

Whitebait Connection at Kaikohe East Primary School. Term 2, 2012

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During term 2, all the students of Kaikohe East School (about 230 children, plus 12 teachers and 8 teacher aides) engaged in the Whitebait Connection fresh water investigation programme.

The school is fortunate in having large grounds, with a small stream on its northern boundary that joins the Wairoro Stream less than a kilometre away, on the Northland College grounds. Many of the students name the Wairoro as their awa when reciting their whakapapa so feel a close connection to the stream. 2 sites within the College farm were selected for the field trips, one being a slow-moving farm drain and the other an accessible part of the main stream.



Room 9 Children get their feet wet!

Four class groups (some being 2 classes combined) made the field trips – the remaining two class groups having to postpone until term 3 because the weather turned particularly wet. All were able to observe the differences in aquatic life between the 2 sites and were excited at finding a range of invertebrates in the main stream, plus a few common bullies.



Studies in class included placing the critters in a 'food web' and observing the interconnectedness of different species. There was also some lively discussion about the life cycles of both the fish and the invertebrates – the children being amazed that many of the 'bugs' in the water later moved out of the aquatic stage and grew wings.

Rooms 5 and 6 (years 1 -3) did some great follow-up presentations:



Initial plans to access the tributary on the KES boundary were abandoned as access is across a boggy wetland area with blackberry patches which would have been difficult to negotiate. However, the near edge of the wetland area became the focus for the 'action' carried out by the whole school, with a tree-planting day marking the start of a larger wetland restoration that will evolve with the school's involvement.



Tree planting on the edge of the school wetland area: most of the KES kids are not new to planting, many being active in the school food garden.

Principal Chicky Rudkin and staff are keen to have an ongoing relationship with Whitebait Connection. Some of the teachers identified themselves as farmers and noted that the programme had made them more aware of the effects of land use on water way health. The children love being 'active learners' and the teachers recognise the potential for integrating the wetland restoration on the school grounds into the curriculum in the long term.