



"How do we move the current generation of critical, interpretive thought and inquiry beyond rage to progressive political action, to theory and method that connect politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world?"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.x)

**CPIT**  
THE COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL INQUIRY AND THEORY

**If the shoe fits:  
Student activism  
and identity**

Dave Irwin

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

*"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....**

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

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

**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”*



**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)



Students acting politically: Senior Management Team support the action

Te Kāhui Manukura		Information Item
<b>Campaign Against the use of Plastic Water Bottles</b>	Meeting	3 May 2013
	Chairperson	A J
	Member	Ka-Oro

Mr Goodman is a student in the third year of the Bachelor of Sustainability and Outdoor Education. He has recently been featured in a CPT media release: [http://www.cpt.ac.nz/news/news\\_article.asp?id=1007](http://www.cpt.ac.nz/news/news_article.asp?id=1007)

Mr Goodman is currently undertaking the final project required in the degree programme. For this project, he has chosen to photograph students engaged with the act that would be committed in making one plastic water bottle. He proposes to use these photographs to create posters advocating limiting the use of plastic water bottles.

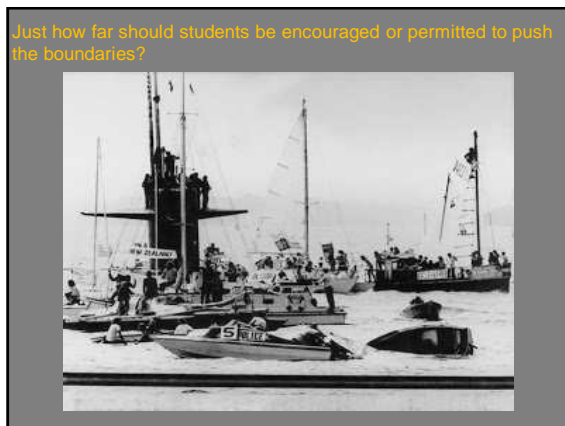
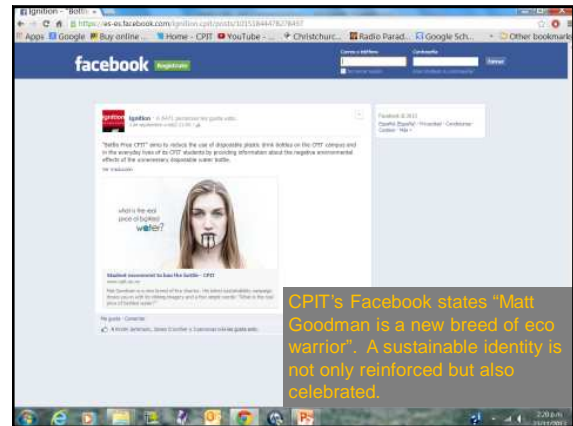
I have approved that Mr Goodman use the CPT logo on the posters and that they can be displayed around the campus.

I have asked that the Manager, Environmental contact the contacted officer and to advise them that this initiative is underway, as it may have an impact on their sales of bottled water. In addition, it should be ensured that any new building plans or refurbishments make adequate provision for water fountains.

Kay Oles  
Chief Executive

Student movement to ban the bottle

Universities and polytechnics are communities: What messages about their identity do they portray?



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

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