

CASE STUDY: MY FIRST BUSH KINDY

A CASE STUDY OF AN ECE CENTRE GOING OUT ON THEIR VERY FIRST NATURE EXCURSION TO A LOCAL PARK





WELCOME

Hello, My name is Celia Hogan, founder of Little Kiwis Nature Play and I am passionate about getting children outdoors and into nature. Children thrive when they experience nature and the connection it brings to their lives. We see the incredible benefits it brings to the children we care for when they can explore the outdoors in their own way, with us as their guide. Nature is our teacher, food provider and home.

I want to help you connect children to this. And I want to help you weave nature through everything you do with them both indoors and outdoors.

This case study is to help inspire and give you a starting point to setting up a nature excursion programme. In this case study of Opawa St Martins Kindergarten's first official session you will find out:

- Recommendations on where to start when setting up a bush kindy or nature session
- How planning was the key ingredient
- The session breakdown
- Outdoor management essentials
- Teacher learning and observations
- What the children said and the benefits of a facilitator

TOP TIP

Getting the systems in place beforehand ensures that teachers feel confident and know what to do in any given situation and that families are clear about what is required of them.

It could definitely be done without much planning, but I would recommend time being put into the planning stage to make it an enjoyable experience for all involved, rather than a stressful experience that ends in not doing it again!

GETTING READY



THE 6 P'S

Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

I had this drummed into me years ago and I have no doubt that the more prepared we are, the better the outcome. I am not talking about perfection here just wanting to avoid the 'Fly by the seat of our pants' scenario. Sometimes it can be daunting thinking about what has to happen to be able to set up a regular nature programme but with support and guidance it can happen really efficiently. Below are some of the main things that you should consider along with some recommendations and system development ideas to look at when starting a bush programme.

PAPERWORK

- Risk Analysis and Management including group management and ratios (covering transport and on-site hazards. Should be more detailed than the average excursion form)
- List of resources and equipment that are required for the sessions (who provides what, fundraising if required)
- Check lists for the session and timing of the morning/day
- Developing any procedures and organising the logistics
- Roles of teachers and parents during a session outlined
- Excursion form outlining the risk management, ratios and toileting
- Parent information, clothing list and permission forms



PLANNING AND PD

- Know your why - what are the benefits, what is the purpose and what will be gained
- Location choice and familiarisation - site risk assessment is a must for all teachers going on excursions
- Transport options (legal requirements and ratios need to be met if using vehicle transport)
- Engaging and involving families (ideally an information evening on what they need to know and how they can support the excursions)
- Team PD on nature play, risk management / group management in an outdoor setting and embedding an outdoor philosophy
- Any other up-skilling that is required for teachers (nature education skills - although this can come later)

SESSION BREAKDOWN



PRE DEPARTURE

- Bush Kindy Checklist completed by teacher and trolley checked
- Children gather in bush kindy clothes, with their food and spare clothes
- Parent helpers were briefed on their role for the day
- Children talk about safety and hazards when walking to the bush site

ON SITE

8.45am

Depart kindy (1.6km walk to bush site)

9.15am

Arrive and walk around to identify boundaries, do a hazard check and advise on toileting. Remind group of how to stay safe in the area

9.20am

Have some kai and water

9.30am

Exploration time!



HEADING BACK

10.45am

Quick kai and drink (for energy to walk back)

10.50am

Check area and walk back to kindy (1.6km walk back to kindy)

11.30am

Arrive back at Kindy

OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS



SAFETY WHILE WALKING

- We had a safety talk before we left the kindy and will have a safety talk each time
- One adult at the back and children can't go behind that adult. One adult at the front and children can't go in front of that adult
- Other adults spread through the group and managing children getting too close to the road
- At roads we all cross together
- Don't approach stray dogs. If the owner is there ask if the dog is child friendly

GROUP MANAGEMENT

- When we arrived we walked around the area with the children to identify hazards and discuss boundaries
- Children should be with or near another child at all times
- Adults to be in sight of children at all times (this could change as children and teachers become more familiar)
- We set up a base-camp where everything was kept for the session
- If the children heard a whistle then everyone needed to go straight back to base-camp



LOGISTIC LEARNING'S

- Allow 40 mins to get back to kindy as children were tired
- Having the trolley was useful as two children needed a turn in the trolley on the way back
- 10 children 1 teacher, 1 facilitator and 1 helper. For the first time it might have been helpful to have 2 helpers.
- Make sure the parent role is clear before leaving the centre. We laminated a sheet of information for the second session so they knew how to help during the session
- For the first session we were a lot more involved with their play. It would be beneficial to step back and observe so that we can manage the groups movements more effectively

TEACHER LEARNINGS AND OBSERVATIONS



PLANNING

Lots of this work was done as Celia (from Little Kiwis Nature Play) had produced an extremely detailed information pack, checklists and gear list. It was in part a matter of cutting and pasting into the excursion form and the parent information and permission form. It takes time to plan and get all information sent away, talking to parents, chasing up permission slips. I placed a great deal of trust in Celia, as she has experience leading children and their families in nature settings on a weekly basis. The area had been thoroughly scoped by Celia prior to the session taking place.

WHAT I LOVED

I enjoyed the walking in the rain and the opportunities this then offered the children. Watching the children entertain themselves on the mud slide with all the freedom and fun that excites and nourishes their mind, body and soul. I loved hearing children's imaginations being ignited and listening to their working theories develop as they made connections with the land. The children had appropriate clothing to fully explore the surroundings, it all went smoothly with no incidents.

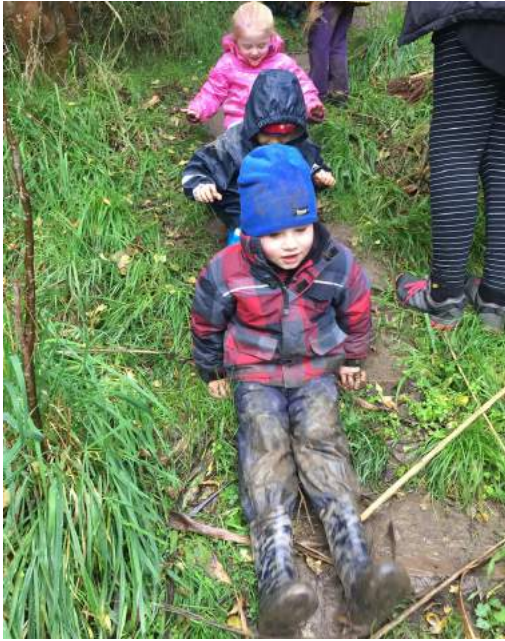


SESSION OBSERVATIONS

Children's leadership skills were coming to the forefront - using encouragement and creative strategies to keep their friends in good spirits. The ability to watch the different approaches some children used in an unfamiliar setting. Some children's confidence was dependent on how familiar they felt in a setting. I enjoyed the children working together, role-modelling climbing challenging steep banks and serving as inspiration to other children to give it a go.



TEACHER LEARNINGS AND OBSERVATIONS CONTINUED



BIGGEST CHALLENGE

- For me the biggest challenges were the travelling to and from the Farm Park. Firstly this was contributed to us not having all things in the checklist prepared prior, which I will learn from for the next time. Also not leaving enough time to travel back taking into account children are tired and less enthusiastic about the walk home. I felt I had to keep coaxing the children to keep a good pace because I had to be back before 11.30 so the teacher's lunches wouldn't be impacted.

BACK AT KINDY

- There was a calm approach in their play, a balance to their emotional and social states. This was really interesting to observe.
- It was interesting in talking to children afterwards who felt like they had done it once, so in their mind it was done. I would like to explore this more. I feel it could be because of the instant gratification world some children are exposed to and moving on to the next stimuli.



REFLECTIONS

- While there is room for improvement in organising in the morning upon leaving and departing more promptly, I feel the benefits to the children far outweigh any of the technical issues.
- I think more work with the role of parents would be beneficial and their knowledge of being at the lower level of intervention in regards to the children's play.
- I like that the principles of Bush Kindy align with our EnviroSchool ethos and highlight the role of Papatuanuku in children's education.

WHAT THE CHILDREN SAID



"I went on the swing and I went on a mudslide. And then I had adventures, going down paths and then I was back where I were. My mum went with me and she slipped on the hill. Guess what in the weekend I climbed up the mudslide without stopping!"

"Some Indians live in there, in there in those trees. In all of the trees. One of them must be going to find humans and to make fire."

"My favourite thing was going down the mud slide. I 'feeled' responsible when I got to pull and push the cart. Going on the swing, it was really fun. I want to go again because it is so much fun going on the mud slide."

"The best I loved, it was going on the mud. I did it with Jack and Leo and Ethan. It was so fun and I was so happy. I had a drink of water because I was so thirsty."



"I did lots of stuff like finding sticks, crossing over the bridges. I went on the swing, climbed up a hill. We found a stick house. I played with Hanna. I didn't want to go mud sliding because I didn't want to get muddy."

"I liked the swing, I liked walking there too. I liked going up in the bush. I have been up there before with only my Dad."



WHAT WAS HELPFUL: TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

- The preparations of risk management had been done prior to attending by Celia (what potential risks eg: stream after lots of rainfall).
- Celia Liaised with Park Ranger and conferring of potential dangers during the seasons to the children
- Having an ally in a risk averse culture
- The ability to articulate the role of parents in the process and allowing children to recognise, assess and deal with risk
- It was great having someone who is experienced and is up to date and current with the Bush Kindergarten and nature movement for young children

I sincerely hope you have enjoyed reading through this case study and have gained some valuable insight into what a first session looks like. If you are wanting to implement a nature-based programme but you are still feeling stuck with how to start, check out our How To Guide which is available in our [shop on our website](#).

Celia

PS Have you checked out our blogs? There's some great information to support you on your nature play journey.

www.littlekiwisnatureplay.com