

# The Great Escape

Your kids aren't in the slammer, they are in childcare; and your CV says 'teacher' and not 'warden'. There isn't a law saying infants and children must spend all day locked up inside, and unfortunately there isn't law that guarantees them one hour a day outside either. Prisoners are guaranteed that much at least. The law requires that infants and children spend their time with you in unlocked cells; that is, they must be able to access the exercise yard "without being dependent on adults, at all times". (Ministry of Education Regulations - Premises and Facilities: 13)

## Spring Yourself First

The locks that keep children in captivity are not made of steel. They are locks of habits-of-thought and unexplored perceptions in the minds of the adults. In my own mind I hear the lock "It is too cold" when contemplating a swim. Yet when I was a child, I was in the creek before Mum had finished parking the car. It is not the water temperature that has changed, my mind has locked. The only way to pick the mind-lock is to examine the thought combinations discarding those that do not lead to freedom. It's easy: you just notice what the little stool pigeon in your head has to say when it comes to going outside, you catch your automatic-habits-of-thinking and see whether they will cause you to rob your children of their childhood as an Earthling, and their chance to become ecoliterate.



## Listening in - examining the mind-field

Read each of the following work scenarios and jot your first response - your automatic-habit-of-thinking:

- The children want to go outside and it is blowing a gale:
- The children want to go outside and it is drizzling quite heavily:
- The children want to go outside and it is 3 degrees:

Like any successful break-out artist, you will have to do forensics on each of those combinations with care. Here are four questions to apply to each phrase you jotted:

1. Is this true? Can I categorically say I know this is true?
2. What are my actual in-the-moment-perceptions of the actual experience, as distinct from my *thoughts* about it?
3. How free would I be if I didn't have this thought?
4. How would the children benefit?

When I am working with teachers and tell them, “We are going outside now, bare foot”, their thinking escapes out loud: “It’s too cold.” “It’s wet.” “But it’s going to rain.” “We’ll catch our death of cold.” “I hate bare feet.” When those same teachers do come outside and dance on the damp grass in bare feet we all stop and take note of the temperature of the earth through the soles of our feet: “It’s warm! I thought it would be freezing.” “It’s soft, I thought it would be prickly...”. And when we come back inside, “My feet are all tingly. My feet are warm. That was a real surprise for me”. This is called living - living in the present. People go to India to find a guru to learn how to do this - which is an expensive exercise when every child in your centre does this all the time. Let the child be your teacher on this one. The children in your centre haven’t got that little voice in their head locking them into habits yet. That installation isn’t completed until the child is seven.

### **Spring the others - Go for the Mass Breakout**

You might have discovered that your door is unlocked, that you yourself are free in the present, but you are captive to the one with the keys: the manager, the others on the floor, the parents: “We are not allowed to. The owner won’t let us.” “We need to keep the door shut.” “We haven’t got enough people to have one on outside duty.”

Jot any habits-of-thought you hear and submit them to the same forensic scrutiny with the same four questions:

1. Is this true?
2. Can I categorically say I know this is true?
3. What are my actual in-the-moment-perceptions of the actual experience, as distinct from my *thoughts* about it.

Institutional blocks to ecoliteracy don’t actually kill children, but they do act as a life sentence that kills any hope of children being able to live in their place and learn to read its seasons and moods. Institutional blocks to the outdoors kill Belonging - Mana Whenua. The Maori term in our curriculum says it all: mana = god given personal power; whenua = land, placenta. It is the land that nourishes infants, children and us in exactly the same manner as the placenta nourishes the baby-yet-to-be-born.

### **Preplanning**

Any good successful breakout depends on meticulous planning, with every single person knowing what their role is in the whole operation. People have to know what to expect or the whole operation will be bungled before you even tie the sheets together. Begin with your philosophy, you do need to be on the same page. Your philosophy holds your operation together, so sort it out as a united team. That might involve a lot of discussion because the place of the Earth in children’s early childhood education pre-service education has barely been mentioned.

Having a rich and inspiring Earth philosophy gives you the edge when people come to enrol at your place. You set it out for parents at the first hearing so that they know what they are agreeing to right at the beginning.

#### **At our centre -**

- **We believe that every child has a need, and the right, to learn and play in nature.**
- **We treat ecoliteracy as seriously as we do people-illiteracy and the cultural literacies.**
- **Accordingly, every child has access to the outdoors when they choose.**
- **All children have access to the outdoors in all weathers, in all seasons.**
- **All children have clothing appropriate for all weathers. (Many centres provide this.)**
- **Being outside in appropriate clothing does not cause illness, or even exacerbate illness. Viruses cause illness - and viruses are most readily spread indoors where doors and windows are shut and ventilation is poor.**

That way there is no room for misunderstanding, and no room to let habits of thinking keep children under ‘protective’ house arrest. Pick the locks and open the doors - our future depends on it.