was nothing new.

Political Influences

As established in earlier discussion, the key difference between environmental education and EfS in Aotearoa New Zealand has been the move toward critically thinking about ways to instigate changes in the way we live. However, this action has not always found resonance with conservative governments. For example, under the three-term Labour–Greens coalition government from 1999 to 2008, EfS gained traction, with significant funding for an environmental education advisory service and Enviroschools. However, the incoming National–Act–Māori Party coalition government of 2009 announced cuts to the environmental education advisory service and Enviroschools in their 2009 budget (New Zealand Association of Environmental Education, 2009); although Enviroschools funding was later reinstated as part of a confidence and supply agreement with the Greens. This inconsistent governmental support for these services has resulted in mixed messages emanating about the importance of EfS, and also highlights the neo-liberal agenda relating to growth and development.

From the late 1980s, education in Aotearoa New Zealand was transformed by neo-liberal policies that promoted economic efficiency, business style competitive strategies, and centralised forms of control and accountability (Codd, 2005). Neo-liberal politics rescinded progressive forms of education, instead promoting standardised testing, individualism, self-interest, and consumerism (Kincheloe, 2007). As curriculum was developed through this period, curriculum documents became progressively more ideologically focused (Chapman, 2011) towards preparing students to compete for work in the international economy. In schools these changes promoted teaching and assessment strategies that led to a reliance on measurable outcomes and a narrowing of content (synonymous with unit standards), and less attention given to the processes of thinking and learning (Codd, 2005). Hill (2011) and Boyes (2012) describe these neo-liberal influences as significant in shaping outdoor education from that time as small units of learning that were easily measured and were valued ahead of broad-based holistic knowledge.

Since 1999, the New Zealand Health and Physical Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010) has signalled a philosophical move towards EfS because it contains the underlying socio-ecological perspective that is intended to enable ‘physical educators to relate practices to the power structures and social economic forces underlying wider society’ (Culpan, as cited in Boyes, 2000, pp. 82–83). But the model of outdoor education encouraged through assessment using unit standards cannot easily support this. This is because the narrow assessment focus can limit holistic and integrated learning associated with education for sustainability (Boyes, 2000; Henderson, 1996; Martin, 2004).

Thus, the developments shifting outdoor education and EfS apart are also highly political, for while parts of the curriculum signalled a focus on sustainability, the politics of the era relating to secondary schooling in particular suggests a much more managerial approach to teaching that discouraged anything but clear performance outcomes related to assessment. This has disadvantaged holistic approaches to learning and impacted on the way teachers perceive the purpose of outdoor education. For example, Zink and Boyes (2006) concluded that generally, teachers ‘did not see the outcomes of cultural and ethnic understanding or environmental understanding to be as important as the skill and personal development goals’ (p. 20). This situation led one prominent environmental and outdoor education researcher and academic interviewed by Irwin (2010) to comment:

I think the whole focus of outdoor education needs to shift ... away from just the perception of outdoor pursuits, and take on board sustainability related concepts. ... There could be a whole range of outdoor experiences that allow students to have the outdoor pursuit skills, understand the risks, but the work they are doing outdoors could be heading more towards sustainability and environmental education.

The next section looks to find evidence of such work and argues that interpretations of outdoor education that have incorporated threads of sustainability and environmental education are gaining in popularity.

A Re-engagement of Outdoor Education and Environmental Education

The development of the resource *Environmental Education – A Source Book for Teachers* (Scott, 1984), published by the Commission for the Environment, was a significant development for environmental educators in Aotearoa New Zealand and signalled the formal presence of environmental education in schools. The source book contained general information and advice on pedagogy, but what was particularly useful for teachers was a collection of teaching exemplars identified as good practice by an earlier research project (case study) into environmental education in four Christchurch schools (Scott, 1984). Many of the exemplars were experiential and took place outside the classroom. According to one person interviewed by Irwin (2010), the source book gave teachers’ colleges the necessary impetus to develop training in order to support teachers to engage with environmental education.

Christchurch College of Education was likely the first in the country to develop such training, and academics from outdoor education, social studies and science developed an environmental education course that could be taken as an elective by postgraduate trainee secondary teachers from all curriculum areas. That the development of environmental education at Christchurch College of Education was driven by outdoor educators suggests an important transition in the purpose of outdoor education was taking place. Over time, it was noted by academic staff within the outdoor and environmental

program at the college that environmental education appeared to attract students into outdoor education (Personal communication, B. Law, February 1, 2008).

There is an increasing range of examples that suggest outdoor education teachers are moving to draw themes relating to EfS into their programs, despite the lingering dependence on unit standards in senior high school discussed earlier. For example, Straker (2014) observes that outdoor educators interviewed commented on engagement in environmental issues with students, and developing relationships of care, concern and responsibility as they spent time engaging in a range of outdoor activities. While many of these behaviours were described in anthropocentrically pragmatic ways, there were numerous small but obvious pro-environmental actions taking place. For example, teachers talked of sourcing local food for camp, fund-raising so disadvantaged students could attend programs, and using Bokashi fermenters to compost food scraps while on school camps.

Further integration of EfS into outdoor education can be found in professional magazines. Secondary teachers Taylor (2010) and Major (2010) both write of using EfS achievement standards in their senior outdoor education programs (Taylor at St Patricks College in Wellington and Major at Papanui High School in Christchurch), while Watson (2012) writes of taking a place-based approach to outdoor education at Wellington East Girls High School. Place-based practices seem to be gaining wider traction in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, the September issue of *The New Zealand Journal of Outdoor Education* was a special edition on the notion of place in outdoor education (Brown, 2010, p. 5). In another example, a useful Teaching and Learning Research Initiative undertaken by Brown (2012) sought to help two high school outdoor education programs to develop localised experiences in the outdoors that empowered teachers and students to better understand their local places and to undertake action-oriented activity such as habitat restoration.

The publication of two recent books by local authors is also a poignant marker of the increasing engagement of outdoor education with EfS. In *Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A New Vision for the Twenty First Century* (Irwin, Straker, & Hill, 2012), approaches to outdoor education that are framed by socio-ecological thinking (where communities and environments are central to pedagogy) are strongly encouraged. In *Pedagogy of Place: Outdoor Education for a Changing World* (Wattchow & Brown, 2011), place-based and place-responsive approaches to outdoor learning are outlined in ways that integrate elements of local environs, community and embodied knowing, and that develop sensitivity to issues within local environs.

In the tertiary sector, outdoor education programs have also drawn EfS into curriculum. For example, at CPIT, a Bachelor of Sustainability and Outdoor Education has been delivered since 2010, which weaves together curriculum relating to health, environment, social geography, and outdoor education. Other programs are similarly engaging future environmental and outdoor educators in new and innovative ways that will prepare graduates to teach the breadth of the national curriculum in the outdoors.

The focus on the place of Māori in contemporary outdoor education that Cosgriff et al. (2012) describe is important in that it signals a move to value biculturalism in the outdoors, a critical aspect of EfS. This is because dominant culture tends to view the physical environment as separate, 'as an objective thing, as a commodity to be developed or traded or wasted or exploited, as an economic unit, as property' (Zapf, 2005, p. 636), which is a far cry from the spiritual connection and intergenerational obligation to the land that underpins a Māori world view.

Legge (2012) suggests it is beholden for outdoor educators to build Māori-Pākehā educative partnerships in the outdoors. To achieve this she identifies: expanding personal knowledge through learning Te reo; incorporating marae visits; researching the

history and etymological significance of place names; communicating with local hapū and iwi; and seeking the support of Māori mentors. She also notes that ‘outdoor educators need to be willing to learn about their own cultural horizons and identity, in addition to accepting the limits of their cultural competence’ (Legge, 2012, p. 143). For example, Pākeha tertiary educator Ockwell (2012) from the University of Otago school of Physical Education describes using waka ama through partnerships established with local tangatawhenua to teach students about Māoritanga. In these ways, outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand can become more sensitive to its cultural history.

Outdoor pursuit centres have also demonstrated a move to incorporate more emphasis on environmental education. For example, Graney and Graney (2012) outline recent developments at a number of outdoor education centres, including at the SEHOPC, where a greater alignment of delivery with the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) has occurred, underpinned by a social and ecological perspective and place-based approaches.

A very visible example of the emerging partnership between outdoor education and EfS can be found in a project that ran from 2010 to 2013, funded by Sport NZ. The project saw Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ), in partnership with the New Zealand Association of Environmental Education (NZAEE) and the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (NZMSC) first develop a series of national workshops for teachers on *The EOTC Guidelines – Bringing the Curriculum Alive* (Ministry of Education, 2009), and second, a collection of web-based resources (see Ministry of Education’s EOTC on TKI at <http://eotc.tki.org.nz/eotc-home>) to support EOTC in the broadest sense. There is a wealth of information about EOTC in Aotearoa New Zealand, including an overview of research relating to EOTC, teaching and learning in the outdoors, Treaty of Waitangi and cultural issues, EfS, place-based education, critical research, and risk and safety.

Conclusion

Outdoor education and environmental education have had a long association in Aotearoa New Zealand. With common roots tracing back to colonial times, both have struggled to gain traction within the formal schooling context. In particular, the impacts of neoliberalism on formal education relating to funding constraints and an increased focus on vocational outcomes have been significant drivers in teasing apart outdoor and environmental education.

Education has a major role to play in learning about living in sustainable ways, yet for many New Zealanders, EfS is still not a significant part of their learning in schools. Outdoor education is a popular subject, but has tended to focus on education ‘in’, ‘for’ and ‘about’ the natural environment. The popularity and emotional engagement outdoor education can generate opens the door for teachers to address the complex issues of thinking about the future and taking action to tackle underlying sociological reasons for unsustainable practices, and a number of examples demonstrating this synergy have been given. However, such coupling also requires a level of commitment from teachers, managers and politicians, and more effort, support, and resources are required if teachers and students are to make practical links between living well and living sustainably. In addition, tertiary graduates, especially those entering the teaching profession need to have a core understanding of holistic sustainability models that can be applied throughout their lives and the organisations they work with.

As the 21st century unfolds, the need for students to understand their world will only increase. Over recent years, EfS and outdoor education have generated practices that can induce a different way of seeing and engaging with the world. Many of these experiences involve being actively engaged and responsive to the nuances of outdoor

environments, local places, and communities. Holistic approaches that encourage students to address change by building personal efficacy, and to increase understanding of social-ecological systems by enhancing a sense of connection to where they live, recreate, and learn, can also help outdoor education and EfS form stronger links. Such an approach supports the theoretical underpinnings of outdoor education and the engagement of students in addressing sound social, economic and environmentally sensitive ways of living on the planet we depend on.

Glossary

(Note: tribal dialects vary and there is some variation in macron use and spelling)

Hapū — section of a kinship group

Hauora — Well being

Iwi — tribe; often referring to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor.

Māori — Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand

Māoritanga — A generic term for Māori culture

Marae — tribal meeting ground, complex of buildings including wharenui and wharekai

Pākehā — New Zealander of European descent

Tangata whenua — Local people

Te reo — Māori language

Waka ama — Māori outrigger canoes.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Arthur Sutherland and Bert McConnell for their insightful comments, and the AAEE reviewers of this article for their constructive feedback.

Keywords: environmental education, outdoor education, New Zealand

References

- Boyes, M. (2000). The place of outdoor education in the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. *Journal of Physical Education New Zealand*, 33, 75–88.
- Boyes, M. (2012). Historical and contemporary trends in outdoor education. In D. Irwin, J. Straker, & A. Hill (Eds.), *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the twenty-first century* (pp. 26–45). Christchurch, New Zealand: CPIT.
- Brown, M. (2010). Editor's note. *New Zealand Journal of Outdoor Education*, 2, 5–6.
- Brown, M. (2012). *Developing a place-based approach to outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand — Outdoor education in our place: 'keepin' it real'*. Wellington, New Zealand: Teaching Learning Research Initiative.
- Cant, M. (2009, September). [Letter to schools from the Chief Executive of NZOIA]. Wellington, New Zealand: NZOIA.
- Chapman, D. (2004). Sustainability and our cultural myths. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 9, 92–108.
- Chapman, D.J. (2011). Environmental education and the politics of curriculum: A national case study. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 42, 193–202.
- Codd, J. (2005). Teachers as 'managed professionals' in the global education industry: The New Zealand experience. *Educational review*, 57, 193–206.
- Cosgriff, M., Legge, M., Brown, M., Boyes, M., Zink, R., & Irwin, D. (2012). Outdoor learning in Aotearoa New Zealand: Voices past, present, and future. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 12, 221–235.

- Eames, C., & Barker, M. (2011). Understanding student learning in environmental education in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 27, 186–191.
- Eames, C., Cowie, B., & Bolstad, R. (2008). An evaluation of characteristics of environmental education practice in New Zealand schools. *Environmental Education Research*, 14, 35–51.
- Graney, B., & Graney, S. (2012). The role of outdoor education centres. In D. Irwin, J. Straker, & A. Hill (Eds.), *Outdoor Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the twenty first century* (pp. 125–137). Christchurch, New Zealand: CPIT.
- Gruenewald, D.A. (2005). Accountability and collaboration: Institutional barriers and strategic pathways for place-based education *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 8, 261–283.
- Gruenewald, D.A. (2008). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Environmental Education Research*, 14, 308–324.
- Hattie, J., Marsh, H.W., Neill, J.T., & Richards, G.E. (1997). Adventure education and Outward Bound: Out of class experiences that make a lasting difference. *Review of Educational Research*, 67, 43–87.
- Henderson, B. (1996). Thoughts on the idea of adventure [electronic version]. *Trumpeter*, 13(2).
- Hill, A. (2011). *Re-envisioning the status quo: Developing sustainable approaches to outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand*. PhD, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- Hill, A. (2013). The place of experience and the experience of place: Intersections between sustainability education and outdoor learning. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 29, 18–32. doi: 10.1017/aee.2013.13
- Irwin, D. (2010). *Weaving the threads of education for sustainability and outdoor education* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Retrieved from http://ir.canterbury.ac.nz/bitstream/10092/3637/1/thesis_fulltext.pdf
- Irwin, D., Straker, J., & Hill, A. (Eds.). (2012). *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the twenty first century*. Christchurch, New Zealand: CPIT.
- Jickling, B. (2004). Making ethics an everyday activity — How can we reduce the barriers? *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 9 (Spring).
- Jones, M. (2004, July). *Disconnections between outdoor programmes and education principles*. Paper presented at the International Outdoor Education Research Conference: Connections and Disconnections: Examining the Reality and the Rhetoric, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia.
- Kincheloe, J. (2007). Critical pedagogy in the twenty-first century: Evolution for survival. In P. McLaren & J. Kincheloe (Eds.), *Critical pedagogy: Where are we now?* (pp. 9–41). New York: Peter Lang.
- Legge, M. (2012). Bicultural perspectives of educating outdoors. Part 1: A Pākehā perspective on biculturalism in education outdoors. In D. Irwin, J. Straker, & A. Hill (Eds.), *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand: A new vision for the Twenty First Century* (pp. 138–145). Christchurch, New Zealand: CPIT.
- Lonsdale, A. (1978). A syllabus: Primer 1 to form 5. In *Outdoor education: Year book of education no. 7* (pp. 267–294). Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Educational Institute.
- Lynch, P. (1999). *Enterprise, self-help and cooperation: A history of outdoor education in New Zealand schools to 1989* (Unpublished PhD thesis). University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand.

- Lynch, P. (2006). *Camping in the curriculum: A history of outdoor education in New Zealand schools*. Lincoln University, New Zealand: PML Publications.
- Major, C. (2010). Trying to buy New Zealand made. *Out and About*, 24, 20–21.
- Martin, P. (2004). Outdoor adventure in promoting relationships with nature. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 8, 20–28.
- McMurray, K., & Flemming, H. (2013, June 13). Call to debate outdoor education in schools. *Taranaki Daily News Online*. Retrieved from <http://stuff.co.nz>
- Ministry of Education. (1999). *Guidelines for environmental education in New Zealand schools*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media Ltd.
- Ministry of Education. (2004). Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC). Retrieved from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/web/downloadable/dl14443/v1/cs-nesss-round3.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2007). *New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.
- Ministry of Education. (2009). *EOTC guidelines: Bringing the curriculum alive*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media. Retrieved from <http://eotc.tki.org.nz/EOTC-home/EOTC-Guidelines>
- Ministry of Education. (2010). Health and physical education. *New Zealand Curriculum on line*. Retrieved from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-curriculum/learning-areas/health-and-physical-education>
- Mitchell, W.J.T. (Ed.). (2002). Imperial landscape. In *Landscape and power* (2nd ed., pp. 5–34). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- New Zealand Association of Environmental Education. (2009). Government funding cuts to EfS and EE. Retrieved from <http://www.nzaee.org.nz/news.htm>
- New Zealand Educational Institute. (1978). *Outdoor education: Year book of education* (vol. 7). Wellington, New Zealand: Author.
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (2005). *The New Zealand National Qualifications Framework*. Retrieved June 5, 2009, from http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/news/featuresandspeeches/docs/nqf_background.pdf
- Nicol, R. (2002). Outdoor education: Research topic or universal value? Part two. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 2, 85–99.
- Ockwell, G. (2012). Waka ama as vehicle for learning about Māoritanga. *Out and About*, 27, 16–19.
- Palmer, J. (1998). *Environmental education in the 21st century: Theory, practice, progress and promise*. London: Routledge.
- Park, G. (1995). *Nga Uruora: Ecology and history in a New Zealand Landscape*. Wellington, New Zealand: Victoria University Press.
- Payne, P.G. (2002). On the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of experience in ‘critical’ outdoor education. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 6, 4–21.
- Schumacher, E.F. (1974). *Small is beautiful*. London: Sphere Books.
- Scott, G. (Ed.). (1984). *Environmental education: A source book for teachers*. Wellington, New Zealand: Commission for the Environment.
- Senge, P.M., Lichtenstein, B.B., Kaeufer, K., Bradbury, H., & Carroll, J.S. (2007). Collaborating for Systemic Change [PDF]. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 48, 44–53. Retrieved from ABI/INFORM Global database.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2008). Historical context. Retrieved from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/urban-rural-profiles/historical-context/default.htm>
- Straker, J. (2014). *Meanings of ‘the outdoors’: Shaping outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

- Taylor, C. (2010). Education for sustainability achievement standards. *Out and About*, 24, 22–24.
- UNESCO. (2004). *Millennium ecosystem assessment report*. Paris: Author.
- Watson, S. (2012). Same place, new view: Connecting a school community with their local place. *Out and About*, 27, 12–15.
- Wattchow, B., & Brown, M. (2011). *Pedagogy of place: Outdoor education for a changing world*. Melbourne, Australia: Monash University Publishing.
- Zapf, M.K. (2005). The spiritual dimension of person and environment: Perspectives from social work and traditional knowledge. *International Social Work*, 48, 633–642.
- Zink, R., & Boyes, M. (2006). The nature and scope of outdoor education in New Zealand schools. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 10, 11–21.

Author Biographies

David Irwin PhD is manager of the Sustainability and Outdoor Education Programmes at CPIT. His research and teaching interests lie in the exploration of culture, identity and human-nature relationships, education for sustainability, and social change in an organisational context. Dave is the editor of *Out and About*, a magazine about EOTC published biannually by Education Outdoors New Zealand.

Jo Straker (PhD, MEd, BBs) is a senior lecturer on the Bachelor of Sustainability and Outdoor Education at CPIT. She has been teaching in the outdoors for 40 years and still enjoys walking and cycling up and down hills. Her research and teaching interests focus on the potential of learning outdoors.