

## **Iain Taylor – ICP Convention Abstract**

### **Beyond the Four Walls:**

A school's Rural unique brand of innovative, whēnua-based learning: MI Papakāinga, Manurewa Intermediate Schools Rural Campus

In the face of the 'Anthropocene,' Aotearoa is uniquely positioned to redefine the 'brand' of modern education by moving beyond the four walls of the classroom. This session explores MI Papakāinga, Manurewa Intermediate's 6.5-acre rural campus. While the Reggio Emilia philosophy identifies the environment as the "third teacher," the MI Papakāinga model positions the whēnua as the first teacher - a perspective aligning with a Te Ao Māori worldview.

Once a 'blank grass canvas,' this site was transformed into a sophisticated learning landscape thanks to a philanthropic 'angel' who funded our vision for a radical educational shift. This support enabled us to design a space in which the environment dictates the pedagogy. Students engage with the land through diverse Education for Sustainability and Education Outside the Classroom experiences, from the calculated bravery of the high ropes course to the river's energy. Whether building rafts, engineering bridges, kayaking or swimming, these activities foster a sense of freedom and grit that a desk-bound curriculum cannot replicate. This shift toward whēnua-based learning creates a 'noticeable sparkle' in engagement, where values such as Kaitiakitanga (guardianship), Whanaungatanga (relationships), and Hauora (well-being) are lived rather than just taught. Through bushcraft activities, gardening through the Maramataka (moon-cycle), and creating healthy soil, students engage in a living heritage.

Central to this innovation is a curriculum that infuses Māori culture into every experience. For example, the development of Māra Hūpara (traditional Māori playgrounds) illustrates this 'environment-first' approach. These natural installations are used to teach resilience, safe risk-taking, and pūrakau (ancestral stories), demonstrating how indigenous wisdom and physical environment can combine to facilitate deep, individualised learning.

This session demonstrates how moving education into the wild enables students to become visionary, environmentally literate leaders. Attendees will gain insights into a transformative framework for 21st-century education, demonstrating that when we reconnect with the land, we reconnect with the heart of learning.