Small Waste Workshop

at Mairangi Bay School

"A small workshop for free creation in the school, open to all who wish to use it."

"Craft as shared or collaborative practice,
the ability to invent, adapt, and improvise with limited means, and as
humanly-scaled, environmentally attuned technology." [1]

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small workshop http://small-workshop.info

[1] Allan Smith (Elam School of Fine Arts) on the work of collaborator Xin Cheng.

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Overview

Small Waste Workshop at Mairangi Bay School attempts to widen the margin of play in the school grounds and fosters a unique environment where students can learn about waste, its possibilities, and the challenges involved in collecting and working with it.

Waste resources collected in the school are repurposed for free creation in a 'tinkering' or 'loose parts' zone located in the bush embankment behind the senior playground.

Students:

- Learn about the sources and characteristics of organic and inorganic waste created in their school;
- Develop their abilities to invent, adapt, and improvise with limited means;
- Explore how they can use frugal materials to meet the practical needs of our daily lives, and to transform spaces and the functions of things.
- Develop analysis, reflection, and self-led research skills.
- Develop another kind of pride in their school, based on their own modifications.

The project works on the five core Enviroschool objectives, with an emphasis on Empowered Students and Learning for Sustainability.

Children are already always repurposing their everyday environments for play, pleasure and function. This project is nothing new to them, except that it 'makes it OK' to do it with the stuff of their school.

Practical Details

- Waste resources will be collected by the students in the course of their normal school activities, as well as by Chris, Siobhan, and other interested parties.
- Chris will securely store the resources in a mobile junk stall/workstation on school grounds. At lunchtimes he will open a 'junk shop'[2] at an agreed spot, preferably near the senior playground (Figure 1(orange)).
- Interested students can freely take materials and create constructions within an agreed site ('*loose parts zone*'), preferably on the embankment behind the playground (Figure 1(blue)). Students may, if they are so inspired, bring waste resources from home to use in their constructions.
- After lunch the constructions-in-progress will be left in place. After each session constructions will not be dismantled but Chris will 'tend' the site, retrieving discarded/unused materials, re-collating objects into small 'toolkits', removing any 'stray' debris, and possibly adding physical 'hints' to stimulate ambient student learning.
- Students will not be required to participate, nor will they be given any direction on what they should create. The Small Waste Workshop simply provides an opportunity and resource for creative work, initiated by adults passionate about the subject.
- Chris will also create and run an online component/document, moving to a student-led/managed system with those that show particular interest in the project.

[2] A mobile station with waste resources, a selection of simple hand tools, and guides to simple craft techniques (e.g. knot tying).

Figure 1: *Proposed Small Waste Workshop Zone*

Proposed Timeframe

Pilot program for Term Four (2015), to continue in 2016 (increasingly student managed) if project positively received.

Enviroschool Objectives

The following is a brief summary of how the project relates to the core Enviroschool objectives.

- **Empowered Students**
  - Students experiment with the scavenged materials without recourse to plans or worksheets. In the process of experimentation they learn that the qualities of things are a function of experience - that waste is a matter of perspective, not fact.
  - By using, breaking and fixing their handmade school students learn to take care of and responsibility for their environment. They gain confidence that they do not have to be passive consumers of their learning environments.
  - Students develop another kind of pride in their school, based on their own modifications. They begin to view their everyday environment as a pet, or a treasured friend.
  - As the project progresses, interested students begin to lead and manage the mobile workstation and the online components of the project.
- **Sustainable Communit**ies
  - Self-led creation fosters intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm. Students share their experiences with family and friends, opening up opportunities for debate and students-becoming-teachers ('ako').
  - Working in shared space (together or independently) with limited resources is an experience in negotiation (bodies, materials, cultural norms, etc). Students experiment with dealing with respect and care, while also respecting their outdoor work environment.
  - Working with waste activities a kind of 'design thinking' that imagines alternative economic models.
- **Learning for Sustainability**
  - Students gain even more intimate knowledge of the various waste that is produced in their school. Their senses become increasingly attuned to the potentials of all objects by

collecting, analysing, and selecting waste objects to use in building/repurposing useful objects for their classroom.
    - Working closely with organic and inorganic materials in an outdoor environment fosters richer connections with non-human aspects of our world.
    - Students develop awareness of the concepts of 'limits' and 'working within means' and invent their own strategies for dealing with the challenges of living in an age of material constraints.
- **Maori Perspectives**
    - Useful recycling of discards is an ancient stratagem of all lifeforms (e.g. bones evolve from the shedding, by cells, of poisonous calcium). Maori ways of life in New Zealand developed around the concept of creating with resources at hand, rather than importing from faraway lands. In working with resources derived from their immediate surrounds students gain experience in living according to this kind of moral compass.
    - Interaction with plantlife in the school fosters interest in working with organic materials and encourages independent research into traditional techniques such as making rope (which also a ritual of peacemaking), mats, nets, and shelters from harakeke or other fibres.
- **Respect for Diversity of People and Cultures**
    - Non-goal-oriented making engages subconscious modes of interacting with materials. Through making together, students learn more about how others view everyday objects, and come into contact with a diverse range of culturally unique craft techniques (e.g. flower buds used to make pop-guns in NZ are used to make rabbit dolls in Japan).
    - Interaction with the diverse individuals and groups in the school/neighbourhood when collecting resources expands students' local social experience and knowledge of how people around them live. It illustrates that the things around us are made up of histories. The things that students build will be infused with stories particular to their creation as opposed to things which are ergonomic and functional yet anonymous and sterile.

Interaction with Enviroschool Classroom Activities

The Small Waste Workshop opens up directions that can be built on in the Enviroschool classroom as part of the Enviroschools whole school approach. Initial ideas include:

- Themed modules on (for example) reuse, ecology, and human/non-human play and habitats.
- Documentation, reflection, and analysis of constructions.
- Presentations/Tours with junior buddy classes to explain waste aspects of the school.
- Outings to local homes, businesses, and public spaces to analyse/consider waste and develop reuse/minimisation techniques.

Knowledge Sharing, Development, and Awareness

The project will be carefully documented in (primarily) photo and text form. Photography will be carried out in line with the casual agreement for the previous 'Volcano Walk' document (HERE)

- The project and various constructions will be documented and compiled into an open and growing resource to which others can refer and contribute to. In this way the project can have a multiplier effect, acting as a platform for sharing, debate, inspiration, and collaboration between schools and other interested parties in New Zealand and overseas.
- Chris will create and run the online component, moving to a student-led/managed system in collaboration with those that show particular interest in the project.
- Articles may be published in relevant online and print media.

Visual Examples / Successful Precedents

Small Waste Workshop is a continuation of collaborative research and project work in New Zealand, Japan, Cambodia and the EU. Examples include the one-month outdoor workshop *on enjoying our gardens and other wild places* for headland Sculpture on the Gulf (2015); the day-long workshop *home remedies for*

frugal and friendly living for Ecoday (2015); *making-do* (an ongoing public project supported by Artspace NZ) (2014); the interactive installation *A Stimulus Terrain! for Widening the Margin of Play* for the 26th International Biennial of Graphic Design Brno, Czech Republic (2014), and concept designs for a public-built park in Manukau, South Auckland. Other activities include a programme of artist talks, workshops, public engagement and collaborative publication. Please see the following pages for a selection of visual examples from our projects and those of friends and collaborators.

An outdoor creative workshop...

...open to all who wish to use it

Intense concentration on the task at hand

Hand made outdoor after school club[3]

Hand made after school care facility on the street

Improvised playground in a vacant lot[4]

[3] This, and following image a project by Jun Kitazawa Office, Tokyo
[4] Project by Public Workshop, Philadelphia.

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Conglomerates of organic and inorganic resources

Sturdy constructions in native materials

Patterns of organic-inorganic interaction

Collaborative concentration

Improvised large scale rest/thrill-seeking apparatus

Junk work.play-table

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Handmade organic headwear

Crockery experiments with on-site clay

Closeness to tools that work at hand speed

Junkbox lucky-dip

Pattern experimentation with local plants

Improvised box-tunnel during school trip[5]

[5] By Aya Yamashita, Auckland.

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Small-scale civil engineering

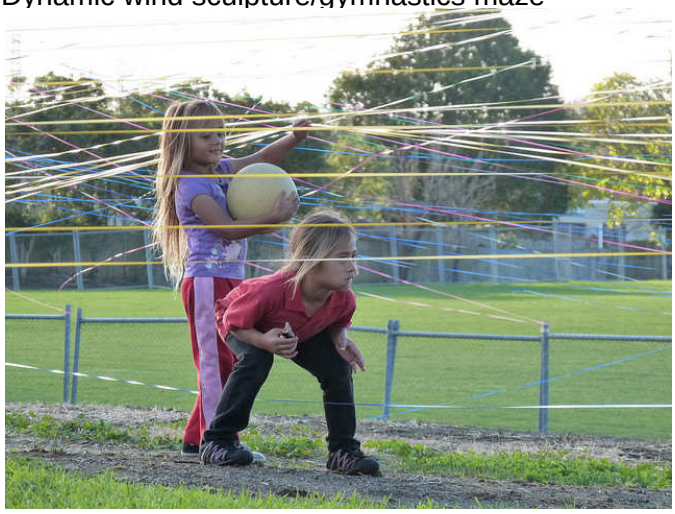
Quiet time in trees

Skill-sharing and weight-lending

Low-flying acrobatics using bicycle inner tubes

Weird improvised backpack

Dynamic wind sculpture/gymnastics maze[6]



[6] By Robin Rawstorne, Auckland.

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"A castle, made of cartons, rocks, and old branches is worth a thousand perfectly detailed, exactly finished castles, made in a factory."[7]

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[7] Christopher Alexander