

Re-visioning School Camps

Case Study: Matamata Intermediate

School introduction and background

This case study centres around a Year 7 and 8 camp at Matamata Intermediate, which involved 35 students.

Previously, EOTC experiences at the school were decided by the teachers with no consultation with students. This was due to perceived convenience and venue availability. The original camp this case study was adapted from usually took place at the beginning of the year, and was entirely planned and lead by the teachers (there was little opportunity for student agency). Things such as sleeping arrangements and activity groups were organised by teachers. The budget for this original two night/three-day camp was approximately \$150 per student.

Exploring alternatives

After attending the 'Revisoning School Camps' professional development, we were given the challenge to find alternative ways of framing and facilitating our school camps. This meant thinking deeply and critically about why and how we were running them. This was a daunting but exciting prospect, as revisoning the camp presented new opportunities for staff and students.

After considering the aims and purpose of the Year 7 and 8 camp, we decided to focus on increasing opportunities for cultural and place responsiveness. This meant learning about and visiting places of significance in the local area. Focussing on these concepts also enabled students to have greater ownership of the camp, particularly in the planning and management of it. It was important the camp experience was equitable, affordable and meaningful.

The 're-visioned' camp

- Location: Raungaiti Marae (10km from school)
- Length: 2 days/1 night
- Budget: \$40 per student
- Links to learning: We were able to make MANY connections to learning! Here are just some of the ways camp supported our students in their on-going learning and development. As you can see, it was easy to make integrated/cross-curricular links.
 - Numeracy: Costings and budgeting. Students estimated travel distances and time frames when creating the camp itinerary.
 - Reading: Understanding camp checklists and reading the forms that needed to be completed. Students researched the Kaimai Air Crash and the story of Tarore. They also read and practised protocols of the marae, read recipes to create a camp menu and followed instructions on how to weave and play traditional string games.
 - Writing: Students filled out required forms such as the Safety Action Plan (SAP). They wrote permission slips and updated notices, as well as writing their pepepa and a reflection on their experience.
 - Listening: The class took part in a powhiri and listening to speakers, including the kaumatua tell us stories from around the area and at Tarores grave. At school they listened to feedback from the DP and Principal and made required adjustments to camp documents.
 - Speaking: Communicating with the pools and supermarket to make bookings and orders. Speaking with the DP and Principal when submitting proposal and getting forms checked off. Students said their pepeha to their peers, sang waiata and gave karakia. They also spoke to parents at the briefing meeting prior to departure.
 - Social Studies: Students researched information about the significance of our local area and what has happened before and making connections with the now.



Links to our school's core beliefs (values):

- Connections and Belonging: We made connections with students from the College (who came and spoke to us about their experience of planning their own EOTC experience) and Mill Cres Kindy (who joined us for the powhiri and we visited prior to the experience). Students planned additional visits to the Kindergarten and continuing to strengthen the bond made. We were welcomed onto Raungaiti Marae and are now Tangata Whenua. Here we planted a tree, which was a significant moment for the students as they now have a tangible connection they can revisit.
- Relevance: We went to a local marae which is home to several of our students (they sat with Tangata Whenua when we were welcomed) this made it important and special to us all. The experience was about who we are and where we come from. The students were involved in every decision and planning step.
- Innovation: There was a lot of 'outside the box' thinking and students had a lot of ownership of the experience. Problem solving was a common skill used. For example, coming up with a 'Plan B' for camp activities.

What happened on camp (as told by the students)

We started by meeting in class where the students ran the parent meeting. Each camp 'committee' had a student speak and explain what was happening. We had the parents sign the appropriate forms and handed out information packs. This was a really successful activity and positive experience for everyone.

We then headed out to Raungaiti Marae where we were joined by Mill Cres Kindy for a powhiri and shared kai. The powhiri was explained to us as well as some history of the marae. The story of Tarore was told and we proceeded to visit her grave and spend time listening to the kaumatua and being still. It was a beautiful experience. Later we returned to the marae where we settled in and food preparation started. The setting up the Wharekai and Wharenui was an important part of this experience and was led by a student who lives at the pā. Students also spent time together weaving flax.



The next day we woke and got sorted for the day. We had bought a Kowhai to plant on the grounds and there was a ceremony and karakia. It was really special for us to know that in the future we can come back and see the tree we planted – a legacy of sorts. It had been terrible weather and we thought it unsafe to walk to Wairere Falls as we had planned, however during camp planning we had developed a 'Plan B'. This involved a series of challenges that had to be completed before arriving at the pools in town. After further adaptations to the plan we went back to the memorial of the Kaimai Air Crash where we stood (again still) looking out on the Kaimai Ranges draped in cloud (as they were the day of the crash) and read out each of the victims' names. We stood for a while and then left to the Wairere Falls carpark to view the falls from afar and share some kai. Finally, we returned to school – exhausted but happy.

Reflections and suggestions

- To organise a stay on the marae is not a quick process (like it is when ringing and booking a traditional camp venue). We needed to be very clear what our kaupapa was and presented this to our kaumatua prior to beginning the detailed planning work. Building a connection with the marae was our starting point.
- The students brainstormed what it meant to be culturally and place responsive. We looked into all of our cultures, such as farming, townies, Pākehā, Māori & Filipino. We also brainstormed our region and the places we could go. However, most importantly we looked at our values and the purpose of this EOTC experience. The outcome of this is that we wanted to honour two students in our class and visit their home. We wanted to experience a powhiri and staying on a marae together. We wanted to learn the stories of the district and spend time still, thinking about the past and relating it to the now and the future.

“The students really got on board and were excited about planning their own experience. I remember Jack saying early on when we were organising the camp committees and looking at the checklist we needed to follow saying, “so you usually do this on your own?!”. It was good for the students to see how much goes on behind the scenes and the amount of planning that is needed in order for them to have an EOTC experience. Of course, we had students who did less than others and I will think about this in the future - how to engage those students. A highlight for me was the SAP committee, who have now added a new section to the form: ‘Cultural and Place Safety’. It was a wonderful experience watching the students take ownership and have genuine agency. The students also gave a presentation to the BOT about their experience, which was well received.

It was challenging for me to speak with such important and wise men and women. I had support from a colleague during the first meeting but was somewhat on my own after that. It was an amazing experience for me and making the connections with the Iwi empowered me and made me more confident as I was in regular contact. I realised that everything you say is important and listened to. Items were discussed at the marae during meetings held on a Sunday and questions brought back to me the following week. Details were important and I needed to have answers (not in a negative way, I just could not make things up). An example of this was the Kowhai we planted. I said it was going to be this and that is what the marae had planned for, they had together decided on the spot it would be planted. It was an important part of our koha and was treated as such. It was really humbling, and I learned so much from just that one interaction.” (Teacher reflection)

Top tips & suggestions

- Give it a go! The students really enjoyed and valued the experience and are already excited about planning their next experience.
- Start small and focus on local; there are so many rich experiences to be had in your community.
- We are looking forward to doing this again and adapting things based on teacher reflections and those of the students.
- Have job descriptions for the committees, so students know what is required before opting into one.
- Co-construct camp roles during the experience so students remain focused and carry out the tasks they are required to. Have the students plan a few more organised activities throughout the evening.
- Through this experience students developed a strong understanding of what agency means and how they are able to make decisions about how and what they learn. We now ensure there are times during the week/term where they are able to have some genuine input into our programme. It has a real positive impact on student learning and engagement.

