

A review of New Zealand's EOTC policy and curriculum: Changing meanings about safety

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Abstract

New Zealand has guidelines for education outside the classroom (EOTC) that support schools to take advantage of the community and environment beyond the school gates and thereby bring the national curriculum alive. While teaching and learning are the main focus for EOTC, safety is another paramount principle of EOTC programmes. Safety has not always been the priority that it is now, as notions of safety have changed over time. Taking a position that meaning-making occurs in social contexts, the article presents some etymological shifts in meanings about safety, and reviews how the changes contributed to primary school EOTC policy and curriculum, considering historical and current trends in thinking about safety.

Introduction

In New Zealand, the space outside the formal classroom has provided for aspects of learning or training in children's education. The history of teaching and learning outdoors covers a wide range of activities, such as participation in military drill (from the 1877 Education Act), activities to enhance physical development, and the encouragement of recreation and outdoor learning. Dominant social movements and interest group activity as well as the aims and purposes of the state have shaped the different forms of activities outside the classroom. Official education policy has been and remains responsive to changing political and social circumstances. War, epidemics, increased leisure time, and developing understandings of conservation affect educational policy (see, for example, Rata & Sullivan, 2009).

Prevailing approaches to children's safety are evident, too, in social and education policy. Tracing New Zealand policy initiatives for children's safety illustrates gradual state intervention in family life, children's health, physical and emotional safety, and school safety. Current safety policy in education indicates the extent of recognition of the need to protect, and keep the child safe. In education policy, "learning safely" in the outdoors is a paramount focus of EOTC curriculum guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The term "education outside the classroom" (EOTC), introduced in 1980 by the then New Zealand Director-General of Education (Stothart, 1993), acknowledged the space outside the classroom as an important learning site. Currently EOTC is a generic term that describes "curriculum-based learning and teaching that extends the four walls of the classroom" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4.) and can include museum trips, zoo trips, or outdoor education camps. While school outdoor education is likely to be activity focused and include outdoor pursuits and adventure learning, Cosgriff (2008) considers that local interpretations play a part in shaping what constitutes the field of outdoor education.

Student safety in the outdoor classroom has always been of concern for teachers, yet when New Zealand underwent market liberalisation, and government involvement was reduced in health and education (Duncan, 2002), responsibility for student safety moved to principals and those involved in schools' governance. Accordingly, at that time, safety became a major policy focus in New Zealand schools (Lynch, 2006, p. 173). The movement was evidenced by the greater focus on safety in outdoor education documents. This article illustrates the evolution of meanings about safety and the effect of social and technological developments. It clarifies how safety has become an important component for primary teachers educating children in the outdoors and how shifting ideas about safety continue to influence and be an important consideration for teachers interested in EOTC.

To illuminate policy and curriculum changes, an etymological account of the derivatives of safety is produced, with concurrent analysis of a selection of texts related to the outdoor classroom. The basic etymological investigation uses references from the Oxford English Dictionary's (2013)

online version, and outdoor education material consisting of school health texts, safety legislation, government education records, and curriculum material. This investigation tracks changing meanings attached to “safety” in education. The study is presented within three time frames that relate to significant shifts in policy development in New Zealand from 1877 onwards.

Method

Analysis of policy documents draws on linguistic discourse analysis with interest in the specifics of actual texts and textual features (Potter & Wetherall, 2004). How meanings are concentrated in texts presents a textual analysis but attention also focuses on how the language is produced by social forces (Codd, 1990). “(D)iscourse refers not only to the meaning of language, but also to the real effects of language-use, to the materiality of language. A discourse is a domain of language-use and therefore a domain of lived experience” (Codd, 1990, p. 138). The words *save*, *safe* and *safety*, as they appear in various New Zealand education curriculum expressions, derive from somewhere, gain different meanings and power, and as such affect teacher sensitivities and practice. This article analyses the linkages, especially in relation to safety and educating in the outdoors.

A variety of documents can be included in analysis of policy texts and the study was not restricted to texts designated “official curriculum”. Included were school health texts, health and safety legislation, government education records, and school syllabuses. Sources for archival material included personal curriculum archives, New Zealand Department of Education and Ministry of Education publications, other government publications, and material obtained from Archives New Zealand. Ozga (2000, p. 95) asserts that policy texts “tell a story about what is possible or desirable to achieve through education policy”. In this case, the texts also tell a story about social conditions and changing focuses relating to children’s safety. My social constructionist approach maintains that language affects reality, and notions of “safety” are constituted through language and social and cultural interactions and practice, which shift with time and context.

To open up this area with reference to safety in the outdoor classroom, I follow Hamilton, Adolphs, and Nerlich's (2007) method of etymological examination of the meaning of "risk" to trace changing meanings about "safety" across historical contexts. Further, I suggest a pattern to the changes that illustrate current understandings of safety in outside-the-classroom practices.

Meanings of safety: Save, safe, safety

The meanings of safety are products of cultural and historical ways of understanding the world. Ideas about safety in EOTC in New Zealand in the 21st century reflect some broader historical and etymological shifts in understandings of safety. The Oxford English Dictionary Online defines "safety" as "the state of being safe", exempt from hurt or injury and free from danger ("Safety", OED Online, n.d.). For the New Zealand workplace, safety is defined in relation to risk, and in relation to a person, safe means "not exposed to any hazards ... and free from hazards" (Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, s 2).

But what it means to be safe hinges on how "safety" is given meaning. For example, early etymological references to safety from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* ("Safety", n.d.), point to safety of the physical body from danger and damage. Avoidance of physical damage is now part of current understandings, but safety has developed its own significance that extends beyond that of a physical body. The etymological account is used to trace evolutions in meaning and to demonstrate expansion in the importance of safety in modern times. This is not a definitive etymology, but rather an attempt to locate some patterns in the way meanings have evolved. Different shades of meaning have been acquired since the earliest recorded usages.

A simple model is used to express an evolutionary pattern to changes in the meaning of safety, and to follow those changes in policy and curriculum. Using different forms and senses of the word, and a quotation history of usages, the development of the word over time can be formulated simply thus: save > safe > safety. This linkage is illustrative of a changing focus regarding individual safety. Beginning with references to "save from harm", later references note protection against harm, and at a later date,

references note complex safety systems to protect against all danger. Safety became an entity, able to be measured and assessed. The pattern suggests a move from the “*present sense*” focus of “save me” to a future focus of “being safe” as protection against harm and finally to “safety” as a condition free from possible harm.

From the etymology

In this section, I use etymological references to chart briefly the changes in the general and historical senses of the words “save” and “safety”, and then, in a later section, I show how changes in outdoor education material illustrate those changing meanings. The etymological references are also from the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Chronologies present written examples of the words with years [in brackets] of first recorded usage.

To begin with “save”, the earliest references, from the 13th century, refer to saving life and rescuing from peril. While references in English texts also refer to “god” to save (the individual or the individual’s life), delivery from peril or hurt is the earliest recorded usage from the etymology. Prayers or exhortations to save people, their bodies, from hurt or misfortune, or save their lives from shipwreck are examples from this period. “To save” a life from danger evolved into saving or protecting a thing; for example, saving property, a city, the state, or money. To save retains the earliest recorded meanings of life and property but over time has expanded into situations such as saving one’s honour or reputation and, in recent times, computer data (“Save”, *OED Online*, n.d.).

Early examples of “safety” (“Safety”, *OED Online*, n.d.) have the sense of “save me” from danger. Saving from danger developed at a later time into “make safe” or to safeguard, or to referring to places of safety, before turning towards the state of safety. As indicated, the earliest references to safety from the Middle Ages show that others are called upon to save individuals from danger, as for “to save”. Safety was at the behest of others, such as a lord or leader. Later, there is mention that safety can be controlled, for example by keeping together in large groups as safety against thieves:

[1617] Merchants, passengers and drivers of loaded Camels, keeping together for safety against theeves [thieves].

Patterns emerge showing that by the 17th century there were signs that safety had evolved to mean itself as a thing. For example:

[1539] ... makest me dwell in safetye [*make me dwell in safety*].

[1697] All dangers past, at length the lovely Bride In safety goes

[1771] ... not to hazard the Safety of the Community.

Changes in meanings correspond to developments towards future proofing, to guarantee greater security and protection. Possessions were safeguarded from damage or loss (from the 14th century), people made safe (15th century) and the city made safe (16th century). This future proofing idea would be significant in the development of later safety policy in industrialised Britain.

The movement from a present-time focus to future-focused meanings indicates changing world views. During the Renaissance period of the 16th and 17th centuries, the western world became understood through knowledge, compared with previous understandings based on fatalism or belief. The world was made safer through the development of techniques to protect life and property for safe-keeping, in keeping with a future-forward focus.

Technologies that emerged from the intellectual developments of the 18th century illustrated increasing knowledge and control of the world. The invention of machinery during the industrial era introduced a largely rural population to factory work, and for people unused to the speed of heavy machinery, injuries were common and serious (Shellard, 1970). Safety of workers became a concern from the beginning of the 19th century and increasing references to safety contrivances are found in British references to new technologies. References include, for example, Davy's safety lamp for coal miners [1816], safety bolts for guns [1881] and safety bicycles [1877]. Such contrivances, protections, and safety guards were products of scientific thinking to protect against danger and aimed toward safety. Increasingly "safety" was used to denote such contrivances constructed with a view to "safety in use".

A further development in ways of thinking about safety occurred towards the end of the 19th century when safety could be managed, not

just by contrivances, but also by systems or human practices. By 1891, safety factors determined the strength of building materials. In the 20th century, industrial safety committees worked to codify safe practices in engineering [1939] and working with machinery [1945]. Safety measures were instituted for the petroleum industry [1934], safety codes for workers exposed to ionising radiation [1961] and safety regulations for the atomic energy industry [1956]. Safety standards were devised [1960], with calculations of safety margins [1967]. Slogans such as “safety first” to avoid workplace accidents originated in the American railway industry [1873] and were taken up in Britain in the early 20th century for safety campaigns in factories [1914] and schools [1924]. Safety became a designated practice. A safety consciousness [1961] appeared too when safety became part of individuals’ ways of thinking of themselves: a safe worker, safe teacher, safe adult around children.

To summarise, the etymological patterns show a trend toward a predictable and safe future. Attempts to protect against harm led to development of contraptions, systems, and standards, measurable and calculable, and in modern times, internalised safe practices and safety consciousness. Protections against harm have contributed to a certainty of safety that permeates all aspects of western life (Furedi, 1997). The sequence suggested earlier—to save > being safe > safety—highlights conceptual developments in the meanings of safety. I use this sequence below to trace changes in policy and curricula related to education outside the classroom. First, however, I briefly consider health and safety legislation and then *accidents*, both which are part of British and New Zealand educational safety policy and practice.

Changing patterns in safety legislation

Safety movements of the industrial era highlight changing ideas about safety, as indicated above. Social movements concerned with poor working conditions contributed to technological developments specifically to protect workers from accidents and injury. “Safety” appeared to describe such contraptions. A more systemic approach to safety emerged as the state accepted greater responsibility for worker protection. Legislation

enacted at the beginning of the 19th century in Britain, and subsequently in New Zealand, was to reduce harm to workers.

In Britain, the earliest piece of occupational health and safety policy, the 1802 Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, addressed long hours of work. New Zealand's earliest concern was for the health of factory women working with inadequate ventilation, as indicated in the 1873 Employment of Females Act (Campbell, 1992). Introduction of legislation addressing safety concerns often followed accidents or fatalities. For example, mines were notoriously dangerous places of work. In New Zealand, two pieces of legislation followed mine fatalities, the 1874 Regulation of Mines Act and Inspection of Machinery Act. New Zealand's early legislative responses to mine safety were indicative of efforts to address workers' safety. Since the late 19th century, safety legislation, originally to regulate dangerous worksites, developed to cover other places of work. At the present time, all workplaces, including schools, are covered by health and safety legislation.

Understanding accidents

Ways of viewing accidents illustrate changing views about safety. In earlier times accidents were considered the result of bad luck or misfortune. But, with increasing understanding of accident prevention, with safety contrivances and systems, accidents became understood as preventable misfortunes (Furedi, 2002). The idea that accidents were preventable gained purchase during the 20th century as more complex systems were developed to protect against workplace hazards. By the end of the 20th century, the idea of "accident" as a random occurrence was reconsidered by the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ). The BMJ's editor took a position that accidents were not random but preventable occurrences. Subsequently, in 2001 the BMJ proposed banning the word "accident" because almost all injuries were preventable (Furedi, 2001). That "most accidents are preventable" became a widely accepted view.

Changes to understanding accidents coincide with changes in understanding safety, which would influence policy development for safety in EOTC in New Zealand. The current policy environment tends to accept the surety of safety, yet safety cannot always be guaranteed. For Furedi (2002), banning the word "accident" was indicative of a

safety conscious society. In the following section, I show how changes in understandings of safety are reflected in written material related to the outdoor classroom, where, in recent times, a safety consciousness has emerged.

Understanding of safety in New Zealand education policy documents

It is possible to deconstruct historical documentation and detect ways in which safety-related realities in particular times were constructed, influenced, and maintained. While contemporary understandings of safety are relatively recent in New Zealand's education policy documents, texts of various eras have contributed to the evolution of contemporary understandings. This section examines a range of those contributions, accessed from Department of Education or Ministry of Education publications, and includes archival material and curriculum statements. The pattern save > safe > safety derived from the broader etymological analysis is used to analyse changes.

To save and saving life, 1877–1950s (post war)

Early publications which noted “the outdoors” in education related to physical education (Stothart, 1974), swimming (Moran, 1999), health education (Bedgood, 1950), or school camping (Lynch, 2006). For safety, texts refer to saving life, and instruction in road safety was instigated in the 1920s as motorised vehicle traffic increased, with associated risks to life from accidents. Policy documents at the beginning of the 20th century focused on saving lives to reduce harm from accidents.

Swimming was a school outdoor activity and area of instruction that was promoted as requiring a safety response in the 20th century. “To save” and “saving life” are portrayed particularly well in policy documents related to swimming. New Zealand is surrounded by 15,000 kilometres of coastline, with hundreds of rivers and lakes. Recorded New Zealand drowning rates have been high since European settlement times. Drowning was such a “commonplace cause of death of pioneers ... that it was referred to as the ‘New Zealand death’” (Pascoe, 1971, as cited in

Moran, 1999, p. 38). High rates of drownings have continued; between 1945 and 1950, a period of only six years, 636 drownings were recorded (Moran, 1999, p. 142). More than 100 deaths per year by drowning in that period can explain why “to save” and “saving life” was significant.

Swimming and life-saving instruction were promoted in schools from the beginning of the 20th century (Moran, 1999) but it was not until the 1940s that learner swimming pools were constructed in most primary schools (Moran, 2001). A high rate of drownings motivated the Department of Education, in 1949, to establish a “Prevent Drowning” committee to promote water-safety messages (Moran, 1999). The 1953 primary school syllabus supported swimming-skill development. The focus of these initiatives was on “saving lives”. As one parliamentarian noted in 1955, the more that people are being taught to swim, the better “protection we have against drowning accidents” (Moran, 1999, p. 152). Swimming, life-saving, and first-aid featured in 1950s’ health and physical education texts. A specific aim was to teach swimming strokes together with “life-saving instruction” (Bedggood, 1950, p. 12).

Practice for saving lives was required by school committees through regular fire and earthquake drills (Auckland Education Board, c. 1960, p. 26). A protective sense of safety was adopted with the use of the term “*safeguard*”. Children are not saved from danger, they are protected from harm, safeguarded by “being safe”.

Being safe, 1960s–1980s

From the 1960s to the 1980s, understandings of safety within policy documents evolved to encompass ideas relating to saving lives, accident prevention, and being safe in the outdoors. The outdoors was seen as both a location for valuable learning and a source of safety risks that had to be managed. Policy about “being safe” is represented, for example, by camping. The *School Camp Handbook* (South Auckland Education Board, 1960) includes a chapter on health and hygiene, referring to fresh air, sunlight, and care of latrines. As in previous years, children needed to swim sufficiently well to stay afloat, and had to know mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The handbook considered few, if any, Auckland beaches to be safe. Precautionary measures were considered desirable. Danger

avoidance through accident prevention is evident. Dangers were of a physical nature, and included drowning and the danger of disease.

The documents from the 1960s indicate that “being safe” became a key idea. School committee material from the Department of Education and education boards had limited mention of accident prevention—usually a sentence or two. When accidents were referred to in greater detail, it was with reference to indemnification of education boards and teachers or principals. Teaching material included some safety elements, more often hygiene and care of knives (when camping). A focus was on the value of outdoor learning, rather than outdoor safety. Changes occurred in the 1970s when safety material became available for schools.

Increasing mention of “safety” occurred in Department of Education files in the 1970s: the New Zealand Road Safety Council (1970), Physical Education National Water Safety Committee (1971), and the Safety Resource Sets (1977). Primary school syllabuses had included water and electrical safety education for a number of years, and teacher refresher courses at teacher training colleges included similar safety education.

Safety education was part of the health syllabus (Department of Education, 1975). Promotion of safety practices was the key focus, aligned with a hazard prevention approach. Hazard awareness deemed appropriate to student learning related to electricity, firearms, fire, or roads.

Accident prevention was part of school health and physical education teaching, with drowning prevention swimming programmes, and school fire and earthquake drills. But accident prevention and safety became more of a focus after New Zealand’s universal no-fault accident compensation scheme was introduced in 1972 (implemented in 1974). The Department of Education issued two circulars in 1978: Outdoor Education – Safety and Supervision (Department of Education, 1978a), and Outdoor Education – Legal Aspects (Department of Education, 1978b). The legal aspects circular clarified the effect of the Accident Compensation Act 1972 on outdoor education, and noted that failure to provide a duty of care to pupils could be grounds for action based on negligence. Liability could arise if negligence was established, and in extreme cases prosecutions could occur under the Crimes Act 1961.

The safety and supervision circular, while using the term “safety”, retained both the “being safe” understanding of the term and the “saving life” aspect, as competent teachers needed knowledge of first-aid and accident procedures. Both circulars were to remain key references for safety and outdoor education until they were replaced in 1985. One important feature of the circulars was the appearance of the concept and practice of leadership; wise experienced leaders could assess dangers and safety precautions.

During the 1970s, the number of school camps had increased throughout New Zealand (Lynch, 2006). Independent organisations such as the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council, wildlife organisations, and the New Zealand Forest Service, as well as regional teacher associations, supported outdoor recreation and teacher training courses. Teachers saw outdoor education as a useful way to engage further with children and their learning, and the outdoor classroom was considered to enrich the lives of children (Phillips, 1983). However, a series of accidents that occurred between 1978 and 1984 brought safety into a sharper policy focus.

During this period there were 10 child fatalities on school outdoor programmes (activities were mountaineering, flying-fox, caving, falls, fishing, and tramping) that brought the issue of safety to the foreground (Lynch, 2006, pp. 158, 175). Community and teacher responses to the fatalities, however, were not to restrict outdoor activities, but to request better resourcing. The fatalities prompted the Department of Education to update the circulars mentioned above with two new circulars, *Legal Aspects* and *Safety and Supervision* (Department of Education, 1985a, 1985b). The fatalities had been considered preventable and “avoidable tragedies” (Lynch, 2006, p. 175)—the current meaning within policy and practice.

Calls for teacher certification for outdoor education began after the fatalities. The deaths gave impetus to initiatives by outdoor education experts, New Zealand’s Department of Education personnel, and Mountain Safety representatives for a Management Training and Assessment scheme (Lynch, 2006). Teacher training in risk management was established. Industry standards were set in 1987. The professionalisation of outdoor education/pursuits leaders began, and with it the risk management of outdoor education. Until this time, the Department of Education’s

approach, supportive of education outside the classroom, had not focused on managing risk as a strategy to avoid danger or accident.

The updated circulars (Department of Education, 1985a, 1985b) and a national policy statement on EOTC (Department of Education, 1986) affirmed the value of the outdoors for educative purposes. Safety emerged as an important consideration, though not with the priority it has at the current time. While the first consideration was for educational advantage, safety had to be considered (along with teacher experience, time factors, and financial costs). Supervision needed to be of the “highest standard” with “all necessary safety procedures” taken (Department of Education, 1986, p. 4).

There is a conflict in the Department of Education's 1985 *Safety and Supervision* circular. On the one hand, accidents are preventable, but on the other they occur because of a trick of nature. The capriciousness of accidents, defying reason and control, was identified as one cause, although human reason (or lack of) was identified as another, caused perhaps by inadequate organisation, faulty procedures, or neglect (p. 1). Greater levels of preparation, planning and organisation were necessary to prevent accidents. The 1985 *Safety and Supervision* circular also introduced the idea of minimisation of potential dangers for safe outdoor education. Minimising harm, avoiding serious mishap, and avoiding fatalities showed “safety” as an important entity.

Safety, 1990s–present day

From the 1990s, safety became an essential concern in EOTC. In 1992, the Health and Safety in Employment Act (HSEA) moved responsibility from government management to employers, which passed responsibility for safety management in school environments to school management, including activities in the outdoors. Individual school boards took responsibility for their school's safety (and health) processes. In 1992, the newly established Ministry of Education published *Anywhere, Everywhere: EOTC Curriculum Guidelines for Schools* (Ministry of Education, 1992). These guidelines reiterated the value of EOTC, with a reminder that all teachers should be familiar with safety and risk-management procedures. The Outdoor Safety Institute¹ (1994) was

proactive in releasing *Safety Management: Guidelines for Schools*. In reminding schools of their responsibilities under the HSEA, the guidelines attempted to cover all possibilities of safety provision. The following year, the Ministry of Education (1995) produced a set of guidelines for EOTC, including a longer set of appendices than those of the Outdoor Safety Institute. The Ministry's guidelines emphasised that responsibility for health and safety was now a mandated obligation, rather than the voluntary consideration of the past. A further development was increased individual responsibility for compliance to safety standards. This move brought the idea of safety to the forefront of individual primary teacher's outdoors practices, where the idea of "professionalism" had emerged.

Sound professional practice requirements for EOTC included a greater responsibility to maintain accident and incident registers, for example, or to undertake risk analysis for outdoor activities. Teachers underwent staff appraisals to check their capability to take children outdoors. Safety and risk management for teachers included safety management checklists, emergency preparedness, and risk analysis management systems. The Ministry of Education's 1995 *Guidelines for Good Practice* was an indicator of changing societal expectations regarding children's safety when participating in outdoor activities. Many possibilities for harm were considered in providing for safe outdoor experiences. Safety planning and good practice had become a matter of risk management and of policy compliance.

After the 2002 amendment to the HSEA, the Ministry of Education (2003) produced an updated EOTC safety guide. This was prompted because of a number of drowning fatalities between 2000 and 2001. The centrality of safety and risk management in EOTC was cemented with the 2003 guide, where safety became an important feature of practice. New Zealand's health and safety legislative requirements and EOTC good practice standards were combined in a comprehensive manner with a detailed "toolkit" of sample forms for safety management systems.

The most recent EOTC guidelines, *Bringing the Curriculum Alive* (Ministry of Education, 2009), are aligned with the New Zealand curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and relevant safety legislation, and reiterate both the importance of safety and learning in EOTC. There

is a set of comprehensive EOTC resources and reports online at Te Kete Ipurangi (<http://health/tki.org.nz/>), and professional learning support from Education Outdoors New Zealand (<http://www.conz.org.nz>), with information on good practice, case studies, and incident reviews. Teachers have access to a wide array of material to assist with teaching and learning in the context of “thorough risk management planning and sound operational procedures” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 48).² Safety has become an essential component of EOTC policy, and the pedagogical practices supportive of curriculum-based learning and student outcomes.

The future of safety—a more holistic view

The analysis has shown the emergence and then centrality of safety in EOTC policy and curriculum-based learning. Safety is realised through risk management, analysis, safety action plans, and incident review systems. Safety precautions are necessary; as the Ministry of Education (2009, p. 4) notes there is a “degree of risk inherent in many EOTC activities”. Learning safely is the focus for EOTC. The safety guidelines provide information on best safe practice, codes of practice, and acceptable standards of safety. Teachers have access to risk management incident reviews that highlight aspects of good (and bad) practice (Haddock, 2009). For teachers, safety has become a managerial responsibility that shapes what is and can be done with classes and students in the outdoors. A recent study of primary teachers’ beliefs and understandings of children’s safety indicated that safety is a central theme in teachers’ outdoor practice, and is a dominant repertoire drawn upon when talking about children in the outdoor classroom (Sullivan, 2013).

Changes have occurred in outdoor curricula that both support and challenge the focus on safety. While primary teachers previously used “safe” risk taking to move students out of their comfort zone, (see Sullivan, 2013), Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) argue that employing risk to develop personal growth does not address differing perceptions of risk, nor emotional risks. They argue that risk taking ignores participants’ emotional safety, and may contribute to anxiety. Moving students from their comfort zone in EOTC experiences does not necessarily help their learning. While there is less acceptance of risk in outdoor learning programmes, Jones

(2011) considers it is important for EOTC teachers to not over-react to risk-averse parents or to media reports of accidents or fatalities. This is difficult, as the focus on safety has increased teacher anxiety (Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan, Carpenter, & Jones, 2011), and reduced nonspecialist primary teacher participation in EOTC programmes (Sullivan, 2013). Yet, the current complex safety policies for outdoor curriculum and teacher practice signal a move toward safe outdoor learning which conceptualises safety in a more holistic fashion. As Davis-Berman and Berman (2002) consider, growth and change occur in situations of safety, security, and comfort, rather than in manufactured risk-taking environments. Brown and Fraser (2009) suggest that other pedagogic possibilities are more appropriate for contemporary outdoor learning than traditional approaches that highlight risk taking. The supposed benefits of pedagogies of risk or anxiety cannot be assumed as effective to aid learning in all instances. Brown and Fraser also suggest that learning might be better if the educational opportunities were addressed for the particular outdoor settings, for more contextualised learning. The outdoors is the site where learning occurs in a reciprocal manner. Brown (2012) suggests that learners feel safe when they are encouraged and enabled, and this is likely to occur when students feel comfortable in places to which they have meaningful connections.

Contemporary approaches offer a more nuanced awareness of the learning process, the social and cultural contexts of learners, their experience, and the significance of place (Wattchow & Brown 2011). For Brown and Fraser (2009), an educational opportunities approach includes activities of group enterprise in communities to experience a revisiting of activities, the social nature of learning, and new decision making. This is possible when safety is an integral part of practice, in addition to policy and curriculum. Planning for safety (even though safety cannot be totally guaranteed) offers an understanding of the “safe” learning environment that allows a focus on positive student learning and engagement.

Summary

The shift in safety focus in school EOTC has been traced from a brief etymology of safety which was then linked to relevant policy and

curriculum documents. Educating children outside the classroom is reflective of sociopolitical conditions, with particular attention, at different times, towards children's safety and educational needs. EOTC safety policy documents from 1877 on show the emergence of a safety focus aligned with educational aims.

Early educational material related to safety in the outdoor classroom was concerned with saving life, such as, for example, when swimming. Later material, in line with the accident prevention approaches of the time, focused on being safe. When the 1950s Department of Education material paid attention to being safe, and when accidents were mentioned, it was with reference to liability and culpability. However, serious injury to children or fatalities did not undergo the intense scrutiny and public debate that occurs at this present time. Community concerns about children's safety are playing a part in focusing attention on their care and protection. As Periam (2002, p. 1) noted when alerting teachers to a shared responsibility for EOTC safety, children's fatalities "have an enormous impact on all of us, not least the education profession".

In 2014, fatalities and accidents have turned attention to improving safety in EOTC, much as mining accidents did in the late 19th century. For example, student drownings during school outdoor activities have prompted calls to refocus on teaching swimming in schools. Drowning remains a serious concern in New Zealand—since 1998, there have been 19 deaths during EOTC activities (New Zealand Education Gazette, 2012). There have also been pedagogical drivers towards a more holistic view of safety and learning outside the classroom and growing attention to learning that does not require or emphasise physical and emotional risk taking. There have been a number of drivers toward more complex safety and risk management systems in EOTC. However, community concerns continue to focus attention on safety. Changes in workplace health and safety are an example of a legislative or policy response to community concerns about safety (e.g., the Health and Safety in Employment (Adventure Activities) Regulations 2011). Complex risk-management systems and procedures, developed for workplaces, are now employed to organise school outdoor activities. The current EOTC guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2009) refer to health and safety codes of practice,

accepted sources of best practice, and relevant standards, and employ a systems approach to safety management.

Safety policies, accidents, and societal and community values towards children reinforce teachers' safe practice. By tracing developments in the meaning of safety using historical contexts, this article has illustrated the manner in which the idea of safety became embedded in EOTC policy and curriculum, and suggests that understandings of safety and EOTC continue to evolve. This offers insight into how safe practice has become an important consideration for primary school teachers in their work outside the classroom when providing outdoor learning experiences, and how a more holistic view may guide current and future practice for EOTC.

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Notes

- 1 The Outdoor Safety Institute, established by Dr Grant Davidson, provides safety management services for outdoor adventure programmes.
- 2 The Health and Safety in Employment (Adventure Activities) Regulations 2011 give guidance for providers of adventure activities. The regulations do not apply to schools—the commercial operators must be safety audited and registered.

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