

Note: Behind the scenes, what's actually happening?

Constructing a sustainability identity through tertiary outdoor education in Aotearoa NZ.

David Irwin, PhD

Sustainability and Outdoor Education Programmes



**Presentation draws from PhD:
Weaving the threads of education for sustainability
and outdoor education**

Research Methodology:

- **Emancipatory and participatory action research.**
- **Involved staff and students.**
- **Concerned with empirical, structural and political reflection and action (Chapman, 2004; and Cardno & Piggot-Irvine, 1994).**

The action research project:

- **Aimed to develop practical outcomes to improve education for sustainability in a bachelor degree programme.**
- **Was concerned with the development of individual and group identities relating to sustainability and their role in organisational change.**

Who am I?

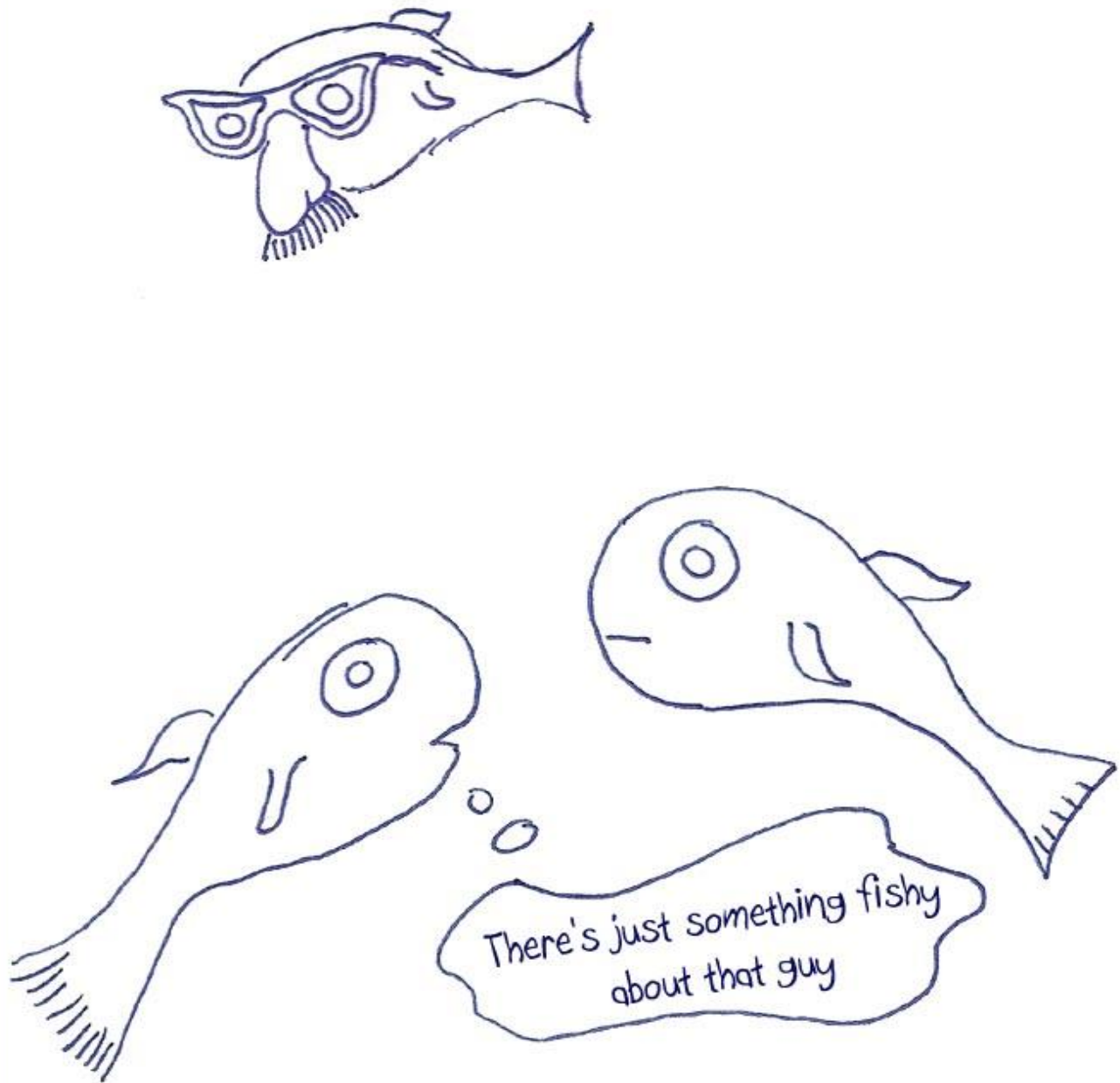
Who are you?

Who are we?

Who are they?

Order and
Buffer...

Not static ... we
(individuals and
communities)
work on our
identities



(c) M. FLYNN

"The identity work that people do is not most usefully understood as primarily an 'internal' self-focused process.

Instead, it is better understood as a coming together of inward / internal self-reflection and outward / external engagement - through talk and action - with various discursively available social identities." (Watson, 2008)

Our actions define our identity at any particular time....

- Cheyenne dog soldiers – where is your picket? What would you defend?**
- Tibetan monks – what are your stones you rebuild no matter how often they are knocked down?**

Action projects allow students time and space to explore who they are and who they could be.

Education Respects

Kindness WEEK

LAST YEAR WE USED OVER
100,000 TAKE AWAY CUPS...

RIGHT NOW THEY'RE IN A
LANDFILL

Your choice

Coffee
Coffee
Coffee
Coffee
Coffee
FREE

A small
conscience
environmental
change

The Soho takeaway
cup
Paper waste
Plastic waste
Add to land fill

Make the right
choice



TAKEAWAY CUPS USE AN OIL
LINING

THEY CAN'T BE RECYCLED

LAST YEAR WE USED OVER
100,000 TAKE AWAY CUPS...

RIGHT NOW THEY'RE IN A
LANDFILL



Make the
choice



The Reusable
cup





Recyclables. These can be recycled in Christchurch.

Plastics 3 to 7

Compostable material. eg Food, serviettes

General waste



Key individual processes were evident:

- Engaging with sustainability discourse over time increases level of comfort**
- Internal struggle to position contrasting identities (ordering and separating)**
- Not me positions (anti identity)...**

A student reflected:

“On the topic of sustainability I have worked through a cycle of feelings and opinions relating to environmental issues, which resembles the grief process. Firstly, I was in denial. Secondly the reality of the inherent destructive nature of man hit me as I examined the evidence. Thirdly, I reflected on whether there was hope that education would be beneficial. Finally, I reasoned that I have a moral obligation to attempt to make a difference in protecting our environment”...

Step 5 is ACTION...

A student reflected:

“If my neighbour is driving to work then why shouldn’t I? ... If my brothers are flying around the world having big adventures, why can’t I? ... These last couple of years of study have really increased my awareness of the environment, however ... I am not willing or prepared to make any changes in the way I live that requires any extra effort on my part, especially if my efforts are not noticeable and are insignificant from society’s point of view”



Key point: A sense of community with like minded others prevents us feeling alone

What is the role of community?

- Shared beliefs & a sense of 'we-ness' helps shape individual identity (Saunders, 2008)
- Individuals move between positions of 'in-group' (advocating sustainability) and 'out-group' (protecting the status quo)
- Social validation through acceptance of group actions leads to solidarity of the group over the wider organisation or society (allowing radical behaviours to be normalised)



Anti nuclear movement

Anti apartheid movement (in NZ)







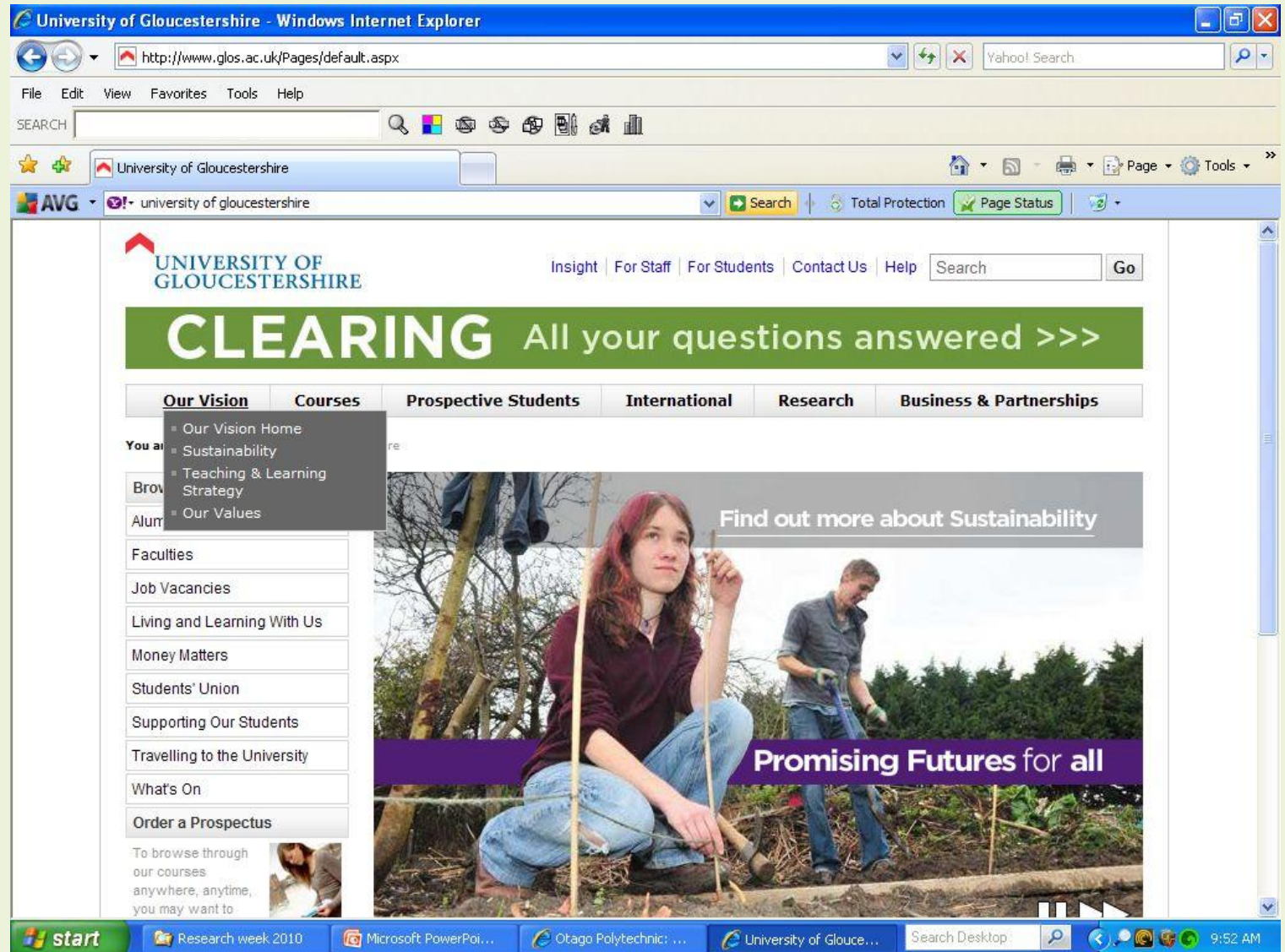
We Need
To Change
To Stop
CLIMATE
CHANGE

www.waho.co.nz

MFL

i

Our schools are communities: What messages about their identity do they portray?



- **However, community identity is characterised by chaotic concurrent and conflicting images (Alvesson et al., 2008) – and a weak sustainability identity risks being subsumed**
- **defensive positioning and counter framing**

There are many available ways an individual can present themselves to the world:

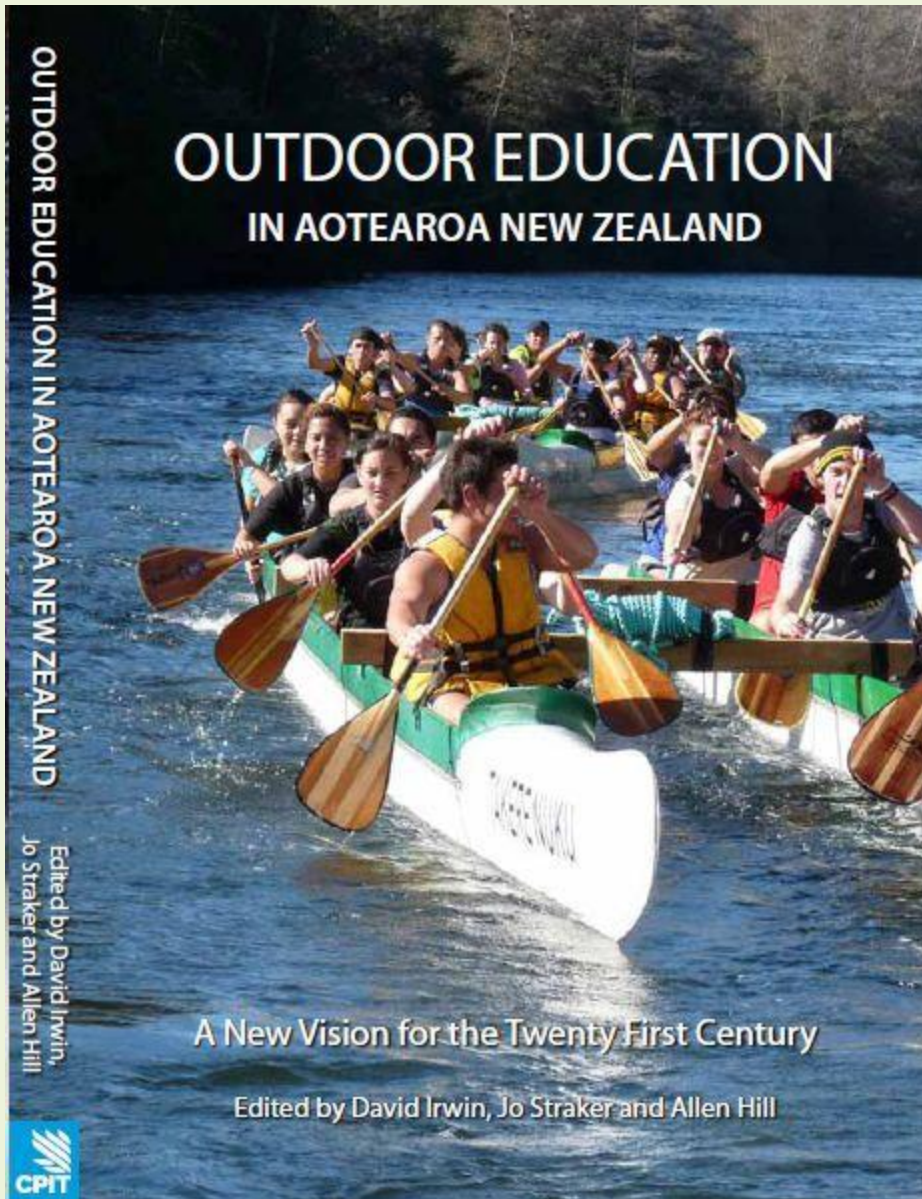
- A strong community sustainability identity encourages individuals to strengthen their own position to reduce alienation (Porter, 2005)**
- Community identity allows individuals to feel loyal**
- Individuals and groups seek validity**

There are many stories interpreting the world available to the individual:

- **Organisations (e.g. schools) signal the importance of sustainability through strategic policy formation, institutional processes, and regulation**
- **These create opportunities for the resonance of students and staff with the school's framing of sustainability**

Reflections on identity:

- **Communities create a sense of belonging and alleviate feelings of loss**
- **Affirmative actions create opportunities to explore identities**
- **Change is difficult in strongly valued social contexts**
- **Incremental changes in individual and organisational identity lead to weak sustainability**
- **Time is a critical factor – identity processes take time ... but we don't have much of that...**



NEW BOOK ... explores education in the outdoors using a social ecological framework.

Contributing authors:

Mike Boyes PhD, University of Otago

Mike Brown PhD, University of Waikato

Margie Campbell-Price, University of Otago

Marg Cosgriff, University of Waikato

Brigid and Simon Graney, SHOPC

Allen Hill PhD, University of Tasmania

David Irwin PhD, CPIT

Maureen Legge PhD, University of Auckland

Howard Reiti, University of Auckland

Jo Straker, CPIT

Liz Thevenard, Victoria University

Available from :

Education Outdoors New Zealand

Email: eonz.eo@clear.net.nz

Key resources used:

Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies . *Organization* 15(1): 5-28.

Ashford, M. (1997). The power of one. *Trumpter* 14(1)
[iuiicode:<http://www.icaap.org/iuiicode?6.14.1.2>]

Chapman, D. (2004). Sustainability and our cultural myths. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 9, 92-108

Cardno, C., & Piggot-Irvine, E. (1994). *Action research – The key to successful management training in schools*. Paper presented at the NZARE, Christchurch, New Zealand.

della Porta, D. & Diani M. (2006). *Social movements: An introduction*. Malden, MA, USA, Blackwell Publishing.

Porter, T. B. (2005). Identity subtexts in the discursive construction of sustainability [pdf]. *Electronic Journal of Radical Organisation Theory* 19(1): 1-14.

Saunders, C. (2008). Double-edged swords? Collective identity and solidarity in the environmental movement." *The British Journal of Sociology* 59(2): 227-253.

Takatsuki, H. (n.d.). Behind the scenes [Cartoon]. <http://www.japanfs.org>, Japan for sustainability.

Watson, T. J. (2008). Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances. *Organization* 15(1): 121-143.