

Unconventional Spaces of Learning in New Zealand

A textual analysis, 2023

A report for the Wayne Francis Charitable Trust

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This report provides insight into unconventional spaces of learning (USL) in New Zealand. Specific emphasis has been given to neurodiverse learners and those for whom mainstream schooling does not cater well for. A wide range of alternative and flexible learning approaches, programmes and spaces are explored that diverge away from traditional and conventional mainstream schooling. A clear distinction is made between Alternative Education in New Zealand and USL. Twenty-one USL were identified and explored in light of their theoretical foundations, key drivers and selected characteristics. Textual analysis was used to analyse data. Emerging trends indicate that while holistic, child centred approaches are prevalent there are also a growing number of sustainability focused USL, as well as targeted, individualised programmes, and 'one day school' initiatives. The report concludes with a number of key questions and recommendations for future research.

Introduction

Our engagement with the idea of a fixed curriculum, a physical destination location in which education dwells as if in a box in which people enclose themselves to learn, and the notion of the authority of the teacher versus the subservience of the student are all in the ring and they are losing. We must and are rethinking education.
(Noddings and Lees, 2016)

Background and scope of the report

The purpose of this report is to provide insight into formally arranged learning opportunities that exist outside of mainstream education. A particular focus of this report is exploring unconventional spaces of learning (USL) that provide for the needs of neurodiverse learners, and those for whom mainstream education does not cater well. Specifically, three key areas are explored:

- Awareness: How do we/others know what is available?
- Development: What is the evolution of the USL? Why do they exist?
- Accessibility: Who can access the USL? How are they funded?

The scope of the report includes an exploration of USL for years 3 to 10 within New Zealand that provide for neurodiverse learners, and those for whom mainstream does not cater well. As Skelling (2020) notes, "Neurodiversity is a term used to describe neurological differences in the human brain. From this perspective, the diverse spectrum of neurological difference is viewed as a range of natural variations in the human brain rather than as a deficit in an individual'' (p.1). For those who identify as neurodiverse, there is an understanding that their brain is 'wired differently' and ways of being and doing require adaptation. Given this difference, it is important to consider alternative spaces which allow for successful learning opportunities and an amplification of strengths. The following alternatives have not been included in this report: homeschooling, unschooling, religious schools, state specialist schools, and kura kaupapa Māori. Each of these alternatives requires specific focus which is beyond the scope of this report.

An online search for USL was undertaken that included searches such as ‘alternative education’, ‘alternative schooling’, ‘one day school’, ‘neurodiverse learning’, and ‘flexible learning’ within New Zealand. Sources were found via a general google search, social media platforms such as Facebook, library searches, and peer reviewed research database searches. Twenty-one USL were identified and coded by number (see Table 2). This is not an exhaustive list, although it represents a comprehensive overview of USLs whose information was available at the time of writing this report. For each of the 21 USLs, the following components were explored:

- Philosophical origins
- Key drivers
- Aims (vision, mission, objectives)
- How the USL is delivered
- Access and funding

Textual analysis was used to identify perceived trends that are emerging within the New Zealand context. Before presenting the data and textual analysis, an introduction to context is provided in the next section. This is followed by a definition, rationale and explanation of USL.

An introduction to context

Since the advent of mass public schooling during the mid to late 19th century there has been a call for alternative approaches to teaching and learning and these alternatives express differing visions for education. For example, they may respond to pressing issues of the day, or respond to children's learning needs unmet by conventional schooling. Whatever the reasons, these alternatives reflect what it means to live in a democratic society that values debate about the differing visions we hold for education (Boyask et al. 2008).

Within New Zealand there has been a history of experiments in education that have left enduring legacies. Oruaiti School led by Elwyn Richardson (1949 to 1961) is one such historical example, and the Metro College (1977 to 2001) in Mt. Eden Auckland is a more recent example. Many of the past alternatives in New Zealand traced their lineage to A. S. Neill’s Summerhill School (established 1921) in England which was guided by the principles of democracy, equality and freedom. A key tension within public schooling is marked with the central controversy of the process of education being either one that develops from within the child or one that is imposed on the child (Boyask et al. 2008). Summerhill was a strong proponent of the former.

Relative to other countries, it is interesting to note that the emergence of USL in New Zealand is more nuanced. Part of the reason for this is attributed to the non-prescriptive nature of the New Zealand curriculum and the high trust model of teacher agency in pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning.

Defining alternative education: Unconventional spaces of learning

Lees and Noddings (2016) celebrate the idea that alternative forms of education are undefined or difficult to define. Perhaps what it is, is defined by what it is not. Where conventional forms of schooling tend to be grounded on the modern foundations of a transmission (direct instruction) model of teaching and learning, unconventional spaces of learning (USL) reject transmission as

a dominant model for learning. Instead, USL is “grounded in its own North: principles of autonomy and self/social empowerment” (p. 3). For the purpose of this report, we use the term, ‘unconventional spaces of learning’ to denote the idea of not being conventional, and ‘spaces of learning’ rather than schools. ‘Spaces’ are more fluid and nuanced. ‘Learning’ is also more flexible than ‘schooling’ and ‘formal education’’. Kraftl (2013) also refers to the terms, ‘learning spaces’ and notes, “there exist very few alternative learning spaces that actively seek to isolate themselves from mainstream societies. Rather, most learning spaces are constituted by a fuzzy, dynamic, but carefully orchestrated process of negotiation between connection and disconnection” (p. 237).

The term USL is also used in this report to draw a distinction away from ‘Alternative Education’. While globally the term alternative education is used broadly to denote unconventional spaces of learning, within New Zealand Alternative Education applies specifically to service provision for learners aged 13 and above who have experienced disenfranchisement from mainstream secondary schools.

The argument for unconventional spaces for learning

Alternative and unconventional spaces of learning are politically important. Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that everyone has a right to education and that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In many ways, alternatives in education have provided a means to fulfil this vision. Furthermore, a historic argument that seems relevant today was that conventional schools educated people about a world ‘[they] once knew’ not a world students would inhabit (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Lees and Noddings (2016) argue similarly noting,

> Our engagement with the idea of a fixed curriculum, a physical destination location in which education dwells as if in a box in which people enclose themselves to learn, and the notion of the authority of the teacher versus the subservience of the student are all in the ring and they are losing. We must and are rethinking education (p. 4).

Lees and Noddings (2016) conclude by suggesting that a [global] rise in alternatives in education as a ‘local reason’ is on the side of the idea that alternatives matter. Alternative approaches provide insight both emerging and persistent needs of students and whānau, not currently met within conventional education.

Understanding unconventional spaces of learning

A recent research study of alternative forms of education within New Zealand provides useful insights in understanding USL. Rudge (2021) focused on four case studies of USL. Using grounded theory, she found the following categories to be present across all case studies:

- Learning environment (including connection to nature, community connectedness, mixed age setting, and low teacher student ratio)

- Learning approach (including ecological awareness, play based, creative, low-tech, real-life learning, and 'academics')
- Agency (including freedom of choice, problem solving, self-directed and personalised learning)
- Human development (including whole child development and resilience focus)
- Relationships (including peers, teacher-student, school community, and bully free environments)
- Dissatisfaction with public schools

Characteristics such as learner agency, whole child development, relational and nature based learning are similar to Miller's (n.d.) categories of USL: freedom-based learning, social constructivism, critical pedagogy, spiritual developmentalism, and integral or holistic education.

As part of this research, 21 USL were analysed and the categories from Miller (n.d.) and Rudge (2021) were adapted to include an understanding of the key drivers of USL within New Zealand. These include: freedom based, individual, social justice, social, holistic, sustainability, targeted and inclusive. Each of these key drivers has a main emphasis and focus, and each stem from particular education, social and human development theories.

In Table 1 an explanation of each of the USL within New Zealand is provided as well as an explanation of the purpose and nature of learning, and 'teacher' and learner roles. It is important to recognise that many USL overlap across a number of drivers, and judgement has been made in this report as the main emphasis of each example.

Table 1 also begins with Conventional Education to assist with understanding the ways in which the unconventional differs. It is impossible to categorise conventional schooling at all levels (ECE, primary, intermediate, secondary) as a unified set of pedagogical and organisational characteristics. Conventional schools are heterogeneous, reflecting the diversity of their local boards and communities. While historically when schools were more transmissional in their teaching approaches people sought alternatives that reflected child centred approaches to learning. Nowadays, there are a range of reasons why people choose USL, as shown in Table 1. Across the USL, however, there is a desire for autonomy from the constraints of conventional education in order to more fully meet the identified key drivers.

Table 1: Theoretical Foundations and Approaches for USL

The key driver (adapted from Miller)	The main emphasis and the purpose of learning	Nature of learning	Role of the 'teacher'	Role of the 'student'
Conventional Education	*Knowledge transmission with a focus on qualifications and developing social norms.* *To develop skills, knowledge and experience through instruction in order to contribute economically and socially.*	*Instruction model.* *Focus on qualifications. Standardisation of curriculum and assessment.* *One size fits all.*	*To instruct, direct, manage and assess.*	*To undertake tasks and activities decided upon by the teacher.* *To meet requirements of standards and expectations of social norms.*
Freedom based	All people have autonomy and the freedom to choose how they live and how they learn.	Begins with the individual's needs, goals and desires (as opposed to fixed curriculum or ideas of social norms). Child directed and agentic; problem solving and creative; Self-directed and personalised learning.	To foster a space of creativity and individual expressions of freedom. To walk alongside students as a 'guide on the side'.	Students lead their own learning choices. Student directed learning related to interests and strengths.
Individual	To develop the individual student through targeted differentiated learning.	Individual learning pathways.	Teacher provides individualised and personalised learning opportunities that are specifically relevant for each student.	Participation in learning activities through a personalised programme supported by the teacher.
Social justice	Raise consciousness and develop critical action for a socially just world.	Collective and experiential. Social critical thinking and action for change. Dialogic - discursive. Real world problem solving.	To guide learning through 'ako' reciprocity - teacher and student learning together.	Participation in learning activities that develop critical thinking and action skills. Working together with others on social justice projects.
Social	Knowledge is constructed in relationships with others.	Learning is a social endeavour, requiring meaningful interaction with others. Collaborative, inquiry based, creative problem solving.	To provide a safe and collectivist learning space for collaboration and the social construction of ideas, knowledge and materiality.	Working together with other students to learn about the world around them.

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The key driver (adapted from Miller)	The main emphasis and the purpose of learning	Nature of learning	Role of the 'teacher'	Role of the 'student'
Holistic	Wellbeing is based on holistic development of a person within supportive communities. Students develop holistically: spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically. Students develop as resilient, confident, independent and creative people able to contribute to a better world.	Holistic learning activities ensure opportunities for whole person learning. The focus may be toward one area. E.g., Holistic (nature based) or holistic (embodied/movement based).	To provide learning activities that foster the development of the whole person.	Participation in learning activities that include cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual and embodied components.
Sustainability	Responsible citizenship for a better world. To provide meaningful and authentic real-world experiences that create new learning pathways and worldviews for a sustainable future.	Social learning together; collective problem solving.	To guide learning through a structured approach to real life problem solving	To participate in activities that develop creativity and problem solving for real life situations. To work together with others to solve problems.
Targeted, inclusive	Personalised programmes of learning to meet special education needs. To meet the target learning needs of students with special learning needs.	One-one-one or small group targeted learning; especially for neuro-diverse learners	To provide structured learning opportunities that are specifically tailored to meet the special needs of each student.	To follow the instruction, guidance and direction of the teachers. To work on individualised programmes of learning. Maybe in small groups.

The theoretical foundations and approaches in Table 1 provide a useful framework for helping to make sense of the diverse array of USL within New Zealand. The key drivers that make up USL may be situated primarily within one of the seven concepts: freedom based, individual, social justice, social, holistic, sustainability, or targeted and inclusive. As indicated within Table 1, the primary nature of learning and the role of the teacher/adult and student differ depending on the purpose of learning in each setting.

Textual analysis and emerging trends

Through a textual analysis of 21 USL within New Zealand, the theoretical foundations and approaches are critically applied to develop an understanding of each USL. In Table 2, the key driver (from the seven concepts outlined in Table 1) are identified. The key aims of each USL, as well as the pedagogical approach and key characteristics are also explored. Information is provided regarding accessibility and funding. Each USL has been coded using a number.

The analysis identified a number of key characteristics that differed according to the aims of the USL, and these included the extent to which a USL approach is: (1) structured or unstructured; (2) social/relational or individually based; (3) holistic or dualistic; and (4) offered regionally, nationally or globally.

Firstly, structured, semi-structured and unstructured are concepts used to denote the extent to which programmes provide a predetermined, fixed and prescribed curriculum. A structured approach is more likely to be seen where the key driver is ‘targeted and inclusive’ or ‘individualised’ (see Table 1). An unstructured approach may be more likely where the key driver is ‘freedom based’.

Secondly, social/relational and/or individually based programmes stem from different theoretical origins. Social/relational approaches to learning exist on the premise that knowledge is constructed in relationships with others. By working together with others, students learn about the world around them (see Table 1). Conversely, an individual approach to learning places emphasis on personalisation.

Thirdly, a holistic and a dualistic approach to learning stem from different educational theoretical origins. Historically, it has been argued that mainstream Western education systems have been predominantly dualistic - placing an emphasis on cognitive learning. A good example of this is valuing Numeracy and Literacy over embodied learning such as Physical Education. A holistic approach to learning places equal importance on the whole child: spiritual, mental and emotional, physical, and connected to nature. If a USL key driver is holistic (see Table 1), the programme may place equal value on all domains or the USL may have a specific focus such as embodied or nature based.

Table 2: Examples of USL in New Zealand

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
# 01	Freedom based	'Know thyself" Mission: A personally satisfying life A contributing member of society Nurturing members	Inquiry learning Play based	Regional Unstructured Semi social	Y1-8 Weekly programme	Integrated school - Special character
# 02	Individual	Began in 2018 Complete schooling solution, entire NZ curriculum.	Pedagogy Blended approach: Steiner, Montessori, and Inquiry Online alternative to schooling (home-schooling support); Pre-recorded content to supplement home/school delivery model	Global Structured Individual	5-15 yr olds	Private User pays $29 per week per student
# 03	Individual	Mission: Students at the centre of their learning Learners encouraged to be creative, innovative and to take risks Diverse and flexible learning pathways Learning is a partnership Everyone's a teacher	Pedagogy Agentic Staged not aged Learning Guides Inquiry Project based Personalised learning programmes	Regional Semi structured Individual	Y1-13	Special Character - State school
# 04	Holistic	Mission: To help students become curious, creative and compassionate learners by making their education meaningful and highly relevant	Inquiry learning - play and project based Teacher Advisors – support Building Learner Wellbeing Developing academics and the arts Extending beyond the curriculum Preparing for a sustainable world Launching potential	Regional Semi structured Individual and social learning	Designed for children from year 1 to 13 who thrive in smaller class sizes. A place where care for each other, and the environment, goes hand-in-hand with learning that goes well beyond the national curriculum.	Private

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
# 05	Holistic	To develop the whole, balanced person.	Whole-person learning. Teacher centred. Head, heart and hands – a balanced teaching of intellectual, emotive/creative, and practical in all lessons. Curriculum is tailored to reflect and honour the maturation of developmental growth Unhurried development Deep relationships student-teacher Emphasis on knowledge, E.g., science, literacy and maths teaching through imagination	Global Semi structured Individual and social	Kindergarten (first 7 years), Lower School (next 7 years) and Upper school.	Integrated
# 06	Holistic	To encourage the development of the whole child by providing a comprehensive education. Cultivating independent thought and foundational skills as well as awareness of their environment Empathy for others Social confidence.	Child centred – teachers as guides Children develop the ability to concentrate and to become absorbed in their chosen activity or work when interruptions by adults or whole group times are kept to a minimum. The New Zealand curriculum is a framework and USL materials and philosophy can be utilised in the delivery of the New Zealand Curriculum.	Global Structured Individual	Six-year-olds and most primary classes collaborate with contributing early learning centres to ensure that children remain in the 3-6 programme, rather than moving to primary at five years old. Classrooms of mixed aged children	USL primary classes within New Zealand state primary schools are funded through MoE and depend on parental donations. Private USL primary schools or high schools charge fees and receive limited funding from the government.
# 07	Holistic (nature based)	Mission: Supporting children to be outside, active and creative Reconnection with nature, therapeutic and fun through play.	Pedagogy Play based Experiences are selected based on their ability to inspire children to think in creative ways and to be active. Has developed a range of curriculum programmes for various ages and interests. While we are immersed in natural settings, and aspects of learning about plants, animals and	National Unstructured Social Holistic (embodied)	Y0-8 Day based programmes Holiday programmes Bespoke EOTC programmes	Private

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
			sustainability are included in our programmes, they are not our sole focus. Primarily we are about children being active and creative in natural settings as well as supporting their love of learning.			
# 08	Holistic (nature based)	Mission: Every child has a positive, personal identity and knows their worth, so that they can confidently and capably contribute to their world. Goal of social/emotional development.	Guided by principles of Reggio Emilio Emergent curriculum Placed based education for sustainability Te Whare tapa whā Five ways to wellbeing Relationship-based	Global Semi structured Social and individual Holistic (embodied)	One day school Y1-8	Private
# 09	Holistic	Values: Inspiring Nurturing and social responsibility	Experiential Holistic curriculum Real world experiences Personalised learning Stage based (4 stages) Play based Low student/teacher ratios	Regional Semi structured	Y1-8	Private
# 10	Holistic (nature based)	Mission: Opportunities for free play in nature, within a framework of respect for themselves, others, and the environment. Training for adults supporting children's free play in nature.	Experiential Outdoors based Child-led Play based experiences	Regional Unstructured Social	Community events Play based programmes for primary and intermediate schools In-school programme (half day or full day) Outdoor classroom day Holiday programmes (5-12 yr olds) Pop up adventure playground events (junk play)	Private
# 11	Holistic (Nature based)	Mission:	Marae based Embodied learning	Regional	Y1-8	Private

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
		True citizenship in connected communities	Mixed age Community involvement	Semi structured Social		
# 12	Holistic (Nature based)	Mission: World is full of magic things… patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper	Progressive Screen free “Body work - before bookwork”	Regional Unstructured Social	Mixed age groups	Private
# 13	Holistic (nature based)	Embrace diversity	Embodied Experiential learning	Regional Semi Structured Social	Y1-8 Small rural independent primary	Private
# 14	Holistic	Rebuild confidence Enhance agency	Whānau based Relational Trauma informed/intuitive	National Structured Social Holistic	Y9+	State / Philanthropic
# 15	Sustainability	Mission: Empowering students from and through nature play	NZC effective pedagogies Sport NZ physical literacies Play based Child led experiences in the natural environment	Regional Unstructured Social	Age 5- 12yrs 8 weeks during term time One Day Nature School Holiday Programmes	Not for profit social enterprise
# 16	Sustainability	Mission: A community of learners making our world sustainable To prepare learners for the real world by equipping them with knowledge, values and skills to navigate an ever-changing world. Empowers to make an impact, not in the future, but now.	REAL: Relationships Experiential Authentic action oriented Local/global Holistic, student guided approach	Global Semi structured Social	Yr 1-13 Full weekly schedule	Private

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
# 17	Sustainability	Mission: To provide meaningful and authentic real-world experiences that create new learning pathways and worldviews for a sustainable future. Providing deep nature connections for all ages Seeks to change the way we think about education. We provide regular, local, seasonal experiences in the outdoors to connect people with their whenua - farm, land and sea.	Psycho-cultural approach, grounded in nature. This approach is guided by three core principles: Connection to our local environment Experiences that enhance hauora | well-being Contribution to a sustainable future	Regional Semi structured Social	Term time, day school programmes Holiday programmes Adult/child combined workshop	Private
# 18	Targeted Inclusive	Mission: That all gifted kiwi kids get the specialist education support they require to thrive	Pedagogy Strengths based Small classes personalised learning project based	National Structured Individual	Family of specialist education programmes One Day School Training for teachers who work with neurodiverse Online support Clubs	Private
# 19	Targeted Inclusive	Mission: To provide a positive learning experience to improve cognitive function for all students of all ages and abilities. Strengthen your brain and unlock your learning.	In person (full time in school or part time) Online (part time) Partner programmes Hybrid courses	Regional Structured Individual	Age 7+ Neurodiverse College students Adults Entrepreneurs Adults aged 55+ Full time in school	Private
# 20	Targeted inclusive	Mission: Realising learning capability, Collaborating, Making meaning	Strengths based curriculum. Four pillars: 1.Integrated, curriculum, 2. Holistic wellbeing 3. Passion based project learning, 4. Restorative behaviour, executive functioning	Regional Structured Individual	Neurodiverse learners Y2-10 Summer Academy = One Day School for neurodiverse or those with SL	Private

Unconventional Spaces of Learning (USL)	**Key Driver**	**What the USL aims to achieve for learners** (Vision, mission, objectives)	**Kaupapa - how the USL is delivered** (The pedagogical approach and how is it different to mainstream)	**Characteristics of the approach**	**Who is able to access the USL**	**How the USL is funded**
			Performing Arts, EOTC, real life skills			
# 21	Targeted Inclusive	Advocating for diversity, difference and inclusion ● Advocate ● Develop ● Direction ● Inclusion	Tutoring Private school One Day School Dyslexia Enrichment Academy (4 x per year) Before and after school care Holiday programmes	Regional Structured Individual	Neuro diverse learners	Private

Emerging trends

Of the 21 USL key drivers:

- 11 are primarily holistic
- 4 are targeted and inclusive
- 3 are sustainability focused
- 2 are individual/personalised
- 1 is primarily freedom based
- 0 social justice
- 0 social

Of course, in practice most USL are far more nuanced and embed more than one driver. Further research would provide more detailed insight into the drivers of each approach.

Regarding the characteristics of each USL a number of trends are suggested and these include the following:

- 9 are semi structured in their pedagogical approach, 7 provide fully structured learning programmes, 5 are relatively unstructured
- 9 are socially focused in their learning, 7 are primarily individually focused, 4 provide both individual and social/relational learning opportunities
- 13 USL are regional, 3 are national, and 5 are global.

One third of USL are Day School providers. In most instances, these programmes are run during term time, they are nature based and guided by experiential or play based pedagogy. All seven are privately funded. *The Education Act* (Article 53) makes provision for attendance at 'supplementary education' for one day a week where agreement has been sought between the enrolled school (school in which students attend regularly) and the supplementary provider. In the instance of one identified USL, enrolling parents are required to obtain written agreement from both Tumuaki (Principal) and lead kaiako (teacher) in their enrolled school before attendance is confirmed. This agreement must acknowledge the perceived benefit of the USL given specific learner needs and the identified New Zealand Curriculum objectives which will be met by the USL. In the instance of another USL, as the enrolled school, they also offer a One Day nature-based option for students.

The regional base of more than half of all USL was identified. It appears that there is a strong, grass roots trend of ownership and connectedness across the regional USLs especially. While regionally specific however, there are philosophical foundations that have global understanding.

Seventeen USLs in Table 2 are identified as private or independently funded and as such equitable access to these provisions is an issue worthy of further exploration. While state education in New Zealand is free between the ages of 5 and 19 and compulsory until aged 16, there are an increasing number of private USL being offered. The reasons for this are unclear and warrant further exploration. In circumstances where the specific learning needs of an individual are more effectively met through participation in programmes offered by USLs, costs for many USL must be met by whānau. These financial costs are a likely barrier for many.

There was a range of socially focused and individualised/personalised learning USLs. These reflect different key drivers and philosophical understandings of learning. Social learning requires meaningful interaction with others and can occur through collaborative, inquiry based, and creative problem-solving activities with others. Whereas individual/personalised learning places emphasis on developing the individual through targeted differentiated learning. Targeted and inclusive USLs tended to also place emphasis on individual learning needs.

As previously identified, the key driver for the majority of USL is a holistic philosophical approach to learning. Holistic learning activities ensure opportunities for whole person learning. The focus may also be toward one area of development. E.g., Holistic (nature based) or holistic (embodied/movement based). Approximately half of the holistic based USL has a strong nature-based focus.

While the historical concern of alternatives in education have tended to reflect holistic, child centred approaches and while these remain central to many USL in Table 1, there are three emerging trends:

1. Alternatives linked to sustainability and the environment (Holistic-nature-based; Sustainability).
2. Alternatives that are targeted to recognise individual learning needs (Targeted Inclusive; Individual/personalised in focus)
3. One Day alternatives.

Finally, it is worth noting that more cultural-located alternatives were not featured as key drivers; and neither was the focus on online learning. In fact, the trend with nature-based learning was far more prevalent.

Concluding thoughts

USL form part of New Zealand's unique education landscape. There are a number of questions that surround alternative provisions and these are outlined here.

1. What are unconventional spaces of learning?

   There is no universal acceptance, either in research or in governmental policy, of what exactly constitutes alternative education. Due to New Zealand's strong public education system there is a lack of general awareness and acceptance of alternative approaches to education. The lack of visibility may create barriers for those parents and caregivers seeking alternative education pathways for their children because they do not know "what's out there."

2. What contribution do unconventional spaces of learning make to education provision?

   Due to New Zealand's relatively non prescriptive national curriculum coupled with governance at a local school level, a range of bespoke schooling innovations are possible.

Alternative approaches to education exist within the conventional system (Vaughan, 2004). We need to further consider the unique contributions USL make that are novel, and valuable.

3. Do these spaces provide quality education?

   Every parent and caregiver is concerned about the quality of provision, which includes the physical and emotional safety along with curriculum, learning and assessment approaches to promote human development across a range of factors. When USL depart from standardised approaches, what checks-and-balances are in place? Additionally, what access do staff have to quality professional learning opportunities? Few USL spaces provide comprehensive provision across all age ranges. How do children and young people experience transition from these USL into new spaces or learning, or employment? The propensity to romanticise alternatives in education should be met with critical appraisal.

4. How accessible are unconventional spaces of learning for marginalised communities?

   In many cases, USL has been developed by economically advantaged communities. While there is a lack of information regarding the diversity of the student population in New Zealand's current provision, we need to carefully consider how the fees required can be prohibitive for marginalised communities who may benefit from alternative approaches. In addition, we must be mindful of the extent of cultural capital (the child and family's experiences and cultural resources) required for the transition into a USL.

5. How can these spaces last?

   USL has a history of short-lived initiatives. In the US context, Tyak and Cuban (1995) ask, "Why have outsiders' attempts to reinvent schooling—break the mold strategies—generally being short lived shooting stars?" (p.5). While there are complex social, political, and economic factors at play, we suggest central to USL's sustainability is the continuity of stable governance, ownership of the vision beyond one person, and a robust business model. Historical legacy and wider infrastructure support, such as with Steiner and Montessori schools, helps facilitate sustainable provision. A key consideration for USL providers is to appraise the extent of state funding it receives, or what it wishes to, and the trade-offs required in the process that may impact upon its novel approaches.

6. What is the place for hybrid alternatives?

   It is apparent that various hybrid models of education exist and will continue to appear. How then are these providers more intentional in establishing connections or partnerships to further amplify learning outcomes. For those attending One Day USL, how can learning triumphs and transformations achieved be integrated and valued by the school in which students are enrolled and attend for the majority of the week? How could connection

between programmes be more successfully facilitated? In the instance that a student chooses to engage regularly in these spaces, how are learning successes consolidated?

7. What can we all learn from unconventional spaces of learning?

   USL are important counterpoints to conventional education and provide models for conventional schools that seek innovative change (McGregor & Mills, 2012; te Riele, 2007). History has shown, for example, that progressive ideals for education (such as child-centred learning, inquiry-based learning, democratic values) have been slowly co-opted by conventional schools. Perhaps USL help point us to where education is headed.

Recommendations for further inquiry

The questions raised above indicate that within the New Zealand context specifically, there are many further inquiries that could be made to provide insight and understanding of USL. Based on this textual analysis study, it is recommended that further in-depth research be undertaken to explore USL through survey and interviews of USL providers, as well as where possible students and whānau.

Additionally, it is recommended that:

- The experiences of neuro diverse learners attending USL are explored to determine effectiveness in achieving goals and supporting learning and development.
- The effectiveness of USL are evaluated to determine the value and worth for those accessing the programmes.
- A focused inquiry into One Day Schools be undertaken to better understand the challenges and opportunities inherent within a hybrid model especially for neuro diverse learners (I.e., where learners are attending conventional schooling and One Day School programmes within a weekly programme). Additionally, an inquiry into the nature of transitions in and out of these programmes and between conventional schooling be explored further.
- A focused inquiry regarding equitable access be undertaken that includes an investigation into whānau experiences of gaining knowledge about and access to USL, as well as funding options that enable access and choice.
- The possibility of a conference or establishment of a network of leaders in this field be activated, to support a deeper understanding of knowledge and the sharing of ideas and good practice.

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