

**Outside is where I need to be: Why providing optimal early childhood centre outdoor environments and time in nature is so vital for the holistic development of the child.**

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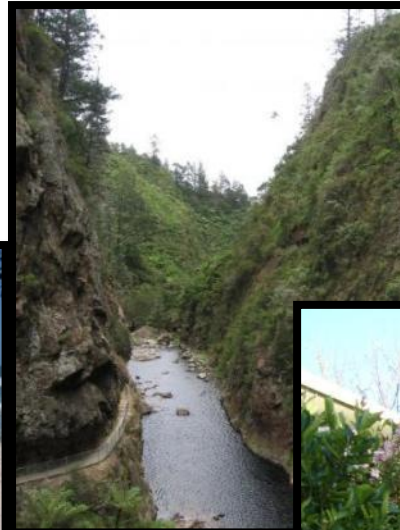


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**Ko Maungataniwha nga pae maunga  
Ko Victoria te awa**



**No Kaitiaki ahau**



**Ke Waihi taku kainga**



Ko Bruce Morpeth taku papa  
Ko Evelyn Davies taku mama



Tokowha aku tamariki  
Toku tekau mā toru aku  
mokopuna



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# Children's perspectives –why?



# My belief is...

- Early childhood teachers need to dig deep into the moral and spiritual principles embedded within *Te Whāriki* and advocate for outdoor environments and experiences that truly foster the holistic development of the child.



# Te Whāriki Principles and strands

- Empowerment
  - Holistic Development
  - Family and Community
  - Relationships
- 
- Well-Being
  - Exploration
  - Contribution
  - Communication
  - Belonging



**Early childhood teachers are part of a child's socio-emotional, spiritual and moral life in a critical period of their lives**



- First, the quality of the relationships between teachers and children and the physical space, the natural world and community



- Second, the quality of the environment and the experiences provided - **optimal**
- Multiple and varied opportunities for play that supports and fosters the holistic development of the child



# Why Relationships?

- The theme of relationships permeates the literature on spirituality.
- Rofrano (2010) states that:
  - the spiritual life of a child emerges in relationship with a caring adult
  - that caring for a young child's spiritual growth is an integral part of early childhood pedagogy
- It is about the quality of the relationships between teacher and child, amongst teachers, teachers and families and people and the environment.



# Positive Relationships

- 5:1
- The stronger your relationships are the happier you will be
- Social connection has powerful benefits
- Everyone needed a significant relationship with someone else
- A healthy sense of belonging encourages the creation of new brain cells and helps grow connections between cells
- Micromoments ( 8 seconds) of connection with an other makes you healthier



I argue it is in optimal outdoor settings with lots of regular contact with nature and the natural world that children will develop holistically.



- All living things have mauri (mana) and early childhood educators have a responsibility to nurture and model this care and respect
- The outdoors has many wonderful opportunities to foster care, appreciation and respect for Pāpatūānuku (Pere, 1991)





**The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we all belong - Thomas Berry**

- Empathy which arise from positive responsive relationships is required for a child to develop morally and spiritually, and empathy has cognitive, biological and neurological components



- If we are going to truly promote holistic development of the children then their spiritual well-being, or taha wairua cannot be overlooked or put into the too hard basket.
- Research by Bone ( 2005, 2008, 2009), Pedraza (2006) and Upton (2009) and others have all investigated spirituality within early childhood settings. Confirming that spiritual development is important therefore what is the early childhood teachers role in fostering this aspect of the child's holistic development.
- Spirituality is a necessary part of Māori culture and therefore our commitment to biculturalism has to be inclusive of taha wairua.



Nature offers a far greater variety of open-ended materials that children can engage with, transform, and have a relationship with





When with others this transformation requires:  
negotiation  
a meeting of minds  
the development of shared understanding or  
intersubjectivity  
which in turn facilitates children's deepening moral  
development.



# Spirituality

- Aspects of spirituality evident in young children's and adults behaviour include: joy, laughter, sense of purpose, spontaneous humour, awe and wonder
- Laughter, shrieking, joyfulness are aspects of delight that are characteristics of young children's play in the outdoors.
- It is outside that children feel a greater freedom to 'be' – to let their emotions and wonder in the world show through





**Children also learn that there is constancy in the natural world, like the sun rising and setting and the tide ebbing.**

**Experiences in natural outdoor environments produce positive physiological and psychological responses in humans**









- Relationship with the world begins by being able to see the sky and clouds, being able to touch a leaf and a flower, pat a rabbit, roll in long grass, drink from a fresh water stream or climb a hill.
- Watching the clouds, birds or a rainbow brings a sense of rising above the world and embraces the Maori concept of Noa – free from restriction (Pere, 1991; Greenfield, 2011).
- It is in the early years, those years which we have such an influence, that the dispositions towards the natural world are established



Eilish's PHOTO



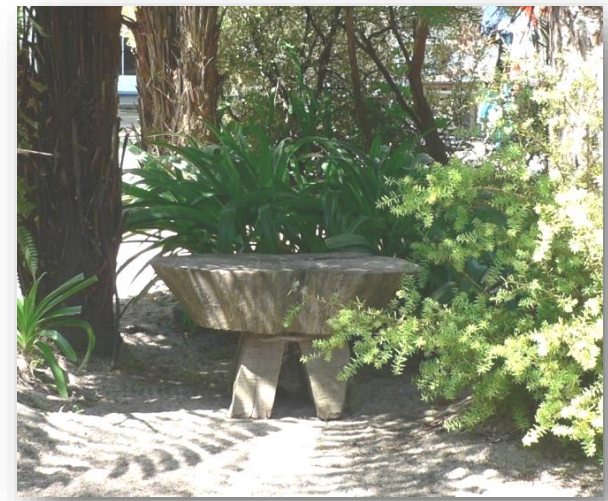
Joshua's Photo



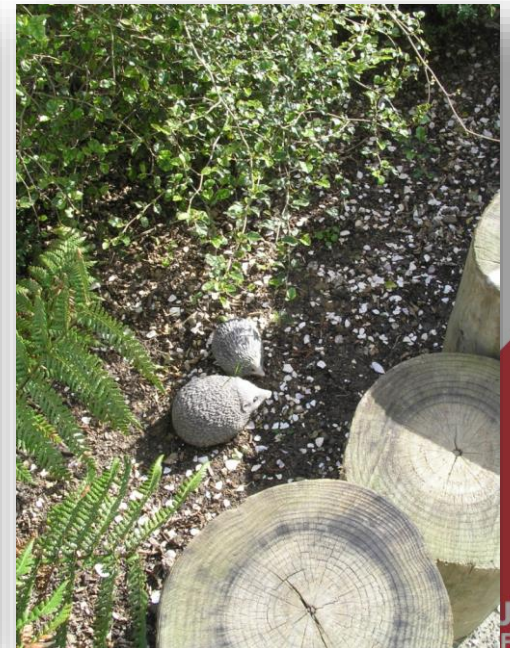
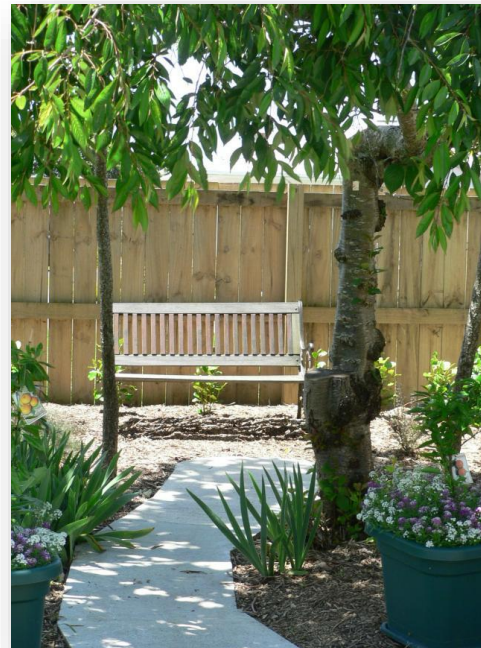
## Chantelle –Oct 20th



- Playing in and being out in the natural world also increases opportunity for learning about causes and consequences.
- As Tovey (2007) states nature takes its time, there are no instant fixes, and children can learn how to be patient



# Mystifying Spaces



# Sacred landscapes

- Delight
- Surprise
- Wonder
- Amazement
- Complexity



**Physical environment**

**Curriculum**

**Interactions**

**Ideas**

**Routines**





Having pets in the early childhood centre is a fantastic way to foster empathy and an ‘ethic of care’.



- Fostering an 'ethic of care', enabling children to care for and take responsibility for the natural world is a vital role of the early childhood teacher.
- Nature offers endless variety, surprises, puzzles and opportunities for exploration and marveling
- However this is only if the animals are afforded excellent care and are seen as part of the everyday curriculum
- I argue that all pets should have their own portfolio so that they are truly valued in a visible way



# Gardening teaches about growth and caring.



Taken by Joshua K



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- Myriad of opportunities to connect with nature.
- Every outdoor environment used by children must be a nature-filled joyful space.
  - It is about providing spaces and places that help children truly notice and appreciate the wonders of the natural world.
- This will only happen if teachers are aware that the environment has the power to promote relationships between all human and non human participants (Greenfield, 2011).



- Facing risks and challenges which are part of everyday life directly impact on moral and spiritual growth.
- If we try and eliminate risk we inhibit our own and children's lives and potential.





- Playing with abandon
  - Vital role in both the animal world and human world
- Learning about maintaining friendships, developing skills on communication, encoding and decoding signals (Tovey, 2007)
- Exploring the aspects of the natural and human world; weathering the storms of life
  - beginning to understand concepts of life and death, beauty and decay, gentleness and aggressiveness



- When you “provide an environment that encourages choice, inquiry, investigation, and independence, you help strengthen essential attitudes towards learning and reinforce children’s confidence” (Banning & Sullivan, 2011, p. 139).
- A resilient attitude, an ethic of care and ongoing curiosity about the world will help them throughout their life.
- We can truly promote the holistic development of our children if it help children listen to the ‘other’ - understanding the interconnectedness of all living systems – potential to be a powerful motivator for avoiding the ravages of war that displace human and disrupt nature (Nabhan 2003).
- Think about the connections between emotions and health.



When the outdoors is considered as a learning environment and exploring nature is part of the curriculum, children's experiences are enhanced and children develop into healthier, better rounded people, less prone to violent behaviour" (Gonzalez- Mena, 2011, p.60).



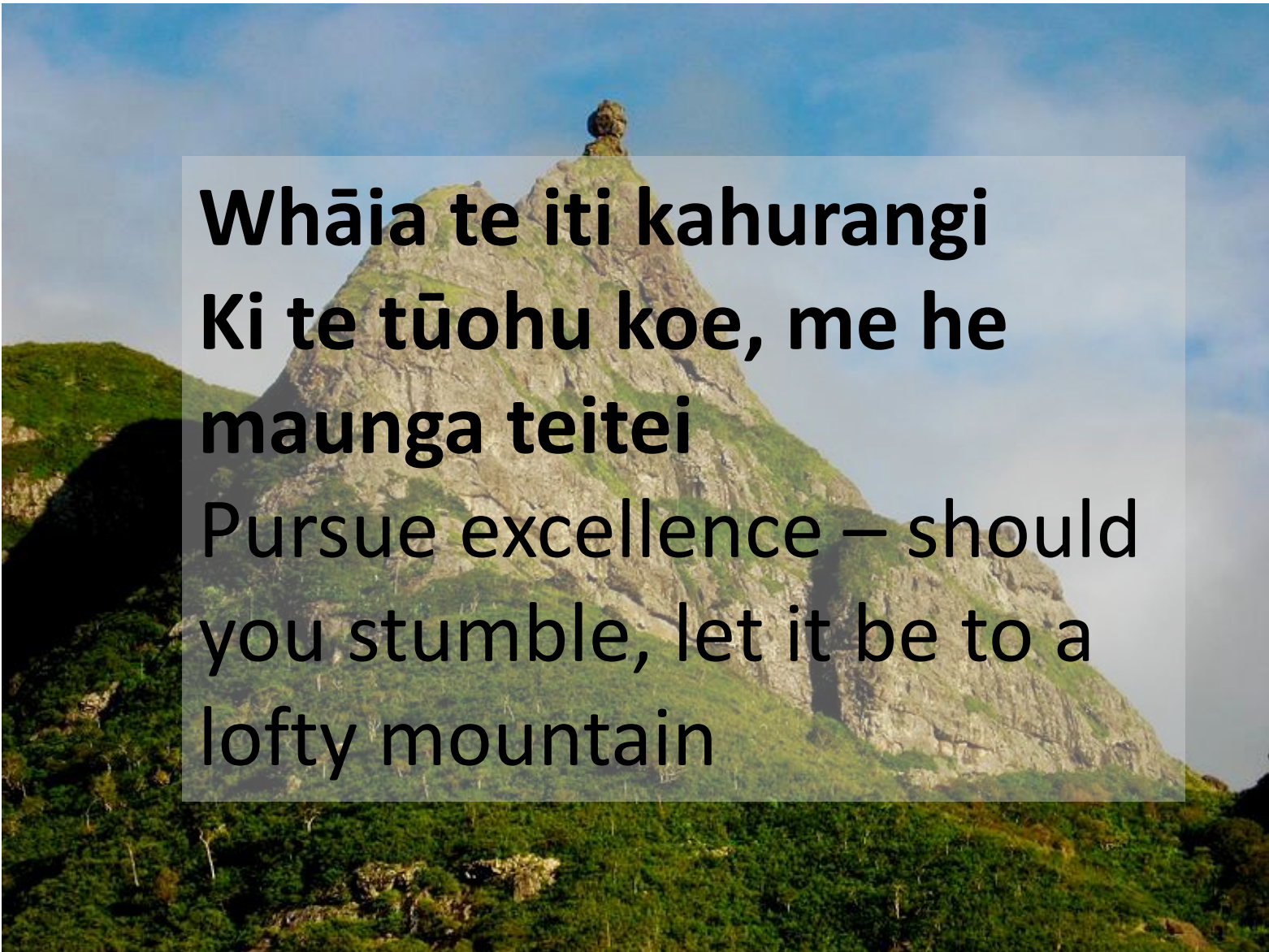
# Our responsibility

Increasingly important that early childhood settings provide opportunities for exciting, inspiring, challenging outdoor play and daily contact with natural world/nature.



- First, let's seek to have optimal **relationships** among teachers, parents, management and children and between people and nature
- Second, let's seek to have optimal outdoor **environment** and experiences





**Whāia te iti kahurangi  
Ki te tūohu koe, me he  
maunga teitei**  
Pursue excellence – should  
you stumble, let it be to a  
lofty mountain

