

# Student perspectives of a place-responsive outdoor education programme

Mike Brown

University of Waikato

## Abstract

There is a growing recognition of the role that places have in influencing learning in outdoor education. Being aware of the importance of place encourages the development of outdoor programmes that respond to the uniqueness of the locality and the community. This article investigates student perspectives of a place-responsive outdoor education programme. The findings indicate that this approach is a viable form of outdoor education practice that has the potential to foster positive interpersonal relationships and strengthen participants' appreciation of, and attachment to, place(s). These findings contribute to a growing body of literature demonstrating that place-responsive outdoor education has the potential to enrich participants' understanding and enjoyment of places in addition to providing a challenging and enjoyable outdoor experience.

**Keywords:** Place-responsive, student perspectives, curriculum.

## Introduction

Advocates of a more place-responsive outdoor education have tended to draw on tertiary students' written and oral accounts to substantiate the value of such an approach (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). This paper builds on the emerging body of work by investigating secondary school aged students' perceptions of an outdoor education programme that was designed to engage in and with local places. In doing so it seeks to add to a small, but growing body of literature focused on students' perspectives of their outdoor education experiences.

This paper draws on data generated as part of a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) involving Ngaruawahia High School and Mount Maunganui College during 2010-2011. The TLRI project investigated student and teacher perspectives of place-responsive outdoor education programmes. I have discussed various aspects of this project in other publications; teachers' understandings of outdoor education appeared in a case study published in *A pedagogy of place* (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) and perspectives of students from Ngaruawahia High School was published in *Outdoor education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (Irwin, Straker, & Hill, 2012). The data used in this paper is drawn from student interviews following the year 12 outdoor education camp conducted at Mount Maunganui College.

The specific questions that framed this research were:

1. What were the students' perspectives of participation in a journey style place-responsive programme in their local environment?
2. Did this programme encourage new perspectives of local place(s) to emerge?
3. Is a place-responsive approach a feasible way to conduct outdoor education experiences in the secondary school context?

As a new or different approach to the provision of outdoor experiences both the teachers and I were keen to understand how a more place-responsive programme might be received by the participants. The study is important in that it adds to the nascent body of research on place-responsive outdoor education and in doing so it responds to Zink's (2011) request to hear student perspectives of place-responsive programmes. It also aims to highlight the value of student perspectives as a means to enrich curriculum development.

The paper begins with a brief introduction to place-responsive pedagogy and the importance of student perspectives in curriculum development. A brief description of the programme is included followed by analysis of the interviews and discussion of the emergent themes.

## The concept of place

On a practical level we know that different places are associated with different activities; for example, our workplace, our home, or the local shopping mall involve different ways of interacting based on the physical and social context (Relph, 1976). Cameron (2003b) has suggested that place has to do "with the relationship between people and their local setting for their experience and activity" (p. 3). For example, many of us will have strong attachments to places that resonate with a special event or time in our lives. Places such as a lakeside camping spot, a swimming spot in the local creek, or even the school ground, may all bring to light different emotions and sense of connection or belonging.

According to Relph (1976) the concept of place is not restricted to a location, rather it is the integration of elements of nature and culture that form a unique fingerprint. This fingerprint distinguishes a particular place from all other places. As Relph (1976) states, "A place is not just the 'where' of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon" (p. 3). This combination of culture and nature means that places are not merely backdrops to learning but are an integral element in what might be taught and learnt and how this learning might occur. Gruenewald (2003) states that "places *teach* as about how the world works and how our lives fit into spaces that we occupy. Further, places *make* us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped" (p. 621). The pedagogical role of place has, until relatively recently, been silenced in discussions of teaching and learning in outdoor education. Outdoor education does have the potential to play an important role in connecting people and places in a way that can enrich learning for both individuals, communities, and the places in which they live (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

## Place-responsive pedagogy

There is a growing body of literature on place-based educational initiatives (e.g., G. Smith, 2007; Sobel, 2005; Tooth & Renshaw, 2009). Place-based

approaches include community gardens, local ecological restoration projects, writing of community histories, and involvement in local social action programmes. Place-based outdoor education programmes may not necessarily be place-responsive. For example it could be claimed that residential programmes are place-based outdoor education, which in a limited sense is correct. However being based at a residential centre does not necessarily elicit a place-responsive approach. Outdoor centres that conduct activities such as a ropes course, abseiling or tubing regardless of geographical or seasonal variations exemplify this decontextualised approach to outdoor education (Brown, 2008, 2012). Being in a specific location does not necessarily require an empathetic response to the particular cultural, historical, or ecological conditions. As Cameron (2003a) reminds us, "the word 'responsive' carries with it the impetus to act, to respond" (p. 180). To respond is to enter into a relationship of mutual interdependence that requires sensitivity and empathy for place(s) and those who dwell there; both now and in the future (Brown, 2012). Being place-responsive has the potential to be inclusive of Māori students' world-views given Māoridom's long and "well rehearsed traditional and historically affinity to place based education practices" (Penetito, 2004, p. 18).

If places, and our relationship with them, contribute to individual and communal identity how might outdoor educators encourage and enable students to feel safe and comfortable in place(s)? How can we expect students to care for place(s) if they have no attachment nor commitment to place(s)? These are challenging questions for outdoor educators if it is believed that learning outcomes are best achieved in remote or wilderness environments far removed from the everyday lives of most students. Brookes (1994) described such approaches as being "short raids on the 'bush' as strangers" (p. 31) which may hinder rather than aid in developing a sense of connection. If we believe that outdoor education requires a wilderness experience, which frequently involves travel from the urban environment in which most of us live, are we destined to remain "strangers" thus limiting the opportunity to develop connections that are central to the formation of personal and communal identity? An alternative approach is to conduct

outdoor education experiences in areas that are closer to the students "everyday lives" so that this sense of being a stranger is replaced by a sense of belonging and connection.

## **Student perspectives**

It has been argued that insufficient attention is given to student perspectives in the educational process (Dyson, 2006). In the outdoor education context it has been suggested that students' comments about their experiences have not always been accorded sufficient merit (Zink, 2005). The voice(s) of students often go unheard in outdoor education research yet there is potentially much to be gained from listening to the experiences of students in informing curriculum design and implementation (Brown, 2012). Whilst research on student perspectives is relatively limited there is a growing recognition that students' experiences are worthy of consideration in understanding both what they learnt and what they thought of their outdoor education experiences (e.g., Beames & Ross, 2010; Brown, 2012; Carlson & McKenna, 2000; Davidson, 2001; Dyson, 1995; Hastie, 1995; Johnson & Wattchow, 2004; E. Smith, Steel, & Gidlow, 2010; Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Zink, 2005).

Biddulph (2011) has noted that whilst student voice has become integral to many aspects of school life such as student councils, "students have had little opportunity to express their perspectives in the school curriculum" (p. 381). Taking students' perspectives into account opens up possibilities for students to be actively engaged in the construction of the curriculum (Brooker & Macdonald, 1999). Pissanos and Allison (1993) have urged teachers to inquire into "students' construction and reconstruction of meaning" (p. 434) so that they are better informed and more able to meet the needs of learners.

One way to ascertain students' perspectives is to conduct interviews thereby assisting educators to gain an insight into how students understand both content and pedagogical strategies. Graham (1995a) suggests that this approach may act as a catalyst to modify content and teaching practices to

more fully engage students. There is solid body of literature that acknowledges the value of seeking to understand how students' perspectives might inform teachers' practice (Dyson, 1995, 2006; Graham, 1995b; Pissanos & Allison, 1993). Taking account of students' perspectives, as a way to enhance learning, is one of the signposts of effective pedagogy outlined in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Whilst attempts to ascertain student voice(s) are admirable the notion that "true" or "authentic" perspectives will emerge is not without its problems. As Brooker and Macdonald (1999) have noted "the notion of securing and understanding all students' consistent voices across time and contexts is flawed" (p. 88). They noted that a number of research traditions (e.g., liberal, critical, feminist and post-structuralist) have problematised the issue of power differentials in interviews and what constitutes, and legitimates the voice(s) that will be heard. Thus in considering student perspectives it behoves us to be mindful of the multifarious and complex nature of interpreting interview data gathered for a specific purpose in which interviewees and interviewer adapt particular roles and identities. It is one of the hallmarks of a place-responsive approach that participants are encouraged and given the opportunity to enter into a relationship with people and places where the outdoor education programme occurs. Taking students' perspectives seriously will hopefully enrich future programme development and be illustrative of a responsive approach that accords value to students' experiences.

## **The place-responsive journey**

The journey was devised by Jane Townsend, a teacher at Mount Maunganui College, and was developed after discussions and readings around place-responsive approaches to outdoor education. Jane had read extensively around these issues as a participating teacher in the TLRI project and as part of her postgraduate studies. The year 12 students on these journeys (n=42) were enrolled in a 24 credit National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Outdoor Education course. Students on the journey were assessed on Achievement Standard 91334; *Consistently demonstrate*

*social responsibility through applying a social responsibility model in physical activity* (3 credits). The elements of the journey were selected on the basis of geographical location, (in relation to the school), mode of transport (e.g., walking, cycling or kayaking) and cultural/historical connections. The journey incorporated multiple ways of experiencing or getting to know place(s); embodied experiences (cycling, walking, kayaking), scientific explanations (e.g., geological explanations of land formation), social history (e.g., farming practices in the Papamoa Hills), and Māori world views (that provided an alternative explanation of geological features and the meaning of these for local people).

Mauao ('The Mount') is a defining feature of the regional topography and Jane was conscious of constructing a journey that incorporated physical, visual and metaphorical connections to this 'guardian' of the journey. The journey was run on two occasions in response to logistical constraints. Each group was accompanied by two teachers, two support staff and a vehicle.

#### *Day one.*

Leg 1: A walk from the school to Matapihi Peninsula

Leg 2: Kayak from Matapihi Peninsula across the Maungatawa tidal flats to Welcome Bay.

Leg 3: A cycle ride to Romai marae. On the way students rode to Summerhill Farm Park, where they walked to a pa site in the Papamoa Hills. They then rode to Kaiate Falls for a short bush walk. They then rode around Kopukairua to Tahuwhakatiki (Romai) marae which overlooks the harbour. Kopukairua and Mauao (the guardians of the journey) were clearly visible from the marae. The group participated in a Powhiri and stayed in the whareniui overnight.

### *Day two.*

Leg 1: A walk from the marae to the kayaks followed by a paddle to Sulphur Point which included paddling under the Maungatapu, Matapihi and Tauranga Harbour bridges.

Leg 2: From Sulphur Point the group cycled around the Waikareo estuary, over the harbour bridge, and finished at school.

Due to unsuitable weather aspects of the second journey were changed. For example, on the last day the group cycled to Mauao ('The Mount'), walked to the summit and then rode back to school.

As part of the journey students were tasked with preparing a small presentation on a physical or cultural feature that they would encounter on their travels. Students had some class time prior to the journey to prepare and they made their presentations individually or in groups of up to three. Students could choose their own topic or select from some examples supplied. Options included;

Māori legends of Tauranga Moana

How did Welcome Bay get its name?

What is the impact of the wharf on the Tauranga Harbour?

Pre-colonial history of the Papamoa Hills/Pa site

The history of Kaiate Falls

The environmental impact of the Te Puke Quarry.

These presentations encouraged students to research places that they may not have visited before or to uncover new information about familiar places that they may have taken for granted.



## Data generation

Data was generated via interviews six weeks after the conclusion of the journey. Students who completed the journey were invited to participate and ten indicated a willingness to be involved. Interviews were conducted in pairs by a research assistant who also transcribed the audio-files. The interviewer was known to some of the students as he had accompanied them on their journey. Spending time accompanying and building rapport with the students was an attempt to break down the barrier of researcher and researched. Admittedly this cannot be achieved quickly nor does it guarantee authentic voice but it is an acknowledgement of the need to build trust and some sense of commonality through shared experiences. The style of interview was informal yet guided by an outline of topics for discussion. This approach has been described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Wheaton, 2000, p. 257).

The study employed a hermeneutic approach to the generation and analysis of data (Hill, 2010; Patterson, Watson, Williams, & Roggenbuck, 1998). The transcripts were read numerous times and were inductively analysed to ascertain emerging themes. This initially occurred at the level of an in-depth examination of individual interview transcripts, which Patterson et al. (1998) refer to as the idiographic level. This process was repeated across the five transcripts to then develop a "nomothetic (across individuals) understanding of the data. In a nomothetic analysis the goal is to identify themes that are relevant beyond the unique experience of one individual" (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 429). The "reasonableness" of the identified themes was confirmed by a secondary analysis conducted by another researcher.

## Findings and discussion

The following themes emerged through the data analysis phase of the research.

### **Opportunities afforded by connections/familiarity.**

Conducting the journey in the local environment allowed students to incorporate their out of school knowledge into the school setting. For example, one student explained how,

*we went kayaking and the kayaking was pretty good for me cause where we went kayaking is where I go fishing and stuff so I knew the area quite well and I was the leader of the group, so I got to lead the way. (1: S2)*

Perhaps one of the more significant manifestations of connection was evidenced during the overnight stay at the marae. One of the students (pseudonym Andrew) on the trip had family affiliations with this marae. Andrew had spent considerable amounts of time there and was familiar with protocols and day-to-day practicalities of being on the marae. He expressed pleasure at being able to share his knowledge of his "home" with his peers. It was his place and he felt comfortable there. In the several of the interviews the other students referred to it as "Andrew's marae". They appreciated his guidance and they saw him in a different light. When speaking about the marae stay one of the other students stated, (referring to Andrew);

*That this is like where I am from, this is me, and for us it was cool to learn about that, in like our group, that was cool. (2:S1)*

Several students spoke about knowing where they were at all times, about being in places that some of them knew well. As one student stated;

*Yeah you could always see your home, like always the place that you live... you still knew that you were away from home but it was still like, you kind of feel home in this area... you could always see the Mount... I think that was really good. (4:S1)*

The value of being in a familiar environment disrupts notions that an unfamiliar environment is an essential element of effective outdoor education

programmes. These students' ability to see connections and continuity between their everyday lives and their outdoor journey finds support in outdoor learning literature. For example, Beames and Ross's (2010) research also gives weight to the viability and value of programmes that take place in local communities "as opposed to far-off landscapes that have little personal relevance for participants" (p. 105).

While some students had an existing connection with specific locations visited during the journey, others recognised that this might be the start of an ongoing relationship with places with which they were not familiar. Several students realised that, given the accessibility of the places that they incorporated in the journey that it would be possible to return on another occasion.

*And you can actually go back and visit them so that's pretty good.(1:S1)*

*And because it is not that far, we can go there again... you can because it is not that far away and now you know where those places are. (3:S1)*

Whether or not the students will return to these places with family or friends remains to be seen. However students know that it is possible to revisit these places. In my case study of tertiary students (Wattchow & Brown, 2011) some students did return to places that they visited on their outdoor education journey. At the other end of the educational spectrum Beames and Ross's (2010) research revealed that some of the participants (8-11 year olds) did "undertake their own adventures outside of their formal schooling" (p. 106).

Interestingly several students adopted a fairly pragmatic approach in regards to the potential positives of a locally based journey. One student commented that she thought this programme would be *a bit cheaper, like if it was something else I think we would have paid a little bit more* (1:S1). Whilst another (perhaps more pragmatic student) noted that,

*if anything went wrong you are not far away from help or you are like just close to things you may need, if something did go wrong... so that's probably good for a school camp idea. (3:S2)*

The concept of staying close to home was not initially greeted with enthusiasm by all students.

*At first I was kind of thinking oh we are not going anywhere for our camp it was like why aren't we going somewhere cool? but when you were actually doing it, it was, ... it was actually quite good. (3: S2)*

This initial disappointment mirrors a comment made by a tertiary student in an earlier study (Wattchow & Brown, 2011). In both instances the initial hesitation was replaced by an acknowledgement that engaging with the local and being open to what is possible on one's back door step can be both educationally valuable and "quite good".

### ***Discovering/appreciating new places in their locale***

One of the most frequently mentioned aspects of the journey was the discovery and appreciation of new "hidden away" places in the local area. In contrast to travelling by car or public transport students encountered places at a slower pace that enabled different experiences. By cycling, walking or kayaking students gained access to places they may not have visited previously, or had rushed passed on their way to somewhere else. Students expressed surprise at the beauty in the normal or everyday environment where they lived. One student described finding new places as *like the best thing* (3:S2).

The following quotes convey sentiments that were mentioned by a number of students.

*Yeah, the main thing for me, it was like, it was just really good to be close to home. All this surrounds you and you didn't even know it. Experiencing it - it's pretty wow. (2:S2)*

*We saw like a lot of the area here where we live. Like I didn't see any of it before so it was pretty cool. I think without a camp I wouldn't have seen all that stuff that we saw, so it was pretty good. (3:S1)*

*This trip kind of taught of the meaning of the place that we live in and we should actually appreciate it more. (1:S1)*

One student stated that her experiences on the journey had led to a different perspective on the local landmarks. She described how prior to the trip she would travel around the harbour and *just take it for granted* whereas:

*now that we have biked it or walked it ourselves you really have a feeling for it. And even now like when we drive over the harbour bridge I'll say oh I biked that it was pretty cool, you have a different feeling for it. (3:S1)*

This student captures the sense of the embodied experiential aspects of learning that is a potential strength of outdoor education. Encouraging and valuing sensual and embodied ways of knowing is central to developing place-responsiveness. As Wattchow and Brown (2011) contend, "It is the learner's bodies that remain the ultimate centre of their learning. Learning cannot be considered separate from their embodied interactions and connections with place" (p. 73). Having a "different feeling for it" is made possible by the rich interplay of the senses and the body in a particular place. Another student commented that the learning was enriched by how places where encountered ... *the way you did it was the new experience not where it was...* (3:S2). The slower, physically active modes of moving also appeared to bring the 'everyday' into focus or to recast it in a way that encouraged students to think about the places in which they live.

*I have lived here forever, like all my life but I still haven't paid any attention whatsoever to like, where I live, which I had not even bothered to think about before that, so that was pretty cool, just actually realising that. (3: S2)*

Learning more about their locality might be seen as a modest accomplishment. However assisting students to understand more about the world which they inhabit is arguable one of the educator's primary tasks (Beames & Ross, 2010). For example, Berthold-Bond (2000) has suggested that one of Leopold's greatest legacies was to encourage a love and respect for place, whilst Cameron (2001) argued that "the task of the educator is how to foster an inclusive sense of place in students so that their love of wild places can extend to care for all places, even neglected city spaces" (p. 28). While developing an affinity and attachment for a place is a complex and multidimensional process (Smaldone, Harris, & Sanyal, 2008) it would appear that the journey facilitated opportunities for the participants to see familiar places in a different light. In doing so this journey contributed to the multi-layered experiences of the places they inhabit. One potential benefit of this approach is the possibility that students' environmental attitudes and behaviour might be altered. Whilst explicit mention of an enhanced environmental ethic did not feature strongly in the interviews, research with similarly aged young people has shown that "attachment to a local natural resource can influence environmentally responsible behavior (ERB) in an individual's everyday life" (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001, p. 16).

### ***Stories in context: Enriching learning***

As mentioned previously, students were required to make a presentation about the places that they visited. Often these presentations involved the sharing of story about how particular places got their names. Students frequently drew upon narratives that explained the significance of places to the local people. Several students raised this 'in context' story-telling as being a meaningful way to remember why places were important and as a means to connect various places with myths/legends. This "storying" of the landscape offered an alternative way of connecting apparently disparate elements. For example one of the students researched the stories of the whales in Tauranga harbour and commented on how *it's really cool to actually go to the marae and see the carvings*. The student went on to say that *yeah just even listening to everyone's things (talks) have made it a bit more meaningful, like actually gave it a bit more purpose to being there* (3:S2)

The inclusion of "other" ways of knowing, in this case Te ao Māori, was a conscious pedagogical decision on the part of the teachers. The linking of stories that were researched with physically being in those places provided a strong learning experience.

*And finding like more out, like more about ourselves, like where we live, like I said I have been here all my life and I had never been to any of those places or heard any of those stories. So I think, to me the main idea behind it was like, getting to know more about my culture and where I live and the stories behind it. (4:S2)*

*There was so much things that I didn't even know that were down here, and got to understand the history around it. (1:S1)*

*And then to like hear the stories behind it, that was pretty cool too. (4:S2)*

In another interview the following conversation occurred;

*(S2) I really like how we each had to like research something, because then it was cool, we all kind of got a chance to*

*(S1) Learn something*

*(S2) Yeah to learn something and to like as students talk to other students about what we learnt*

*(S1) I think it was a good idea to actually like do some research and talk at the place where actually all this history happened, so you could actually see and listen to the stories... Because sometimes you just hear the stories and you are like after a while you don't know it any more like. But I can still remember like nearly all of the stories because I saw it and listened to it, I think that was really good.*

The role of stories in fostering a connection to place has been discussed at length elsewhere (Baker, 2005; Stewart, 2008). However it is important to reiterate that "storytelling is not a frivolous or fanciful endeavour, it is a serious attempt to connect and make sense of where we and who we are" (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 190). The students' presentations were designed to elicit a range of different stories; Māori creation stories, accounts of European settlement, and scientific narratives of geology and botany. Each has a role to play in deepening an appreciation and understanding of place and peoples role in creating places. For as Park (1995, p. 11) reminds us, "A landscape whose story is told is harder to dismiss."

### **Social interaction**

This was frequently mentioned as being one of the highlights of the journey. Working or being together appeared to be valued by the students. Examples came up several times;

*yeah I think it is the best group thing that you can do, when you get a trip like that.(4:S1)*

*The stay at the marae was also another highlight for me because our group, we all got along quite well, so we were all just chilling which was, after the long day our group just got along, which was real cool. (2:S1)*

The importance placed on friendships and social interaction is consistent with Smith, Steel and Gidlow's (2010) findings that highlighted how students associate outdoor education experiences with enhanced opportunities for social engagement. Their research with year 10 students showed a consistent pattern of belief that "camp was about social interaction" (p. 144). Zink and Burrows (2008) research revealed that while camp activities might be fun, "many of the things that were important to the students occurred in-between the activities.... The in-between times were also the spaces where they made friendships they felt could last a lifetime" (p. 157-8). The students clearly



enjoyed the opportunity to mix with their peers in a supportive and informal educational environment. Creating opportunities for interaction over meals or outside structured activities might be considered lost opportunities for learning by an instructor or teacher but this is not necessarily the perspective of students.

### **Challenge**

Several students spoke of the physical challenges presented during the two days. Reid Road, a steep ascent in the Papamoa hills came in for special mention. It provided both a mental and physical challenge for a number of students on the cycling leg of the journey. Despite being difficult, the elation at completing the ride and taking in the views was also mentioned by several students as a highlight of their trip. One student commented that successfully riding up this hill was one of the highlights of the trip and it gave her *"more confidence in what you can do"*.

Another student talked of the bike ride as a lesson in *"not giving up"*. The challenge of the hills coupled with the encouragement from her peers led her to believe that she was more capable than she initially realised. This experience reinforced for her the importance of attempting what might initially appear to be difficult, if not impossible tasks. The trip confirmed her belief that the overall theme of the class was about *"trying new things and pushing yourself"*. One student also spoke of the challenge of looking *"beyond yourself"* and adjusting your pace to match that of the group.

*You have to work as a team, it's not just about yourself... you see other people aren't coping with it so you hang back a bit with them and stuff. You know you should. It makes you aware of others. (5:S1)*

The lack of overtly 'adventurous' activities (e.g., those involving height or technical equipment) might suggest that this style of programme lacked uncertainty and risk which are often seen as central elements of outdoor education (see Brown & Fraser, 2009). However as Beames and Ross (2010, p. 106) state,

It is arguable that these journeys in local neighbourhoods might actually have a much higher degree of authentic adventure than highly regulated ropes course and rock climbing sessions that are common at traditional residential centres. After all, Outdoor Journeys are unpredictable ... and involve real-world risks that need to be managed (e.g., cars, exposure to cold).

This move from highly orchestrated outdoor challenges, which require constant supervision, towards more "real world" encounters where students can be involved in the decision making process has stronger educational foundations (Brown & Fraser, 2009).

## Conclusion

This small case study sought to ascertain students' perspectives of a journey style place-responsive outdoor education programme. Of the five themes that emerged, three were related to the concept of place and are linked to the particularities of the Mount Maunganui/Papamoa area: Opportunities afforded by connections/familiarity; discovering/appreciating new places; and stories in context. The other two themes: social interaction and challenge are less context specific and have been identified as being valued by students in other residential camp settings (e.g., E. Smith et al., 2010). As the students reported, a place-responsive approach did not mean that the programme lacked challenge, which is perhaps a concern of advocates of more activity focused programmes. Similarly social aspects of a communal experience are not lost through the absence of a wilderness experience.

The three themes relating to place are likely to be the result of the pedagogical approach purposefully employed by the lead teacher. Whilst this is a small sample of the overall number of participants, the findings indicate that the programme did encourage positive perspectives of local places to emerge. This is encouraging as research supports the benefits of emotional connections to the local environment as a means to improve responsible environmental action (Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). In addition elements of personal and social development were also reported by students. Although I am conscious of not overstating the case for a place-responsive approach I am mindful that while, "the primary emphasis of this hermeneutic research approach is on understanding the nature of experience in the specific context in which it occurred, the possibility for gaining more general insights... exists" (Patterson et al., 1998, p. 446).

Given the findings presented above and the results of a similar case study on secondary students (Brown, 2012) it is reasonable to assert that a place-responsive approach is a feasible way to conduct outdoor education experiences in the secondary school context. These findings illustrate how a place-responsive outdoor education programme aligns with the vision, principles and key competencies of The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The New Zealand Curriculum gives schools the opportunity to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of their community. This journey style programme was developed by the lead teacher with the students.

community, and local environment very much at the forefront of her mind. As a new initiative the perspectives of the students has the potential to shape the formation of a modified and refined curriculum in future years. Responsiveness lies at the heart of place-responsive pedagogy, thus incorporating student perspectives in the process of curriculum development can enrich the experiences of future participants. The findings of the case study indicate that place-responsive outdoor education has the potential to engage students in different ways of thinking, knowing and being in places. Acknowledging the pedagogical role of place facilitates opportunities to develop outdoor programmes that have the potential to enrich the learning experiences of students.

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