

13. LEARNING THROUGH ACTION – A LEOTC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME FOR SCHOOLS

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The purpose of this report is to provide information about the Learning Through Action programme and to report on progress of the programme to date.

WHAT IS LEARNING THROUGH ACTION?

'Learning through Action' is an LEOTC (Learning Experiences Outside The Classroom) programme run through the Parks and Waterways Unit and part-funded by the Ministry of Education. The programmes focus on delivering environmental education with links to other school curriculum such as social studies, science and technology. It provides an umbrella for a number of the Christchurch City Council environmental education programmes, which include waste, parks, natural areas and heritage themes. The programmes are available to primary, intermediate and secondary schools, within the Canterbury region.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?

Environmental education has evolved over the years into its current form, which is identified in a document from the Ministry of Education called the 'Guidelines for Environmental Education in New Zealand'. This is not a compulsory curriculum document. However it does link with many of the main curriculum areas eg science, social studies and technology. The key dimensions of the document encourage environmental education in, about and for the environment.

IN: The programmes focus on getting students and teachers out of the classroom and into the environment. Experiences outside the classroom provide an opportunity for students to gain a real appreciation of the environment. Such situations also require social and cooperative skills, group work, communication and problem-solving skills.

ABOUT: The programmes encourage knowledge of the environment from a holistic perspective. This means that students not only develop a knowledge and understanding of the environment, but awareness and sensitivity to the environment and related issues. New attitudes and values can form that reflect feelings of concern for the environment.

FOR: There is no point in having a lot of knowledge of the environment if we do not encourage people to do something with that knowledge. Participation and action are an important part of our programmes. We encourage children to take action by thinking of ways that they can look after the environment they are visiting in their everyday lives. Teachers are provided with a wide variety of ideas on how they could take action when they return to school. Children love planting at the parks and waterways they visit. When children can have an input into the environment it fosters a sense of responsibility and guardianship for that place.

Environmental education promotes informed concern that enables individuals and groups to take effective action on environmental issues.

BACKGROUND

The Learning Through Action Programme came about through the successful application to the Ministry of Education funding assistance (via the Learning Experiences Outside of the Classroom Grants). The first application was made in 1999. This funding provides a full time co-ordinator and a part time teacher who are supported by park rangers, education staff at the Recovered Materials Foundation and Provincial Council buildings. The communication team also provide the services of the Education and Promotion Coordinator and assistance with promotion of the programme. The funding and support from other council units has allowed for the development of the programme in a number of areas, such as:

- The creation of experiential, activity-based, action-focused, curriculum-linked, fun programmes.
- Developing programmes with strong Council messages while still meeting the needs of the teachers and students
- Researching programme effectiveness, reach and development opportunities.
- Development of a communication/promotion plan.

- Design and production of promotional material – that includes online information, programme planners and pre and post-teacher support material.
- Ongoing programme development – we have a total of 20 programmes to date.

HISTORICAL NATURE OF THE PROGRAMME

It is important to remember that historically Council staff members had been involved in the delivery of education to schools before this contract, most of which came about as a result of teacher/school requests and or staff enthusiasm. Those involved prior to the Ministry support should be acknowledged for their initiative. However, there was room for improvement in this area as a lot of what was going on was ad hoc and strictly walk and talk (with the exception of the Botanic Gardens) rather than activity-based programmes. Nor did it necessarily align to the Council's messages.

WHY HAVE AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN THE CCC?

There is a strong link in all of our programmes with the Council's strategic goals, policies and objectives. The messages given are not only being delivered to children, but to the parents, teachers and even the bus drivers who accompany them.

The programmes are also aligned to the key Council outcome of a Sustainable Christchurch

WHERE DO THE PROGRAMMES TAKE PLACE?

Learning Through Action delivers programmes at Council sites throughout the city. Refer to the Map in Appendix 1.

PROGRAMME MONITORING

The programme is monitored by the Ministry of Education through six monthly milestone reports and regular visits from Ministry staff to view the programmes.

Those involved in the programme have a strong commitment to evaluation and reflection. Thus, teachers and students are asked to complete evaluation forms, providing useful feedback and assurance. A professional development programme has also been established with the staff educators to provide opportunities for monitoring personal progress.

An advisory group has been set up consisting of teachers from a wide mix of curriculum and teaching backgrounds. The group is another external source of professional advice and support.

A huge factor in the ongoing success of the programme is the enthusiasm and professionalism that the staff educator team across the units bring to their roles. This is evident in the consistently high standard of satisfaction recorded by teachers via the evaluation forms

Table 1: Comments consistently received from teachers on Learning Through Action evaluation forms- January to June 2003

Comments	Frequency
Pitched at the right level/Appropriate for age group	16
Well prepared/Organised "Amazing Organisation"	14
Excellent Hands on activities	12
Good equipment and resources	11
Interesting/Great Activities	9
Knowledge of Staff Educators	6
Great Teachers/Leaders	5

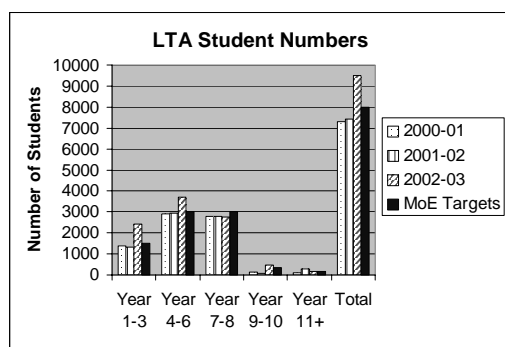
CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS

The LEOTC contract with the Ministry of Education has recently been renewed for a further three years. We also have a new environmental education co-ordinator on board, Andrea Taylor, who has come to us from Rangiora High School. She has five years teaching experience in technology, health and science, and is currently completing her Masters in environmental education. Andrea has begun working with other staff members involved with Learning Through Action to develop new programmes to attract schools and to add value to programmes that exist. These programmes will become part of our marketing plan for the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004. Time is also being spent with Rangers to offer personal professional training programmes which assist with teaching techniques and delivery, thus adding to the quality of their teaching.

The development process of the current programmes and courses visualised now and in the future, is co-operative rather than competitive. Co-ordination across Council units and with other organisations offering environmental education is undertaken so that programmes complement each other rather than copy or compete. This co-operative model will ultimately lead to better use of limited resources, better co-ordination and a greater appreciation for the role of environmental education. For example over Seaweed a joint programme was offered to schools in conjunction with the Canterbury Museum and Southern Encounter. We also offer a joint programme with the Art Gallery Education team called "Creative and Native". These programmes proved very successful with schools.

Figure 1 shows an overall increase in numbers of students attending the programmes over the last three years. We believe the steady increase in numbers is due to the regular promotion of programmes in schools and the development and refinement of LEOTC programmes, thus providing better quality for teachers and students.

FIGURE 1:



SUMMARY

Learning Through Action is a Ministry of Education funded programme providing an umbrella to co-ordinate environmental education experiences outside the class room on Council managed waste sites, heritage sites and parks. Environmental education provides a holistic overview of current issues, heritage and history, in that it encompasses values, attitudes, skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness and provides a platform for action towards a sustainable future. Learning Through Action is a developmental programme that is constantly seeking new ways of providing better education in the urban and natural environment for students.

Staff

Recommendation: That the information be received.

Chairman's

Recommendation: That the continued delivery of the Environmental Education programmes, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, be supported.