

“Our chairs are cool. Very Cool!”

It started a long time ago, when we first started getting hoha about putting the chairs away every afternoon and getting them out every morning. They have fabric upholstered seats and had been given to us by the then-publican of the Telegraph Hotel about ten years ago.

We had sometimes thought about buying some outdoor furniture, but couldn't really justify the expense.

Then .. I saw an advertisement for Godspeed – a company that makes chairs, tables, armchairs out of pallets. They spend no longer than one hour on each piece.

“Imagine if we made some chairs that could stay outside all the time,” I said to a group of children as we put them away yet again. “So they could stay out in the rain?” “Hit the nail on the head!”

Together we looked at the web page, and the group reckoned we could do it. One of the chairs was an easy favourite. “We'd have to paint it black on the top and pink underneath!”

We looked around our yard and found quite a few pieces of suitable wood. We talked about the value of re-using such timber and how it could have just become firewood. ‘But we need firewood,’ someone commented. I agreed and pointed out that perhaps when the chairs were really old, it would become firewood ano. ‘After someone has taken the screws out so they can re-use them.’

We inspected our chairs and determined how long the legs needed to be. We looked at what we could do to make the seat stay on.

Pieces were sawn and nailed together over several days. Our nails weren't really long enough and the chair looked quite good, but was a bit wobbly.

The fencer came to hang the new gate, and he had a rasp. “A skinner!” His boys come to kindergarten and they knew just how to use it. Soon there was a group lining up to receive instruction.

It did a grand job of getting the rough bits off the edges. Alan promised to hunt out an old one he had at home.

But there was a problem. Every time they tried to attach a piece more firmly, another fell off.

Chris suggested we start ano. It was very sensible. It was dismantled. I went back to Mitre 10 for long nails and screws. We had just replaced our battery drill so we made sure it was always charged up. I also bought our very own rasp.

We were in business. Existing chairs were re-examined, plans were drawn and we started ano.

Josh told his Dad what we were doing and he brought in a big pile of dressed pine off-cuts from his joinery business. That widened the invitation - there were plenty of resources and others joined in the mahi.

A whole range of children were involved. Some came and went, others stayed and stayed. We nailed and tried to screw the pieces together. It was a bit like a three-dimensional jigsaw as we leaned it up against our old chair to see what needed to happen next.

It was frustrating. The drill does require more weight than the four year olds have to offer, but even with my help the drill bit kept slipping, and it was difficult to apply sufficient pressure.

We were left with screws that would neither come out nor go in.

Along came Tim, John & Peter's Dad.
"It's always about the bit," he explained.

The next day he came back with more drill bits (donated by Mitre 10) and two g-clamps, "to hold the wood in place while the children drill".

He also told us about 'pilot holes'. "You drill a hole that is the same diameter as the screw through the top piece of wood, then put the screw in."

Next problem was the top bar of the chair. Tearoitu suggested we tied it on. Good thinking! The screwdriver bit was changed and we drilled holes. A piece of flax held it together until we could attach it more permanently.

Two weeks later and the chair was complete. The part Chris had been waiting for had arrived. The old work shirts came out of the shed, I opened a very old and rusty tin of black paint that had been waiting just for this occasion, and by the end of the session the chair was transformed.

Time to start another.

This one went together with relative ease. I did learn to make sure the length we wanted was the piece that fell off. The other piece held by the vice always seemed to invite someone to make it another couple of inches shorter. Good sawing practice though.

Another breakthrough was Rod's explanation of the difference between 'posie' and 'phillips'. Then there was the soap - I knew it helped saws slide through the wood, but thought it helped to put it on the screw head instead of the other end.

The kids reckon we need five chairs but we do often have visitors!

During term break I couldn't help myself, and solicited the help of 8 year old moko, Kyana. We made another from the pallet pieces that were leftover from the pot cupboard we had made for the new whanau room.

Judy and Eric also tried out their chair-making skills and Judy made cushions from felt.

Wonder what Term three will bring.

The carpentry trolley is re-stocked. I have emptied Farmlands 'dunnage box' and got some rather grunty looking pieces. (p.s. new word – dunnage, packing material used to cushion cargo on a ship.) I found a metal t-square, another G-clamp and a mitre box from the second-hand tool bloke in the old Apostolic church opposite the library. P.s. ano. Mitre – to join pieces of wood; to shape the end of a piece of wood, especially by cutting it off at an angle of 45° when making a corner or mitre joint. An old metal tool box from the tip is going to be very useful and Sonia has promised us more pallets.

Our table doesn't really do justice to these new chairs .. and they will need cushions. Lucky we just bought a sewing machine for the Kindergarten!

We all learnt a lot from this exercise.

There were all the physical skills associated with carpentry. The hand-eye co-ordination, the development and strengthening of muscles, small and large.

There was communication of all sorts, and great opportunities for sharing and turn-taking.

The principle of tuakana/teina cropped up often as the more accomplished children demonstrated, advised and helped others who then took their turn as tuakana.

We needed to plan and measure and think about how things could be put together.

There was always perseverance and patience.

Tools had to be used appropriately and carefully. They had to be respected and taken care of.

It was important to have the right resources. Nails and screws that were the right length – a selection of timber that allowed choice.

Children preferred the adult sized hammers and saws. Although heavier, they did cope well with them.

There were often problems that needed to be understood and overcome.

We needed 'knowledgeable others'. Children and whanau who shared their expertise

Re-cycling materials was an underlying principle.

This exercise was sustained by the shared interest of tamariki and kaiako. It is curriculum mahi that is driven by a need. It combines all the elements of successful curriculum.

It attracted the children who love to construct, the children who love to be involved in kaiako associated mahi, those who love a project and those who loved to use the tools involved – the battery drill, g-clamps, saws.

The concepts of what makes a chair into a chair were explored.