

Inside-out learning

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[Looking Inside Out](#) by [Anne Robertson](#) via Flickr [CC-BY 2.0](#)

I spent the last week on the road in our campervan with my husband, visiting a part of the country we didn't know, and tramping up some mountains. We escaped, went off the grid.... no, actually we didn't! We are social media and news junkies so being disconnected from family, friends and what's happening in the world is not really an option. We had our mobile phones with us at all times, even on the tops of misty, windswept mountains. Why? We were making the most of the technology we had to keep ourselves safe and informed.

Before leaving we researched on the internet to plan a rough route and activities to do on the way. We connected with people online who had experience in the mountains to seek advice on the best routes to undertake. This gave us a variety of options to choose from. We checked the weather forecast daily, made observations on the ground and used our prior knowledge and understanding of how weather conditions in the mountains can change to decide our option for the day.

The TOPO maps we had downloaded onto our phones didn't get soggy or blow away in the wind. We could zoom in to see the features and contour lines more clearly and cater for our ageing, myopic eyes! The compass, altimeter and GPS functions on our smartwatches let us know how far we have travelled, how high we are and helped us navigate.

But what has my holiday got to do with education and learning?

Children learn best when they interact with their environment, when they are able to link present content to previous experiences and knowledge and when they take an active part in their own learning.

John Dewey

In the past, we may have carried multiple field guides for flora and fauna but now we have all that information available through phones. Back at our van we would check into the online guides and identify plants from the photos. With the images in our heads and the photos we



had taken we could explore the history and geography of the land and the stories behind the names of places we visited. Our learning was instant, connected and contextual.

Outside-in learning

I have long been an advocate for Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) and the positive impacts it has on teachers, learners and their joint engagement with learning. School camps are traditionally the time when formal learning is put to one side, pens, paper and digital devices are left at home and kids get a chance to reconnect with the environment. Ākonga challenge themselves physically and emotionally, push themselves outside their comfort zones and have fun. They are active, outdoors, developing their hauora, working collaboratively with each other and learning together.

EOTC is not just about camps. EOTC activities can be planned to take place in the school grounds, down the road at the local park, in the art gallery or museum, at the marae, at places of worship, in the old people's home or the library. EOTC and informal learning are examples of learner-centred learning. Dewey described a philosophy of learner-centred pedagogy which is outlined in [this article by Steve Wheeler](#). The digital environment in which we live makes it much easier to provide opportunities for learners to make connections between their environment and learning across the curriculum and to 'rewind' what they experienced in an EOTC context.

One of the arguments for getting kids 'off-grid' for a few days is the concern about well-being and overexposure to digital devices. But [this piece of research](#) argues that well-planned use of digital devices increases the emotional connection that ākonga have to learning and ongoing engagement.

“Students without mobile devices were not as emotionally connected to the environment, nor were they as empowered in learning the content as the group that was given technology and a field guide.”

My belief is that school camps and EOTC activities provide essential non-formal learning which should be celebrated. But we need to go further and leverage the power they have to connect learning across the curriculum and explicitly plan to ensure that they do.

Coherence

Embedded in our New Zealand Curriculum is the idea of coherence across a curriculum in which “all learning should make use of the natural connections that exist between learning areas and that link learning areas to the key competencies.” (p.16 NZC)

EOTC presents opportunities to make connections across the curriculum and learning in a local context. It also offers us opportunities to use and create with digital technologies to enhance the learning before, during and after the EOTC activity.

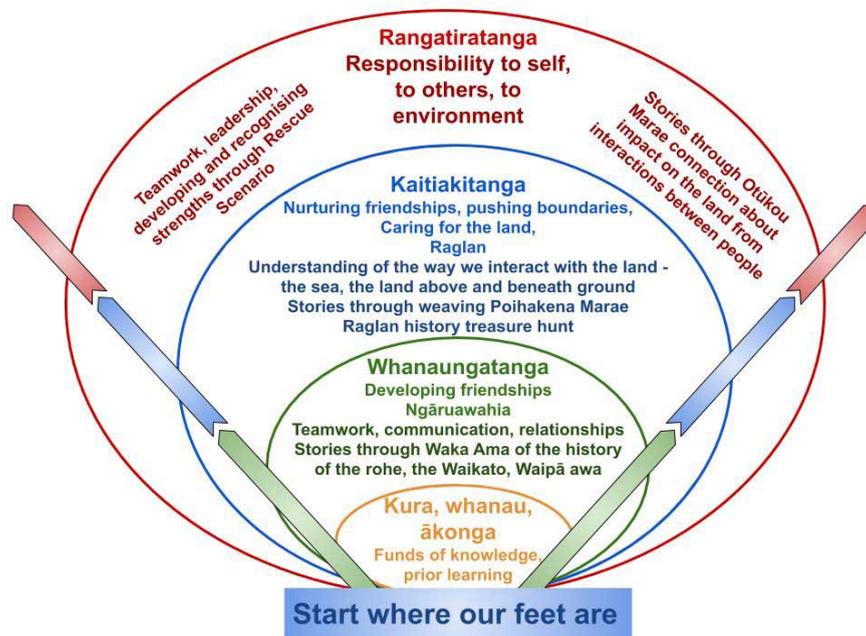
In a previous role, I had the opportunity to reframe the concept of the 'end of year' camp so that there was coherence in terms of context and experience as ākonga progressed through the school. In [CORE's Ten Trends 2019](#) it is recognised that;

“Cultural narratives are increasingly recognised as powerful enablers in connecting our past to the present and acts to build a platform to a sustainable future. They enable schools to situate themselves in the context of the places they co-inhabit, and recognise the influences of people, places, time and events in shaping who we are. When learners are enabled to make connections to where they live, when they create links to significant events, people and the land, they develop a sense that they are part of a larger story. As such, cultural narratives are as much for non-Māori as they are Māori. They help learners examine knowledge, issues and events from where their feet stand first, in their local environment.”

I wanted to develop a holistic vision for camps with a theme of sustainability and a sense of knowing where we are and how we fit into the environment and the culture in which we live. We start close to home and gradually move further away building on our learning and making connections through stories and activities that develop key competencies and an understanding of place and identity.

Starting locally and then moving further afield fits with [Wally Penetito's idea](#) of us starting where our feet are, building on prior knowledge and moving from the known to the unknown.

“Start where your feet are but never let it stay there; it’s the beginning point only, everything else moves out from that.” Wally Penetito



My vision was for these camps to be further developed through strong collaboration between learning areas and integrated and planned use of digital technologies. The flow or progression from one to the other provided rigorous learning opportunities that increased in depth, complexity and richness on camp but the opportunity to make explicit the pathway for learning for ākonga and their whanau in school was still not there. Points to consider;

- How might we have re-designed the curriculum so that these camps provided rich opportunities for learning that ākonga, teachers and whānau could clearly understand?
- How could we have worked together to connect the learning experiences on camp with deep learning in school across learning areas before and after camp?
- How could we have built stronger, sustainable connections with whānau, iwi and other organisations so that there was a strong sense of ownership of the learning experience?
- How could digital technologies have been used to plan for learning on camp, enrich learning on camp, rewind it back at school and produce digital outcomes to share learning?

Come and join the discussion in [edSpace](#) on how to frame your thinking around the EOTC activities you currently do and how you could develop them so that they are rich opportunities for learning, connected across the curriculum and based on ākonga strengths, needs, identities and aspirations.

References

1. <https://www.teachthought.com/learning/pedagogy-john-dewey-summary/>
2. <https://newlearningtimes.com/cms/article/3447/how-to-use-phones-to-emotionally-connect-to-the-environment>
3. [CORE Ten Trends – Cultural Narratives](#)
4. Wally Penetito <https://vimeo.com/188920083#t=6m06s>
5. Digital EOTC <https://sites.google.com/core-ed.ac.nz/why-hamilton/home?authuser=0>

Featured image by [Alex Siale](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Anne Robertson

[Anne Robertson](#) is an Accredited Facilitator at CORE Education. She works with digital technology leaders, teachers and principals within New Zealand schools supporting them with a range of issues related to digital technology and decision-making. She enables teachers to make strategic decisions about utilising technology to work collaboratively and place students at the centre of their learning and which is responsive to the needs and culture of the school community.