LEOTC Provider Trends, Issues, and Themes

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TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction 2

Confidentiality 2

2. Trends across the sector 3

Performance against targets 3

January – June 2009 3

July – December 2009 4

Booking and counting systems 4

Negotiation of learning intentions and pre/post-visit materials 5

Websites 6

Web 2.0 7

Class visits 7

Logistics & scene setting 7

Teacher and parent roles 7

Linking and connecting 8

“Big ideas” 8

Hands-on activities 9

Evaluation 9

Local and national networks 10

Other challenges and questions 11

Areas providers suggested for research/feedback. 11

3. Summary 13

Appendix A: Research for educators 14

1. Introduction

This overview report highlights key themes and trends for LEOTC providers in 2009, identified by NZCER in its role as the Ministry of Education's LEOTC contract monitor.

The overview has been put together using information we have received from providers through:

- Two rounds of six-monthly provider milestone reporting (reporting on the year ending June 30th 2009, and the six months ending December 2009, respectively).
- Site visits to 44 providers between July 2009 and February 2010.

The purpose of this overview is to give providers a sense of the overall trends, themes, and range of practices and approaches we have observed across LEOTC providers since taking up the monitoring role in July 2009. Below, we describe the range of practices and approaches providers take with regards to the day-to-day matters of running an LEOTC contract (for example, booking and planning systems, class visit procedures, post-visit evaluations, etc). We highlight examples of practices or approaches which stood out as particularly effective, innovative, or efficient; discuss common issues that arose across providers; and provide suggestions and questions for providers to consider.

Confidentiality

As LEOTC providers' milestone reports and site visit reports are only seen by the providers themselves, the LEOTC contract monitors (the NZCER team), and the Ministry of Education, it is important to state that this overview synthesis does not refer to any providers by name. We have also tried to avoid descriptive details which could identify individual providers. However, as a provider you may recognise some issues, situations, or practices as relevant to your organisation.

2. Trends across the sector

Performance against targets

January – June 2009

Some providers experienced a downturn in bookings in the period January-June 2009, although at the end of the financial year (July 2008-June 2009) only about 13 percent of providers had not met their overall annual student visit targets. Providers who had experienced a drop in bookings suggested the recession, rising petrol costs, and the swine flu epidemic were contributing factors. Strategies used to address bookings challenges included:

- Promotional campaigns and direct marketing to highlight the value-for-money of the LEOTC packages the provider can offer.
- Arranging sponsorship for free bus services, particularly for low-decile schools.
- Reducing entry costs, or providing incentives such as free follow-up visits for accompanying adults.
- Giving out re-booking forms to teachers at the end of each school visit.

Some providers believed these strategies were already having an impact on target numbers, while others hoped to see better performance against targets during the first half of 2010.

In terms of reaching different year level targets, there were variations across providers as to which year levels were more, or less difficult. Some providers overachieved in their primary student targets, while underachieving in their secondary student targets, while other providers had the inverse situation. Some providers who had persistently low numbers in one or more targeted levels were looking at strategies to increase their service's appeal to teachers at those levels. For example, some providers find secondary schools a more difficult target audience to reach than primary schools. Strategies to reach more secondary audiences included:

- Educators attending meetings with principals, secondary teachers, or secondary subject associations.
- Inviting secondary teachers/teacher associations to special events/evenings at the provider's venue.
- Being more focused in advertising and marketing to show how the service linked to the secondary curriculum and/or Level 1-3 achievement or unit standards.
- Developing new programmes or units specific to NCEA requirements.
- Sponsoring competitions and/or displays involving secondary students' work.
- Providing opportunities for secondary students to learn from adult mentors associated with the provider.

- In some museums and galleries working with curators to enable secondary students access to specialised items from the provider's collections for particular topics or projects.

Some providers had seasonally predictable "boom" times for secondary group visits (e.g. at times of the year when students are working towards particular NCEA achievement or unit standards).

July – Dec 2009

- During the first half of this financial year (July-December 2009), the overall student target for LEOTC visits across all providers was at 60 percent of the annual target. Ten providers were at less than 40 percent of their overall target.

Booking and counting systems

Providers use a variety of systems to receive and record bookings. Most providers' initial contact and bookings are received by telephone or email, although some providers have a booking request pro-forma on their website, enabling the provider to collect details about the school, group size and year level, which programmes and learning intentions the teacher(s) making the booking are interested in, etc. Providers then follow up with schools to organise the specific details and requirements of each visit.

In terms of recording bookings and tracking student numbers, some providers use a system developed by WIN Network (the previous LEOTC contract monitoring providers). Others have created their own databases or spreadsheet systems to track booking details, or use systems established by their institutions or umbrella organisation (e.g. the city council's system). In some cases booking details and pre-visit negotiation of learning intentions are not recorded in a single place, but filed as "email trails" between the educators/administrators and the teachers.

As providers must account for their student bookings in order to meet LEOTC targets, it is important to have effective systems for counting and recording student numbers. The most robust systems appear to be those in which numbers are recorded and updated at several stages:

- Initial count at the time of booking (indicative of expected numbers).
- Updated count as final details of the visit are arranged (e.g. some providers require teachers to submit a RAMS form with final student counts prior to the visit).
- Head counts on the day of the visit (e.g. at the front desk of the provider's facility, particularly when there is a student admission fee to be paid on arrival).
- Teacher evaluation forms which ask for total student numbers.

While such a multi-level counting system is the ideal, the practicalities of each method of student counts vary depending on the provider's context. Some providers already have a visitor number-tracking system in place (e.g. every visitor, regardless of age, is counted on entry to the provider's venue as part of the provider's quality management systems). For these providers it is easy to count and cross-check LEOTC numbers against the providers' entry counts. For other providers, it

is less practical to try to count students as they arrive, and counts are more reliant on teachers providing final numbers at the time of the visit.

Gathering final student numbers through teacher evaluation forms can be problematic if these evaluation forms are not returned at the end of the visit. Some providers ask that evaluation forms are completed and handed in before teachers leave the LEOTC venue. However, other providers suggest the quality of their evaluations is better when they allow teachers to return evaluation forms some time after the visit (see section below entitled "evaluation"). When this method is used, phone calls or email reminders to teachers are often necessary.

Negotiation of learning intentions and pre/post-visit materials

Different providers have different approaches to pre-visit negotiation of learning intentions with teachers. Some providers have extensive information about specific programmes they can provide (e.g. on their website or in promotional materials), sometimes indicating curriculum links and suggested learning outcomes that could be associated with these programmes. Other providers give a general indication of what they can offer, and negotiate each class programme in discussion with teachers once initial contact has been made.

Some providers mentioned striking problems when bookings were made by school staff other than the teacher(s) whose classes are actually coming on the visit. In these cases, pre-visit information sent to the schools was not reaching the relevant teachers. An effective strategy to address this is to require whoever is booking to provide the names and contact details of the teacher(s) who will visit, so pre-visit planning can occur directly with those teachers. Some providers require the teacher(s) who will visit to complete a confirmation form regarding their booking.

The nature of pre-visit and post-visit materials also varies between providers, and can also vary from visit to visit depending on what has been arranged with teachers. Some providers have standard pack(s) related to the content/theme/topic of a particular LEOTC programme, and these can include suggested activities teachers could do or resources they could use before or after their visit. Other providers inform teachers about various resources they can provide and these are sent out on request or given to teachers at the time of the visit.

Some providers send out pre-visit information to help teachers with logistical aspects of their visit. This can include:

- "RAMS" (risk-assessment management) information.
- Names and sometimes photos of the educators.
- Maps, information about buses, and parking.
- Information about the provider's needs or expectations from teachers and accompanying parents.
- Themed name labels or tags that teachers can use to pre-organise students and parents into working groups when they come to the LEOTC provider.

Websites

Prior to monitoring visits, we google-search and look at providers' websites to see how easy it is to find the "education" sections, what sort of information is given about the provider's LEOTC programmes, and any other interesting features of provider's websites. Building, maintaining and updating websites can be problematic for some education teams, particularly in cases where the provider's institutional structures don't enable educators to have direct control over their section(s) of the site. Some educators have negotiated to have access to work on their parts of the websites, while others have a responsive web-support person within the organisation who can make changes or additions on the educator's request. While some providers' websites are up-to-date and comprehensive, other website provide relatively little detail about the providers' LEOTC services, and some websites appear cluttered and are somewhat difficult to navigate.

Many providers are interested in, or are currently engaged in redevelopment of their websites. As website design and development often requires specialised expertise, some providers are working with web designers/developers, while other educators have sufficient expertise to work on or maintain various parts of their websites themselves.

Common features of different providers' websites include:

- A statement indicating that they are Ministry-funded LEOTC providers.
- Indications of the kinds of education programmes/learning experiences they can offer (in some cases, organised into primary/secondary or indicative year level groupings).
- (Where relevant) information and schedules of upcoming exhibitions/ changing programmes for the year.
- Information to help teachers with the logistical aspects of their visit (e.g. information about entry costs, health and safety guidelines, transport, accommodation, other local sites/providers that could be included in a school group's visit).
- Contact details for making school group bookings.
- Names and photographs of the educators.
- "Testimonials" from teachers/students who have used the service (e.g. positive comments about users' experiences of the services).
- Photographs of students engaged in the providers' programmes.
- Educational resources or materials for teachers and/or students linked to the provider's programmes (e.g. pre- or post-visit resources).
- In some cases, teacher and student evaluation forms which can be downloaded or completed online.

Providers have different perspectives about the extent to which teacher and student resources and materials should be accessible online. While some providers have free downloadable teaching resources on their website, other providers are concerned that putting too much comprehensive classroom resource material online might lead teachers to bypass the LEOTC visit altogether. Strategies to avoid this situation included:

- Indicating on the website which resources are available (and requiring teachers to personally request these once they are booked).

- Password-protecting the resources area of the site and providing teachers with a password once they are booked for an LEOTC visit.
- Only providing downloadable resources for past exhibitions/programmes (i.e. those no longer on display at the provider's institution).

Web 2.0

Some providers have areas on their website which showcase examples or photographs of students' work. Over time, there may be potential for LEOTC providers to explore ways in which their websites could incorporate "web 2.0" features. Web 2 refers to the second generation of web design, including various features that allow and invite users to interact with web content and, to varying degrees, *create* content. In the case of LEOTC providers, this might include features such as areas where teachers and students can add photos, video, blogs, or other digital content related to their LEOTC experiences or link from the provider's website to digital content on schools' own websites, blogs, wikis, etc.

Class visits

Logistics & scene setting

During monitoring visits we noticed various ways in which educators managed the first few minutes of class visits. Effective practices seemed to involve:

- Using the initial greeting and welcome to set the "tone" for the educator's relationship with, and expectations of students, teachers, and (where relevant) parents during the visit.
- Identifying what lay ahead during the visit, what peoples' roles would be during the visit, and talking about what kinds of behaviours were appropriate in the learning environment (including any safety issues).
- Talking about the learning intentions of the visit.
- Identifying students' prior knowledge or conceptions in relation to the focus of the visit.
- Introducing an overarching "big question" (or a series of key ideas or questions) to frame the day's visit (i.e. something the students, teachers, and parents could carry in their minds through the day's activities, and back to school, the home, the community, etc.)

Teacher and parent roles

One area of variability across providers was the extent to which educators directly engaged teachers and parents in the initial scene-setting stage of the visit, and during the subsequent phases of the visit. Educators often expected teachers to play a role in managing student behaviour and general logistical jobs such as organising students into groups or moving them from one activity to another. During some visits we observed frequent communication and "checking in" to ensure coordination between educator(s) and teacher(s). However, occasionally teachers appeared to step back from these responsibilities, waiting for the educator(s) to cue them as to the "next step" in

the visit schedule. We suggested that educators could address this by clarifying expectations with teachers about the role each was going to play during the visit when negotiating the programme. When expectations are articulated again during the initial welcome, this serves as a further reminder for teachers, as well as cueing students and parents.

Other adults (such as parent helpers) were more likely than teachers to play an ambiguous role during visits. Some LEOTC educators provided explicit cues to parents (and to students) as to ways parents could support the students' learning experiences (for example, suggesting key questions, concepts, or ideas that parents could discuss with students throughout the visit). Other educators invited parents to "join in" and experience the visit alongside the students. One tension of the latter approach was observed when parents took this invitation too literally, and dominated activities intended for students (thus detracting from the students' learning experiences). Some educators expressed disappointment and frustration with parents who disengaged from the visit entirely and "disappeared for a coffee" during the educators' programmes.

Linking and connecting

Clearly linking the days' activities to the learning intentions of the visit is an important signal to teachers, students, and parents as to the relevance of the LEOTC experience. While some educators made these links quite clearly, in other cases we observed students engaged in "hands-on" activities where students didn't seem highly engaged, or did not recognise the activity's relevance or significance.

Effective ways of linking and connecting the learning experiences we observed included:

- Referring back to the "big idea(s)" or "big question(s)" introduced at the beginning of the visit, and asking students what new thoughts, ideas, or knowledge they could apply to these questions now.
- Questioning students about what they were doing or thinking *during* the lesson/experience/ activity (or setting parents/teachers up to support this questioning, or having students work in pairs or small groups to explore their ideas together).
- Questioning/talking with students about how the learning experience/activity/context relates to their own lives and experiences, or to their classroom learning.
- Inviting students to talk about what they have gained from the days' experiences.
- Providing teachers (and students) with ideas about what they could do next to follow up on any of the days' learning experiences.

"Big ideas"

Below we present some illustrative examples of ways educators tried to link students' learning experiences to "big ideas" or "big questions".

- After giving students, teachers, and parents some relevant background knowledge, a social science LEOTC provider takes students, teachers, and parents on a journey into the past to experience, through drama and costumed role play, what it was like for early European

- A science-based provider asks students to line themselves up on a continuum, to show how "risky" they think it is to live in a particular area which is known to have turbulent geological activity and sporadic natural disasters. At the end of the day, after learning more about the geology of the region, and the frequency and effects of previous recorded natural disasters, the students are asked to line up on the continuum again, and those who have changed their views are asked to talk about why.
- An arts-based provider uses an exhibition as the basis for exploring concepts of figurative drawing with students.
- After exploring different inventions, students have to choose an invention and try to "sell" it to their peers, highlighting the advantages of this new product over the one that came before it.

Each of the examples above have the potential to deepen and enrich students' thinking, particularly encouraging them to think critically and recognise situations in which there is no single "right answer" and complex thinking is required. The experiences also lend themselves to other "big questions", including some which may emerge from students, teachers, or parents themselves.

Hands-on activities

In some cases, "hands-on" activities included some which teachers could have readily done at school, and arguably the time at the LEOTC provider could have been better spent on less replicable experiences. However, when teachers specifically request these kinds of hands-on activities it may be challenging for providers to negotiate teachers away from such requests, particularly if teachers believe they don't have the skills or resources to do the activities in their own classrooms.

Evaluation

As there is no standard evaluation template for LEOTC providers, each provider has developed their own evaluation forms for teachers (and in some cases, for students). Evaluation forms for teachers generally include a few Likert-scale questions asking teachers to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of the visit on a scale (e.g. 1-5). Common scale questions include:

- Timeliness/adequacy of pre-visit information.
- Satisfaction with negotiation of learning intentions with the LEOTC educator.
- Degree to which the visit met teacher's expectations/learning intentions.
- Overall satisfaction with the visit.

Most evaluation forms also include qualitative open questions which invite teachers to give a written response. Common open questions include:

- Asking teachers to describe how the visit contributed to:
    - agreed learning intentions (some providers transfer each teacher's learning intentions from the initial booking confirmation to the evaluation form to check that these have been met to the teachers' satisfaction.
    - any or all of the key competencies.
    - any additional (learning) benefits for their students.
- Teachers' views about the best/most valuable aspect of the visit.
- How teachers intend to follow up on the visit.
- Feedback for the educator about how the visit could have been improved.

Additional information which some providers collect on their evaluation forms include:

- How the teacher found out about the provider's service.
- Whether this is their first visit to the provider.

As discussed in the "booking and counting systems" section, evaluation forms also gather final details about student numbers and year levels for LEOTC milestone reporting.

Providers are required to identify in their milestone reporting how any issues raised in evaluation feedback are addressed. Most providers follow a similar process once evaluations are received: they are reviewed by educators to identify any issues or feedback that they need to address. The educator or an administrator records all the quantitative measures from the evaluation forms, and these are used to identify overall teacher satisfaction rates with the service, reported in providers' six-monthly milestones.

Local and national networks

Many providers have invested time in developing local or national networks to support their work. At the local level, some providers have established relationships with other LEOTC providers, or other non-LEOTC service providers who can collaborate to provide schools with attractive "packages" for extended LEOTC visits. This might include liaising with marae or other accommodation providers so that the LEOTC provider can manage bookings on behalf of schools, or with other arts/culture/heritage/nature organisations in the community who can provide services or programmes that complement a visit to the LEOTC provider.

At the national level, a number of LEOTC educators are members of MEANZ[1]. Some providers, particularly those who provide learning environments significantly different to museums and galleries, align with other national networks in their fields (e.g. the New Zealand Association of Environmental Educators).

[1] On February 5th NZCER gave a short presentation at the annual MEANZ conference, floating some possibilities for ways to build research capacity in the sector.

Other challenges and questions

Other challenges and questions discussed by various providers included:

- Queries about how LEOTC educators can access professional development about *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), NCEA standards in their subject area(s), etc.
- Issues related to the place of LEOTC in relation to other activities undertaken by the provider/institution. In some cases LEOTC (and education services in general) appeared to be lower in the organisation's priorities, and this impacted on issues such as forward planning, and promotional activities. In these cases the LEOTC programmes had to "fit around" other schedules and institutional/curatorial priorities and it was up to the educators to find ways to provide meaningful curriculum related programmes based on current exhibitions.
- Various queries related to LEOTC contractual matters (e.g. questions about which student visits/school visits can or cannot be counted according to LEOTC criteria, queries around communications with the Ministry of Education, etc).

Areas providers suggested for research/feedback.

As LEOTC contract monitors we are interested in exploring possibilities for developing a research/knowledge-building dimension to our work with LEOTC providers. As a scoping exercise, during site visits we asked providers whether there were any questions or areas which they felt might be suitable or useful places to begin thinking about research. Table 1 summarises their suggestions (see next page). In addition, in early February we gave a presentation about research possibilities at the MEANZ annual conference, which was attended by a number of current LEOTC providers. A copy of the speaker notes for this session is given in Appendix A.

Table 1 **Some research questions/areas of interest to providers.**

LEOTC context/national issues	What are the issues for other providers, are they similar/different to ours? What strategies have other providers used that we can learn from? What are the barriers for schools for attending LEOTC programmes?
Purposes/value of LEOTC	What are we educating for? What are the benefits of (outdoor) education in its widest sense? What more could we be doing? What does the research tell us?
Student learning	As adults we make assumptions about what students are going to get out of an activity, but does this really happen – especially when thinking of the challenges posed by one activity for different age groups? How does LEOTC support inquiry learning styles? What kinds of questioning techniques can support this? What are the long-term impacts of LEOTC visits for students (e.g. after 3 months)? What do they remember, what learning have they used, how has it affected how they think/feel about the topic, etc? How much content is still there, what values have been maintained/shifted, have any new skills been developed (KCs)?
Other provider-specific questions	What is the benefit of utilising contact animals versus exhibit based animals to enhance educational outcomes?

3. Summary

This overview represents the first step in NZCER's efforts to initiate collaborative knowledge-building across the LEOTC sector as part of our monitoring role.

As LEOTC monitors we give each provider feedback on their individual services. Although each service is different, and will therefore have various issues, questions, challenges, and practices unique to the context in which they work, we saw a number of similarities across the sites we visited and the milestone reports we reviewed. This summary has described some of the common practices and issues related to:

- Booking and counting systems
- Negotiation of learning intentions and pre/post-visit materials
- Websites
- Class visits
- Evaluation
- Local and national networks

We welcome feedback from the Ministry of Education and LEOTC providers about this summary. In particular, we would like to know whether this overview synthesis has provided useful information, sparked ideas, or raised issues worth exploring in more depth and/or using as the basis for shaping further research.

Appendix A: Research for educators

Speaker notes for presentation at MEANZ conference, 4-5 Feb, 2010. City Gallery, Wellington.

Rachel Bolstad, Senior researcher, New Zealand Council for Educational Research

[Title Slide]

[Slide: Goals for today]

Kia ora koutou,

In these 15 minutes I would like to achieve three things:

- Introduce ourselves and our organisation, and discuss how our work as educational researchers intersects with your work as MEANZ educators.
- Start you thinking about some of the opportunities for research and knowledge-building in your sector.
- Highlight a couple of places you can look if you are interested in following up these ideas.

Intro ourselves and our organisation [SLIDE: Who are we?]

There are four of us here from NZCER: myself, Verena Watson, Jonathan Fisher, and Marie Cameron.

NZCER is New Zealand's only national, independent educational research organisation. We conduct research and evaluation work with a range of public and private sector clients, and we produce research-based tests, journals, books, and classroom resources. We work across all sectors, including early childhood, school and tertiary sectors, teacher education, and workplace learning. We have about 25 researchers and we always take team-based, collaborative approaches to our work. We're very much a "learning organisation", and we value working in collaborative partnerships with other people and groups in NZ education.

We define the key connecting theme across all our research as **21st century education**. This is starting to sound a bit old-fashioned ten years into this century – but what we're trying to signal is that our goal is to focus on research and development that supports education to be relevant, forward-thinking, and equip people to cope with the demands and challenges of the 21st century. Later I'm going to point you towards a website called shiftingthinking which explores THOSE ideas in more depth.

Until recently NZCER hadn't done much work in what some people call the "non-formal" education sector. You may know that as of mid-year last year, we've been contracted to provide

the monitoring service for the Ministry of Education's LEOTC programmes. We've already met some of you in this role (although I know that not all of you are involved in LEOTC).

Obviously one of NZCER's strengths is our expertise in research and knowledge-building. Therefore we're interested in looking at research opportunities that might emerge from working with your sector. The point of doing this research would be to benefit multiple audiences – including: providers themselves, existing and potential users of LEOTC services (i.e. schools), and stakeholders such as the MOE.

At the moment we're focussing on getting our processes and systems in place and getting to know the providers around the country. But we're also beginning to think about what kinds of research or knowledge-building could occur. I'd like to get you thinking about this question as well.

But where to start?

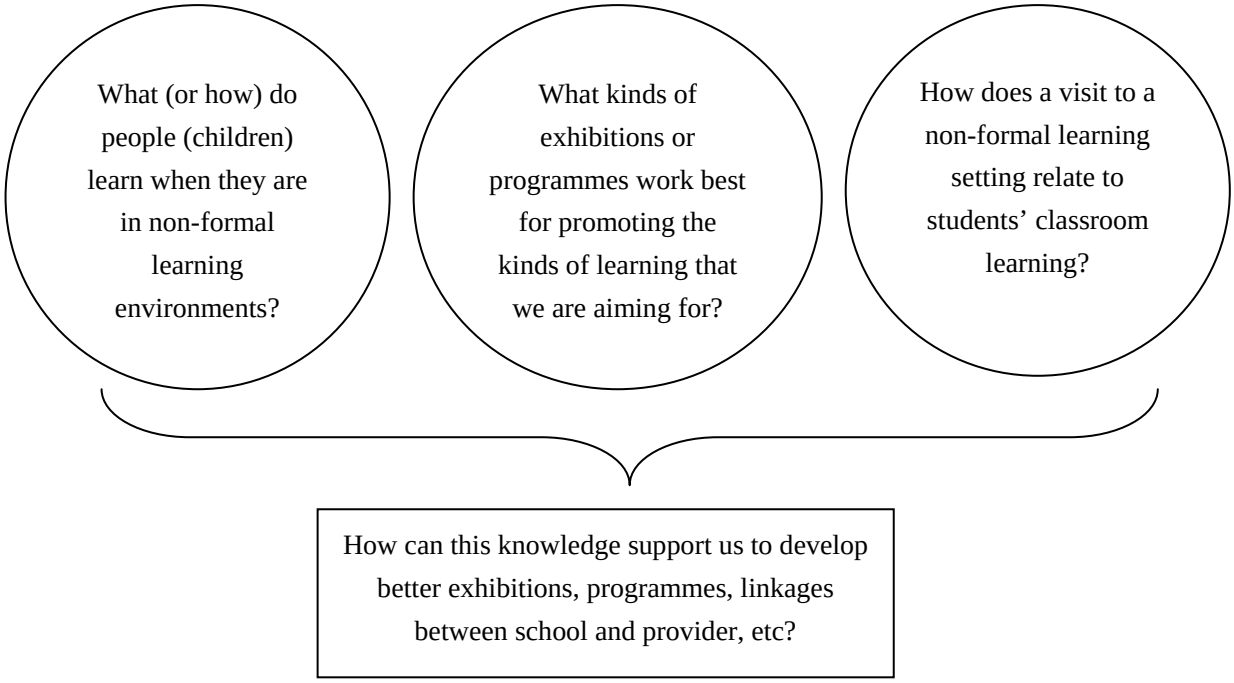
[SLIDE: What could research with your sector look like?]

Research can be a very time-consuming and costly process so you need to think carefully about where to begin. It all begins with identifying a question. Very quickly, here are some of the key stages that would be involved in developing a research partnership with your sector.

The first thing is to identify the research area of interest. To illustrate, here are few different broad "areas" or research questions that a researcher might ask about learning in the non-formal education sector.

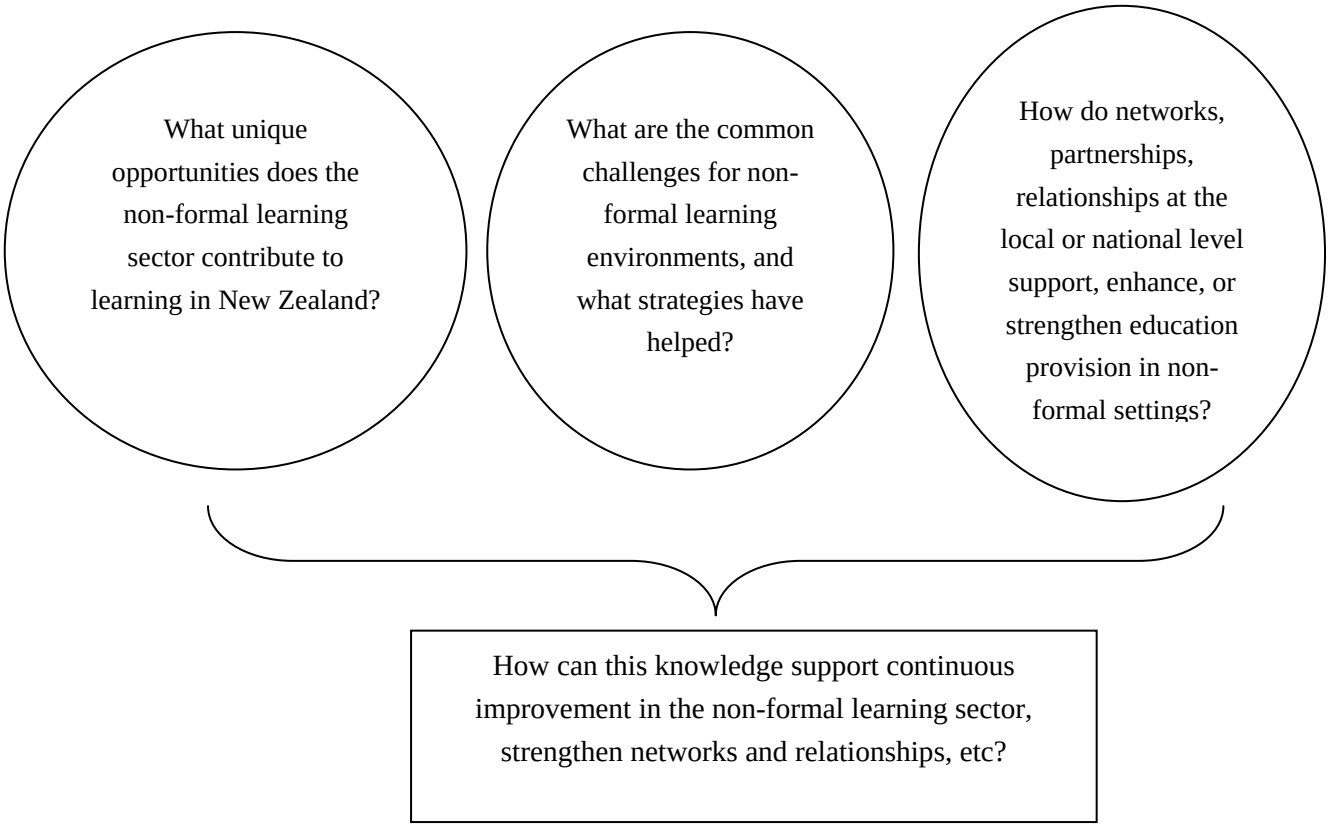
[SLIDE]

Questions about learning in non-formal environments.



[SLIDE]

Questions about the unique features, challenges, and opportunities of non-formal learning environments.



These are just a few examples and of course there could be many others. (I am just trying to give you a very broad brush-stroke sense of where one could begin if one was thinking about developing some research priorities and strategies in this sector).

Taking any one of these broad areas, we'd need to distil down further to get to some much more specific and answerable sub-questions. Then we would need to look at which sorts of research methodologies would help us collect data to answer these questions.

However, with every project one must think about budgets and time and so on – so it is very important to take a pragmatic approach. Some of the considerations in terms of the possible research component that we MIGHT develop through our work with LEOTC providers are:

- What are the most effective/efficient ways to make use of information we already have?
- What information/knowledge is going to be most useful for the sector, for users of LEOTC (or other non-formal learning environments), and for stakeholders such as MOE?
- How much input, involvement, or time are providers interested in investing into research in their sector? What would be the nature of our research partnership with providers?

These are all open questions at the moment, but I just want to illustrate a few possible research strategies to indicate what this might involve for in terms of time and input.

[SLIDE: What could a research partnership involve/look like?]

You could replace the "NZCER" column with any other researchers that your organisation might form working partnerships with)

The strategies at the top are the ones that require the least commitment from educators/providers They are most based on using the information that we are already collecting as part of our monitoring role. The strategies at the bottom are the ones that involve actually gathering new information, and these sorts of strategies involve more of a relationship between researchers and providers in order to shape research questions, and collect data to answer those questions.

	NZCER	Providers
Sharing what is already known	Summarise key themes that emerge across many providers, and provide this summary back to all providers.	Minimal effort or input required – but providers can indicate which feedback they are most interested in receiving.
Identifying new questions that could be explored further	We could suggest questions/themes that integrate what we see from providers, and our background knowledge of research and what else is going on in NZ education.	Suggesting, or giving feedback on, question areas they are most interested in finding the answers to.
Gathering new data, (or making use of existing data) to answer questions	We could suggest strategies for collecting data, or possibly even provide tools and templates for gathering this data.	Contribute to collecting the data (for example, adding specific questions to post-visit evaluation forms across all providers) etc.

We've been asking the LEOTC providers whether there are any particular questions or areas that *they* think would be valuable to research. We are keeping a running record of what providers have suggested. We're also going to start with the top-row strategy – putting together a short summary to send to all providers identifying some of the key trends, themes, etc that have cropped up across our site visits and milestone reports. It should be ready by the end of this month.

We hope that in the next couple of years we may be able to take the knowledge-building strategies further – for example moving towards some of the strategies in the bottom rows. However we do need to keep an eye on what is feasible – as I said including careful attention to what amount of budget and time commitment we, and providers, are able to give to a process such as this. (Also need to discuss in partnership with the Ministry of Education as the contractors of both LEOTC and the monitoring service provided by NZCER).

Where to go to think about these ideas further

I hope that this brief introduction has helped you to START thinking about what kinds of research and knowledge-building might be of value in your sector. Hopefully you'll continue to think of questions that might be fruitful areas for research – whether it involves NZCER or any other research partners, or even research that you might undertake independently.

However, sometimes it can be difficult to "see" what kinds of questions would be good research questions, if you aren't a researcher. This is why it can be really valuable to have a research partner who can lend this kind of "researcher eye".

So where could you begin? I am going to point you towards two websites. I'll give you the URLs on my final slide so don't worry about writing them down now.

SLIDE: TLRI website

The first is the website for the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI). This is a government-funded research initiative, which funds projects that involve collaborations between researchers and teachers/educators in the early childhood, school, and tertiary sector.

This fund may also be relevant for educators in your sector as you are often working with teachers and learners in these sectors. However it is also just a handy site for getting a feel for some of the kinds of questions currently being explored in New Zealand education, and some of the kinds of research partnerships that have formed around these questions. I have some copies of the latest TLRI newsletter here if you would like to pick one up afterwards.

If you look under the "projects" tab [screen capture] you can see short descriptions of some projects by sector. For example here is one particular project in the early childhood sector that involves a MEANZ institution.

Our place: Being curious at Te Papa

Funding Year:2008:2 years

Research team
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Brief description
Based at a new education and care centre at Te Papa in Wellington, this project will research the ways in which young children make meaning from artefacts and exhibitions at Te Papa. It will investigate how they construct knowledge and the opportunities that make this possible and interesting.

This project is just getting underway this year – so reports will probably be coming out next year about the findings.

Another area that you might find interesting is under the "background papers" tab [screen capture], where you'll find interviews with some leading NZ educationalists who describe their "research wish list" - their views on the crucial research questions and current knowledge gaps in different sectors.

There's no "research wish list" for your sector – but if MEANZ is interested in building the research capacity and capabilities of your sector, a good starting point might be to develop such a "wish list". MEANZ might also want to spotlight certain key researchers, or research projects, in its newsletters, or recommend journals, newsletters, or websites where you can keep up-to-date with research in non-formal learning environments.

[SLIDE] Shifting Thinking website

This site, shiftingthinking.org, is the website I mentioned earlier where we explore ideas about 21st century learning. It's a developmental project for NZCER and we ran a conference last November at Circa that was also called 'Shifting Thinking' – there are lots of blogs, videos, and other things from that conference on the site if you'd like to find out a bit more about it.

That's all I have time for – just before I finish I would like to give you a few URLs:

www.tlri.org.nz

www.nzcer.org.nz

www.shiftingthinking.org