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Education Facilities  
for Young Children

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# Education Facilities for Young Children

*Educational buildings and grounds can provide a supportive and stimulating environment for the learning process as well as contribute to greater community needs. These issues were addressed at an international conference entitled “Making Space: Architecture and Design for Young Children”. Described here are the importance of outdoor space to learning in New Zealand, presented at the event, and a campus for pupils in Scotland (United Kingdom) visited by conference participants.*

*Access to outdoor space is seen as essential to New Zealand children’s development. An early childhood education consultant explains how the early childhood curriculum is linked to both indoor and outdoor spaces in line with socio-cultural learning theory.*

*A new campus in Scotland built to regroup several educational institutions for young children has been successful in uniting different faiths and integrating pupils with special needs.*

*Further information about the conference is available in PEB Exchange no. 57, February 2006.*

## **NEW ZEALAND: THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR SPACE**

By Anne Meade, Victoria University of Wellington College of Education, New Zealand

### **Early childhood curriculum**

Maori knowledge has influenced the early education pedagogical practices in New Zealand. *Te Whāriki*, the early years curriculum produced by the Ministry of Education in 1996, reflects Maori tradition: it is designed to be empowering, holistic, community-based, and fundamentally about reciprocal relationships with people, places and things.

The curriculum applies to infants and toddlers, as well as to pre-school-age children, and is bicultural and bilingual. It has two broad aims: to foster positive dispositions toward learning in children, and to facilitate children’s theorising about people, places and things. How children learn and positive dispositions toward learning are considered more important than what they learn.

Children are seen as active learners, and learning and teaching are seen to be reciprocal processes where often the teacher learns and the child teaches. The intended outcomes of these socio-cultural learning environments are for children “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make valued contributions to society” (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Space is seen as important for providing contexts for the processes of learning. Teachers think about and create areas for a rich array of experiences that encourage children to theorise about people, places and things, and areas for quiet reflection. Implementing the *Te Whāriki* curriculum has helped teachers become more conscious that learning is shaped by the combination of prior knowledge, the interactions between all people involved in educational activities and the cultural/institutional contexts. They understand that none of these aspects of learning exist in isolation from the others.

Sea theme tactile mural,  
Childspace Early Learning Centre



### Indoor and outdoor spaces

The indoor environments of New Zealand's early childhood centres are similar to centres in most Western countries. Where thought has been given to special design features, motifs from the sea or of native plants or birds can be seen in mosaics, stained glass windows, and etchings on windows. Maori patterns, unique to New Zealand or Polynesia, may be incorporated.

Like most family homes in New Zealand, the large majority of early childhood services has a garden. Children's access to the land and natural resources in early education facilities is protected by legislation:

"[There must be] adequate space for different types of indoor and outdoor play, including individual and group activities ..." [Education (Early Childhood Education) Regulations 1998, Part 3, 17 (2)].

"The outdoor space must be close enough to the indoor space as to allow for quick, easy, and safe access by children" [*Idem*, Part 3, 17 (3)].

These two requirements are interpreted together to mean that "indoor-outdoor flow" should be made possible for children for most of the day. This is the norm and has been for decades. Research conducted by Alison Stephenson in 1998<sup>1</sup> showed that the majority of children actively chose to be outdoors for more than half the time once the doors were open. This was true for all ages, but more so for boys and older children.

Stephenson found some notable differences between outdoor and indoor behaviour. Outdoors, children take more risks and call, "Look at me"; indoors, children request, "Look at what I've made". Outdoors, children and adults are constantly changing equipment and materials; indoors the layout is fairly permanent. Outdoors, freedom is prevalent; indoors there is more control of behaviour. Outdoors, teachers move in and out of interactions and give skill instructions; indoors, teachers can be ambivalent about joining in. Outdoors is seen as an open environment that has more potential for children's theorising.

### Theories and environments

When a developmental paradigm prevailed, New Zealand's early education settings were seen as bounded settings, and the teachers put out, then supervised, a rich array of equipment and materials.

1. Stephenson, Alison (1998), *Opening Up the Outdoors: A Reappraisal of Young Children's Outdoor Experiences*. An MEd. Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington.



Outdoor area filled with natural materials, Otaki Kindergarten

Now, with the adoption of socio-cultural learning theory, the environment is viewed and managed differently. There are more cultural symbols, particularly Maori ones, and greater use of natural materials. Space use is less bound by “areas” – or the fence – as excursions into the community increase. A rich array of equipment and materials is organised in order to help children interact with people, places and things so they become confident and competent explorers and communicators. The equipment put out by teachers reflects children’s current interests and possible lines of direction in their inquiries. Its arrangement is designed to foster social interaction. Outdoor spaces in particular change in response to children’s interests. Parents mingle with children. Engagement prevails.

### Early childhood education buildings in New Zealand

Ownership of early childhood services in New Zealand is mostly in the hands of the non-governmental organisation sector. Central government used to work with community-based services to plan and build centres. Services received grants for 80-100% of capital costs. Government drew back in the 1990s, when neo-liberal thinking prevailed. Some centres still received capital grants. Nevertheless, buildings increasingly became cheap with minimal indoor space, poor design and little attention to aesthetics. Recently a new initiative was introduced for design-and-build standardised plans and oversight. It has lifted the quality of indoors environments and shortened the timeframe for establishing new centres.

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## UNITED KINGDOM: A MULTI-FAITH, MULTI-NEEDS CAMPUS

By Fiona Ross, Glasgow City Council, United Kingdom

It has been two years since the doors of Keppoch Campus welcomed children from three different primary schools and a nursery. The new GBP 4.6 million campus is Glasgow's first purpose-built, multi-faith, nursery, primary and special educational needs school. One of the head teachers describes the campus as a "community of communities".

The opening of Keppoch Campus marked the culmination of a two-year project to educate Glasgow children with complex learning difficulties. And for the first time in Scotland, pupils with special educational needs can attend a mainstream school.

Since the beginning of term in October 2004, 365 children who previously attended the four separate facilities – St. Teresa's, Saracen and Broomlea Primary schools as well as Keppoch Nursery – have worked and played together under one roof.

Keppoch Campus regroups a number of shared facilities including the playground, canteen and general purpose room – the children have plenty of opportunity to get to know one another and mix across the schools.

As a result of the new site, the area now has a "one-stop shop" for parents right on their doorstep to complement Keppoch After-School Care and the Stepping Stones for Families Project.

The staff are pleased with the new development. Saracen Primary's head teacher, Evelyn Gibson, explains, "Every member of staff is embracing the benefits of the shared site. People are talking to each other, children are playing together, eating together, lining up together, sometimes learning together – it's great."

The head teacher of Broomlea at the time of the move to Keppoch Campus, Liz Rankin, said: "What we want to achieve at Keppoch is to learn to respect everyone by creating knowledge as well as understanding of individual needs. A lovely story that best sums up what we are all trying to achieve was when the children from Broomlea first moved into Keppoch. They were all together in the canteen and a pupil from one of the other schools walked up to a hearing impaired child and used Makaton sign language to say, 'You're my friend'".

An important and encouraging aspect of the Keppoch Campus is that its youngsters are happy with their new surroundings.

In preparation for the move to Keppoch, the children and staff had taken part in a series of events including a St. Andrew's Day celebration as a vital "getting to know you" activity.

The official opening of the campus in April 2005 was a prime example of how the separate institutions can work together and was an emotional event for staff, pupils and parents who had been involved since the conception of the idea. It confirmed that this ground breaking project has broken down barriers between Catholic and non-Catholic schools as well as pupils mixing with children with special needs.

Keppoch Campus was part of the first stage in Glasgow's strategy to modernise schools in the primary sector, and in February 2006 Glasgow City Council approved a financial package of more than GBP 128 million that will see 16 new schools built at various locations.

All 16 schools will provide nursery and primary education. Two of them, at Ruchill and East Govan, are to be multiplex campuses bringing together pre-primary denominational and non-denominational

establishments. The new school at Ruchill will mirror the success at Keppoch with an element for special needs education.

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The inauguration ceremony



A "Fruit Launch" organised at Kappoch Campus



Pupils at the inauguration