

Aroha 2019

Nature, our classroom.

I became more inspired to offer a nature-based learning program through several readings I have been doing this year. In previous years I co-led excursions such as Challenge Zone, which gave me more confidence that a concept like Aroha could work.

Bill Plotkin's 'Nature and the Human Soul' places tremendous emphasis on nature experiences as spaces to 'encounter' soul, to reconnect with our true 'self'. Plotkin's analysis of modernity condemns trends such as consumerism as promoting egotistical traits, harmful toward human



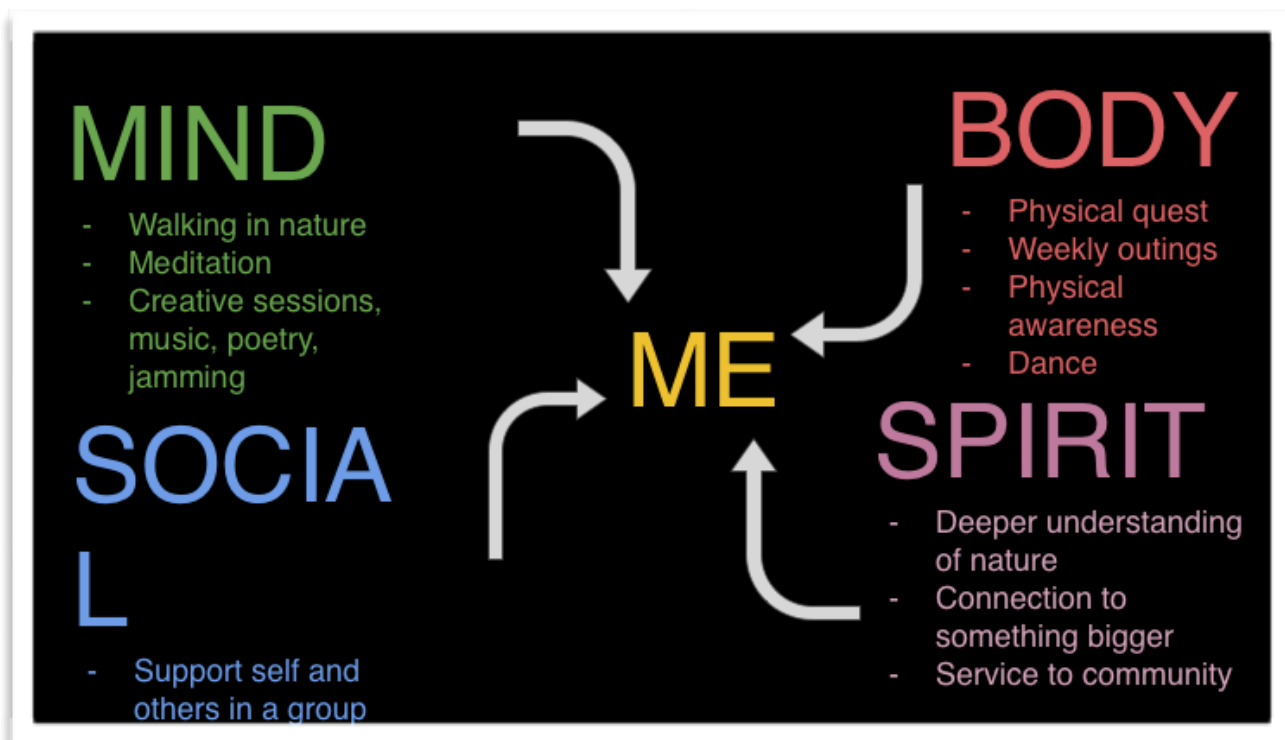
development, and degrading toward eco-systems. He has used, and continues to use, nature as a means to assist individuals to return to soul, to transcend ego-ism, and to seek a more just and sustainable world as a consequence.

I have no formal training in Plotkin's theories, but I felt the gist or 'Geist' could be applied from Ao Tawhiti's new site here in town. The proximity of the bus exchange allows access to the wagon wheel of Christchurch's natural places. Initially I imagined we would set reasonably auspicious lengths, thinking students would like to challenge themselves. In terms of curriculum I saw potential in health/well-being as well as the social science curriculum. I leaned on hauora as a model. Plotkin's work on the impact of nature, reflects the 'spirit' of much of what I read into indigenous knowledge such as Wanganui Iwi saying: 'Ko au te awa, te awa ko au'.

I have also been reading and connecting with educators who are part of the Uderschole or Outdoor school movement in Scandinavia. The movement seeks to embed whole days out and about in cities such as Copenhagen, utilising urban and green spaces to provide learning experiences in nature. I have been liaising with Matt P Stevenson, a New Zealander who is researching in Denmark, discussing recent findings in neurological science that supports the conclusions that around 40 minutes of time outside provides numerous benefit for health and well-being.

How it works

Aroha is an opt-in course. We head out for walks of between 1-4 hours, usually on Wednesdays. These walks take us to beaches, hills, along rivers and into forests. The walks have turned our inauspiciously low-key. We go at a pace that the slower members sustain without over-exertion.



How Student Voice Shapes Aroha

Student voice has considerable impact. Students indicate walks they would like to do. They tell me they want to go tramping; learn bushcraft, some want to create their own forest, help develop bird corridors. For some others it is a chance to let off steam, get fit, and spend time outdoors with friends. Not all who have taken Aroha have enjoyed it, but of the core group, they love it.



Next Steps

I want to support the student voices, trying to get some bushcraft and survival skills for some, for others the goal of planting their own forest, the bird corridors through the city.

Matt sends me links to the blog he writes for. I have attached some of the links below.

<https://www.childrenandnature.org/2018/09/26/balancing->

[screen-time-with-green-time-attention-retention-theory-helps-explain-why-nature-play-helps-learning/](#)

[UDESКОLE IN SCANDINAVIA: Teaching and Learning in](#)

[Natural Places | Children & Nature Network](#)