

# *Dr Nicola Chisnall Memorial Award*

We would like to present our review of our outdoor environment. We value the difference the review has made to the tamariki (children) at Wa Ora Montessori School and to their future.

The review was worked on in collaboration by parents/whānau, tamariki, consultants and kaiako (teachers).

*“Healthy relation to the land, Forbes said, “is the means by which we humans generate and renew the big transcendent values such as community, meaning, beauty, love and sacred, on which both ethics and morality depends.”*

NAMTA Journal (2008) Vol 33, p. 55

## **What did we see as needing action or help?**

It appeared tamariki used the outdoors as an escape from the inside classrooms - the message they had was that inside was for work and outside was for play and fun. We felt that a change needed to happen so that there wasn't such a difference between the two environments.

We wanted tamariki to experience an intimate involvement in the outdoor environment so that they could learn about it, and from it, learning to love it, creating values and knowledge for them to take into their adult lives.

We wanted tamariki the opportunity to work where they chose without any ratio or kaiako restrictions, but we wanted purposeful activity to happen in all environments.

## **Who did you consult with before deciding on the action?**

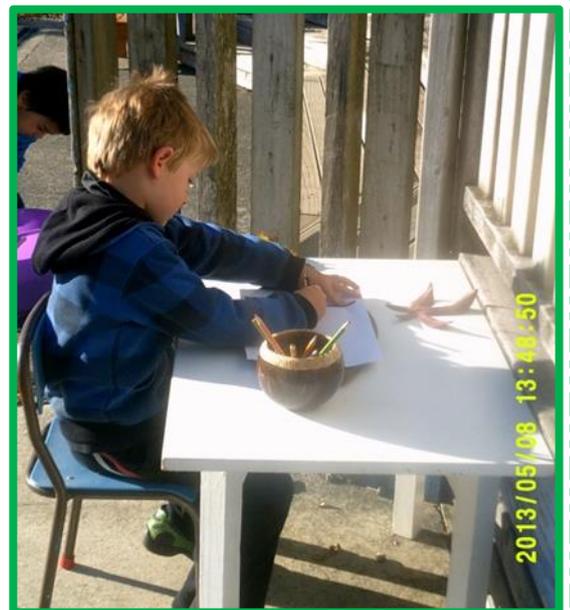
Ginni Sackett – Montessori consultant, Montessori Institute North West, USA

Parents/whānau

Tamariki

Kaiako

Ana Pickering (Montessori Aotearoa New Zealand)



### **What we did:**

The original review of how the outdoor environment was used commenced following a recommendation by the Education Review Office (ERO) in 2009 and a redesign of the outdoor environment which was completed in 2010. From this we conducted a planned review not once but twice! However even from this we were still not completely happy in how the outdoors flowed.

### **What did we set out to do?**

We wanted to create an outdoor environment where tamariki regarded the outdoors as an extension of the indoors with purposeful work in both environments.

### **How did we carry out these actions and what did we do differently?**

- Tamariki were asked questions about what they liked to work with and where.
- Kaiako observed at other Montessori and ece centres to look at how different centres focused on tamariki flowing between the two environments. Kaiako who had observed gave feedback of these observations at preschool meetings.
- Parent/whānau were asked for their opinions on how they were seeing the outdoors operating.
- We collected data on the tamariki outside, what they were choosing to do and the number of kaiako floating between the indoor and outdoor environment.
- Kaiako reflected on how they felt on the outdoors.

### **What roles did people in our community play?**

- Whānau became involved in collecting drift wood from the beach and building a fenced in area, planned for a rabbit and guinea pig.
- Whānau helped to provide and source materials for the carpentry table.
- Whānau donated seeds, plants and vegetables for the garden.



### **Progress we have seen:**

Through kaiako reflections, we have seen that the outdoors is no longer separated from the inside environment.

Kaiako are able to articulate how the outdoors works as they feel a part of this.

We see tamariki happily taking work from the indoors to outdoors to work with.

## **Examples of how the experience of tamariki outdoors has changed as a result of our focus**

At the beginning of the review we set indicators. These were what we would like to see happening in our environments at the end of the review.

When the review was revisited we looked at the indicators and assessed if we had raised the standard of our teaching and learning practices through working on this review. What we found when looking at the indicators was that we had not only changed the teaching and learning opportunities for tamariki but also for ourselves.

By having a free flow between the indoors and outdoors we found tamariki were more inclined to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning by having the freedom to choose where they worked and with what. This has led to increased positive interactions with each other. The outside environment has given tamariki opportunities to have social experiences that wouldn't necessarily happen inside.

We have a kaiako who is dedicated to working in the garden. She sows and harvests and does general maintenance with the tamariki. A garden report is written alongside the fortnightly newsletter to whānau increasing communication as to what is happening outside. Through the sowing and harvesting of our vegetables, tamariki are seeing the very beginning of the cycle of our lunch programme.



Introducing a rabbit and guinea pig into the outdoor environment has created real purposeful practical life activities. For many tamariki this has been their first introduction to animals helping to create empathy and gentleness for others which otherwise they may not have had the opportunity to do in this way. Tamariki also had the enjoyment of building the fence surround for the animals. They now roam freely with the rabbit – Snuggles thinking she has exclusive rights to the vegetable garden!

## **Do the actions and outcomes have application to wider communities than our own?**

Montessori Education is an *aid to life* and for this reason we want our tamariki to be able to



make real links with what they already know and their wider world. We believe that allowing a free flow between the inside and outside environment enables tamariki to make discoveries that may not happen without a full Montessori curriculum. While this is relevant in our First Stage of Development tamariki, we are striving to lay the foundations for the child to become the man of tomorrow, to be socially

responsible for the environment in the generations ahead.

**What did we learn that may provide strategies to build on our success?**

What we learnt through these reviews is that we as educators do not have all the answers. Tamariki, whānau and outside research has provided far more than we could have obtained by ourselves.

We also have realised that what we are doing with, and providing for tamariki in our environments has a far greater impact than just the short three years they are with us in the preschool. The skills they are learning from their work in the outdoors are what will help to create the man/woman of tomorrow.

We also realise that the review in this area has not finished, there are always going to be ways which we can continue to improve ourselves and the environment and the keys which we continue to give to tamariki.



***“This new human will join hands with her friends here in this place and reach out to those in need here and throughout the globe, in whatever ways are possible to create harmonious relationships, to be peace.***

**NAMTA Journal (2008) Vol 33, p.59**

