Whitebait Connection at Panguru Area School, Hokianga: Term 3, 2012

Co-ordinator Soozee McIntyre

Principal of Panguru Area School, Mina Pomare is determined that the freshwater investigation studies introduced by the Whitebait Connection team will continue to inform learning at this small, remote area school into the future. With fewer than 100 students, this was once the smallest area school in New Zealand, and the community it serves is spread along the northwestern reaches of the Hokianga Harbour and the perimeters of the Wara Wara Forest, which contains some of the few remnants of uncut natural forest still surviving in NZ.

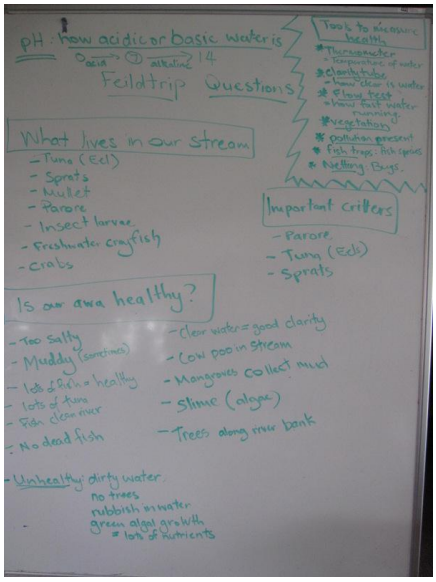
Panguru area School sits on the floodplain below the Panguru Range

So far, in term 3, all the students have been engaged in the introductory classroom sessions and have started work on collecting stories connected to the forest, water and harbour as background research for the creation of a large-scale map that will weave together historic and anecdotal information with the observations they make from the planned field trips. Some of the older children know the forest as a pig-hunting area, giving them an active interest in the issues around pest control, harvesting kai and how this fits with protecting the waterways which ultimately run to the Hokianga Harbour – also an important source of food.

Forestry and farming are the main land uses around Wara Wara and present particular challenges in this high rainfall area.

Mina is keen to see the WBC programme assist the school in initiating a Landcare group that would draw in kaitiaki from the wider community and this fits well with the broader vision shared by WBC

and DoC Kaitaia of encouraging networking amongst the schools and community surrounding Wara Wara: Panguru, Broadwood, Matihetihe and Pawarenga. WBC co-ordinator Soozee McIntyre is currently contacting each of those schools to consult on how best to set-up networking to share the methods and results of stream health monitoring and deepen understanding of sustainability issues in this unique and vulnerable environment.



Field trips are scheduled for this week (August 29). The students have identified species they consider important – mainly in terms of their edibility – and have been set tasks of finding out about the location and historical abundance of the favoured species.

Understanding the role played by invertebrates in supporting those populations will be a main theme of the study following the stream monitoring field trips. Also, with the forest on one side of the school and the harbour on the other, Panguru students are well-placed to observe the connections between fresh and salt water habitats and gain insight into how the health of one supports the health of the other.

Previous studies some of the classes have made of the mangrove area will be reviewed and incorporated in to the current programme. Students and staff are excited about pooling and extending their knowledge of the all-important and ubiquitous aquatic environments of their rohe as they engage in the WBC programme and incorporate that into their broader learning objectives.