

# Identity and Environmental Education

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**SUMMARY** *In exploring the relevance of 'identity' and its politics to environmental education research, this article describes how issues pertaining to personal identity might be understood, both conceptually and empirically. Second, it emphasizes how the postmodern phenomenon of 'identity-seeking' in a steadfastly consumer culture is relevant to unresolved questions about the critical aspirations of environmental education. It concludes with recommendations for research, curriculum and pedagogical development about how the 'intelligent body' might be utilized in inquiry to clarify the connections of the politics of identity processes and the environmental problematic.*

## Introduction

There is a major 'lack' in the discourse of environmental education research. Too little in environmental education, geography, education for sustainable development, health education and even citizenship education has been said *directly* about 'identity'. Even less has been said about how each of these curriculum fields might benefit from grappling more earnestly with the environmental consequences of learners' (and teachers') identity development processes and lifestyle pursuits. That said, like Justin Dillon *et al.* (1999), I am concerned here with the development of research strategies into the question of identity in a post-scarcity, environmentally problematic postmodern social condition.

To assist the reader's appreciation of the complex connections of self, identity, education, environment and culture, I draw on previously published research findings (Payne, 1994, 1997, 1998a,b, 1999a; Payne & Riddell, 1999). Insights into the identity question are gleaned from studies of a rockclimber's use of first person narrative, young children's conceptions of nature, undergraduate students' embodiment of an environmental concern and a young teacher's self-understandings of working environmentally in different educational settings. These studies are part of an ongoing investigation of the desirable human condition of *for being for the environment*, for which the individual and collective (human) 'body' provides a key 'identifying' site for reflective practitioners, teachers and researchers to explain human actions, interactions and their en-

vironmental consequences. In this article I elaborate a number of conceptual and empirical insights into the idea, practices and politics of identity. Some of these challenge prevailing wisdoms in environmental education. I indicate how research into identity processes might be operationalized through various explanatory resources. In view of the current lack introduced above, I also argue that understandings of identity issues might be developed by reinterpreting existing findings and reviewing relevant research designs in environmental education. I conclude with a sample of recommendations about how research into identity and its politics might proceed. I add some thoughts on curriculum and pedagogical development.

### **Self, Identity and 'the' Environment or Nature. Some Narrative Insights**

A preliminary working notion of identity includes how I view myself, how others portray me and how I perceive those others understand me. The practices of identity relate to how I present myself in various circumstances and settings, make some sense of them, and how others relate to the various ways I present myself. Acting, interacting and communicating are vital ingredients of identity practices. The following narrative extracts, 'grounded' in the everyday experiences in which individuals routinely conduct their lives, are powerful indicators of some of the complex ways in which individuals present or see themselves in relation to various social and environmental sensibilities (Payne, 1998a). Ideally, narrativity can be a means of socio-psychological and somatic self-disclosure for what Marjorie O'Loughlin (1997) has referred to as 'embodied intelligence'—a key concern here of understanding how we act, interact and identify with our physical, social, historical and cultural environments. Narrative reasoning and its analysis is now acknowledged as an important learning tool and research device (Polkinghorne, 1995). Caution must be expressed, however, about simply equating subjectivity, narrative, identity and truth (for example, Payne, 1994; Goodson, 1995; Convery, 1999). Philosophers and social theoreticians also recognize that narrativity provides a useful means of developing and sustaining an environmental ethic (for example, Gare, 1998).

Many of the 11–12-year-old children studied had difficulties in 'identifying' with nature (Payne, 1998b):

Nature is something that has not been encouraged, touched or harmed by humans ... People don't have to watch TV, they can look out the window and see the same thing ... people would rather use technology than something that is natural. (April)

Shawn, another youngster living on the city/suburban and bush/farming 'border', struggled with his and others' experiences of nature and the related question of what is natural. In so doing, his conclusion points to a prime concern of this study—the complexity of the ways we physically experience various 'environments', understand our interactions with them and their 'nature' and, inevitably but temporarily, identify with those increasingly problematic concepts:

That's how people are naturally ... people spend a lot of time watching TV when they could go and see it outside. (Shown)

For young adult, undergraduate outdoor/environmental educators, rationalizing their embodiment of an environmental problematic proved a difficult task (Payne, 1997). Many struggled with contradictions between their bodily 'investments', lifestyle 'interests' and the chronic demands of social and cultural life. Ned's gold chain was precious to him. Doubts surfaced when his self-directed inquiries led him to recast his subjectively 'lived experience of the chain into a critical self-analysis of his 'embodiment' of a broader social and cultural context. He asked:

... are the symbolic meanings held with the chain [I wear] any more important than the environment? Am I supporting consumerism and simultaneously ignoring 'the cries' of reform to save the world from the worsening so-called 'ecological crisis'? (Ned)

Similarly, Kim anguished about her own moral 'positioning', albeit political locus of control and associated senses of accountability and responsibility:

Some of my inaction can be attributed to a sense of helplessness ... and, the way in which I am made to feel part of the problem but not part of the solution. (Kim)

More will be said directly in the following pages about these identity 'crises' and how research might make additional sense of their complexity. While little in environmental education has been stated directly about the question of identity, a great deal has been implied. The literature is replete with empirical studies and rhetorical claims about how knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours might be formed, maintained or even modified. There are numerous studies about views, beliefs, conceptions, hopes, formative/significant influences, competencies, skills and thinking of children, young adults, teachers and so on. Some studies even focus on the empowerment of individuals; others finally hear from children. There are autobiographies, studies of women and ethnic groups, local settings and environmental literacies that speak broadly to 'differences'. Other studies report on national policies, trends and developments. Most of these share a common, but indirect, concern about identity—be it personal, social, local, national or cultural. Much of this promising discourse, however, does not reveal the contradictions and ambivalences exemplified above. It needs to if we are to better understand how environmental education might work. Rather, it presumes a somewhat simplistic 'unified' self or identity and his/her appreciations, understandings and interactions with an equally simplified environment/nature. Nonetheless, the emerging vibrancy of environmental education research endorses some of the 'politics of identity' and 'difference' issues that have been played out so vigorously over the past two decades in philosophy, social theory, psychology, anthropology, literary and cultural studies.

So, despite this welcome pluralism and, possibly, *indirect* accounting for identity, the relationship of *personal identity(ies)* to the environmental, social and cultural 'situation' remains ambiguous in environmental education. In the absence of forceful insights into how personal identities are formed, destabilized, re-sought, contradicted or maintained 'for the environment' (or being neutral to, or 'against' the environment!), questions will persist about the strategies, efficacy and, ultimately, purposes of environmental education. What should we make of Les's ambivalence about a fairly fundamental question he posed of himself while

interrogating his motivations *for being* an outdoor/environmental educator (Payne, 1997)?:

Depending on how you view our society the embodiment of a consumer product can mean one of two things. If you view consumerism as an inevitable, unavoidable, irremovable aspect of modern society, the embodiment of a responsible consumer product actively reducing its impact on the environment is essentially a step in the right direction. However, if you view consumerism within society as an avoidable, displaceable ideology, any embodiment of a consumer product will essentially be destroying our natural resources and be viewed as a step in the wrong direction. (Les)

The contrasting thoughts of two more pre-service teachers of outdoor/environmental education highlight the importance of obtaining keener insights into 'where we are at' as individual 'starting points' for devising better educational interventions:

... because I don't see or feel any direct effect on myself I am quite ambivalent, or even apathetic, about changing my behaviour ... There is no comfort in knowing I am not alone. (Alan)

What I believe needs immediate attention is the state of our internal world ... we need to look further into ourselves ... is it because the crisis is not in my backyard? (Jean)

Clearly, questioning one's own (embodied) 'being' in everyday experiences is a point in the right direction of understanding one's identification with the environment, nature, or its 'crisis'. More to the point, Alan's apparent intellectual, emotional and physical loneliness and Jean's need for greater self-identification cast intriguing light on tough questions posed by Zygmunt Bauman (1995, 1997) about morally 'being with' and 'being for'. Bauman's social and political worries are also at the very heart, perhaps soul, of fairly fundamental debates in environmental education about the *identifying* use of the preposition 'for' (for example, Jickling & Spork, 1998). But, rather than dwell theoretically on that debate, Alan, for example, invites us to dig deeper into the apparent absences of his 'being with' while Jean piques curiosity about her need for 'being for' something not yet self-evident.

Moreover, Alan and Jean's comments highlight another concern about the indirect accounting for self/identity in environmental education research. Both lay strong rhetorical claim to positive attitudes to and values for the environment. Yet their embodied existential anxieties reported above belie that discursive positioning. Unchallenged subjectivities about attitudes, beliefs, values and so on may only partially capture the embodied complexities of identifying for and with a self, others and the environment. In the complexity of being human, identities are increasingly uncertain, fluid and often destabilized, as disclosed by Alan and Jean's respective struggles with the embodiment of an environmental problematic. Both reflect the ongoing struggles and predicaments many of the pre-service teachers studied have in relation to forming or 'sustaining' an identity as an environmental educator.

Their uncertainty, optimism, confusion, ambivalence or apathy presses for an educational response that has researchers acknowledge that an individual's (or

researcher's) attempts to make meaning of his/her life are not as simple or straightforward as measuring certain dispositions, evaluating certain experiences or assessing particular interventions, listening only to what they say, or pre-emptively positing a unified, coherent identity for such selves. Something additional, more encompassing is needed. Hence, this weave of conceptual and empirical insight aims to capture some of the complexity of studying and revealing embodied identities. Of particular interest is the exploration of identity within the 'continuity of experience' (Payne, 1997, 1999a,b). Here, the construction of 'unifying' narrative concepts of selfhood developed through incorporating different experiences of others, environments, times, places and spaces may help us more clearly see human agency and identity as something that is for, with, neutral or against the environment, self and others.

### 'Ises' and 'Oughts' of Self/Identity in Environmental Education

But first, some environmental educators have been assertive about the environmental or ecological identities learners *should have*. For a long time, environmental educators have theoretically embraced 'end-goals' like 'environmentally-responsible' behaviour and 'citizenship' action-skills. This type of premeditated 'ought' assumes a great deal about what 'already is' the identities of those who are to be educated. Such an instrumental logic cannot practically address what 'is' the case for Alan, Jean or April, the school and its setting, and other factors like family background, socio-economic status and so on. Shawn's preliminary identifications with nature and other identity-forming processes can be directly traced to his mixed 'place' and 'lived experience' of the city/bush 'divide', among other things.

The theoretical failure to practically acknowledge the 'already is' of human subjects is captured bluntly in Kate's fairly bleak assessment of her achievements in environmental education. Kate's happy childhood memories of rockpools, the beach, boys, the coast and eluding parents signalled in her a fierce support for 'multiple ways of knowing the environment'. This 'continuously learned from everyday experience' (Payne, 1999b) pedagogical imperative underpinned the way she now viewed her professional identity and commitments. After only 6 months in her first teaching position, Kate reflected on the theoretical/ideological aspirations 'for the environment' she held at the completion of her pre-service studies and their mismatch with the 'city kids' attending her 5-day school camp programme 'in the bush' (Payne & Riddell, 1999):

... they [the learners] have little connection with or interest in local (sic) issues, be it feral animals, water shortages, or pollution. Their appreciation of the places they visit is primarily aesthetic, while there is a real fear of the environment due to inclement weather and wildlife. The learners display little responsibility for the impact on the places they visit ... They are in 'holiday mode'.

Kate's dilemmas about her expectations, educational role and, inevitably, identity as an accomplished and environmentally-committed teacher are clear to see as she is forced to confront 'where the kids are at' in themselves (as *being for*) and with each other (as *being with*). Not dissimilar to Kim Walker's (1997) findings, Kate confirms the risks of teachers stereotyping the *being of* young learners on

the basis of their own idealistic theories and, perhaps, unrealistic 'end-goals' and 'oughts' for these kids. To her credit Kate concluded:

Maybe we as educators will get more of a response if we focus education 'for them' or education for sustaining their preferred lifestyles.

Furthermore, labels like 'greenie', 'activist', 'tree-hugger' and the like are not very helpful identity signposts either because these 'namings' are unsatisfactory reductions of the educational 'beings' of environmental education. In a nutshell, what we don't have in our pedagogical, curriculum or research activities are statements about how personal identity and its 'politics of development' might be used to help the environmental educator better see and understand children like April and Shawn, teenagers like those at Kate's camp, young adult pre-service teachers like Alan and Jean, and professional teachers like Kate.

The purpose, therefore, of this exploratory study is to alert the environmental educator and researcher to some of the complex identity-related issues confronting children, teenagers, young adults and professionals and their connections with, to, for and against themselves and the environment. If we can't come to grips with the self-understandings and formative identities of young children like Shawn and April and fail to recognize the self-trials of Kate, Jean, Alan and so on, then any theory of environmental education will become just another wish list, rhetorical device or mere slogan destined for ecotopian disappointment. It will be disappointing, like so much environmental, citizenship, health, physical and multicultural education, and education for sustainable development, because the presuppositions we make about learners, or teachers, or schools, or neighbourhoods are not 'grounded' in the everyday existences and experiences of the learners we as teachers and researchers purport to serve.

How then might we deal more earnestly with the idea and practice of identity? How do beings and selves identify in, with, even about and, hopefully for, their various environments, including nature? [1] What local, historical, social, cultural and global 'shapers' of self, social and environmental consciousness and personal identity can the learner, teacher or researcher 'come to grips with' in the educational process? And how? As already stated, my preferred starting point is the self, whose 'being' and identity are, inevitably, a repository, sedimentation, 'museum' or embodied marker of those local, historical, cultural and global shapers—albeit in highly differentiated ways according to the human 'agency' of that being. For a practical endeavour like education, exacerbated by environmental education's consistent claims for an experiential learning process, the human body provides an immediately accessible 'site' or 'laboratory' for experientially-driven inquiries. This site of action, inaction, interaction and communication, or *human praxis*, has the potential to provide the keenest of insights into how one's being is identified and enters into identifying relationships for/with 'others'. Its being *for* and *with* should, therefore, be a prime consideration of pedagogical, curriculum and research development. Thus, in summary, before environmental education *and* its subjects 'ought to be' *for* x, y or z, we need to address the already 'ises' of our individual and collective 'being-in-the-world', or where 'learners' are at, of which identity and lifestyle are key praxical conditions and, therefore, prime considerations.

## Assumptions

Any vision of environmental education also needs to bare its ideological soul. While readers may disagree with the following assertions about real trends in the 'ises' of individual and social life, my response is to ask how many of us can escape or avoid the following propositions about the actual conduct of western/northern 'life' and 'culture'. Identity formation is increasingly open to a range of powerful forces that operate above or beyond, even outside, many of the previously given factors of self and identity development. Many historical anchors like parental authority, the moral moorings of the church, the centrality of community, the sociability of schools, and the traditions of local sport are in decline, and have been for some time (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). These historical givens, sometimes myths, of individual and social life are under significant pressure from what Anthony Giddens (1991) has identified as the 'disembedding' mechanisms of a globalizing 'juggernaut' of 'late' modernity. Technology 'textures' and mediates every aspect of lived experience (Ihde, 1990). Economy and capital, now cultural capital of globalizing proportions and reach, are voracious. For many, the mall-like 'social space' of lived experience has been transformed by a marketplace that destines many 'desiring' individuals and groups towards the image, icon, star or fad. 'Just do it' that trustworthy Nike advertisement admonishes us *to be* (Goldman & Papson, 1998) and seems to capture the materialistic and consumptive 'spirit' of Giddens' juggernaut and Beck and Beck-Gersheim's (1996) individualizing processes. More and more in this 'dawning' human condition of social and cultural abstraction, post or late modern selves are left to their own devices, often outside the biographies of others (Roberts, 1995), confirming the now unbridled sovereignty of 'I' while reflecting the heightened popularity of the term 'hyperindividualism' in contemporary discussions of the 'human' condition. Even the 'wilderness' is argued to be a commodity relation, a 'naturalistic fallacy' (Beck, 1995; Cronon, 1995) where nature is at its 'death' or 'end' (Merchant, 1980; McKibben, 1990).

If an increasing number of sovereign hyperindividuals are left to find their own ways and identities in an increasingly image-driven, 'post-scarcity', consumption-oriented 'society' then both the notion of identity and the practices of lifestyle become very useful, if not essential, considerations in understanding what 'is' happening 'out there' in classrooms, schools, camps, on the internet, in neighbourhoods, at movie theatres, in shopping malls and in 'the environment'. Thus, I propose that identity formation is a more open question than it has ever been. But, let us not be overly seduced by the juggernaut express because trains follow a certain track. This post or late modern openness is qualified by acknowledging the rise of a culture of increasing constraint. Beck and Beck-Gersheim (1996), refer to this phenomenon as 'precarious freedoms'. Rather than dwell theoretically on this important idea, one extreme example should clarify the ideological starting point presumed about postmodern trends, selves and identities. The 'freedom' to choose from eight salad dressings must be seen in relation to the flattening effect of 'eating out', invariably at 'fast food' restaurants and their now 'upmarket' chain store counterparts. The traditional domestic privacy of eating is now privatized corporately. Clearly, different 'shades' of this homogenizing culture of eating and its 'discourse of diet' (Turner, 1991) exist, pointing yet again to the precarious and complex ways in

which various selves and identities embody certain local, historical, social and cultural 'shapers'. Thus, the connections of the corporeal self and his/her identity processes further distinguishes the politically and culturally contestable 'grounds' of inquiry I am proposing here.

### **Consumer Culture and Identity Seeking: Beyond the Paralysis of the Critical Will**

Critical theories of education and environmental education have not fared well recently for a variety of reasons, one being various postmodern challenges to modern interests (Payne, 1999a). Identity is a long-time critical interest that defies simple and singular definition because of the different ways philosophers, psychologists, historians, anthropologists, sociologists and others, including educators, have tackled the subject. Invariably, the idea of identity gets tangled up in postmodern discussions or deconstructions of 'autonomy', the 'self', 'individual', 'subjectivity', 'agent', 'decentring', 'being', 'personhood', 'difference', 'multiplicity' or the 'subject'. The meanings of identity are further confused when practical consideration is given to normative terms like 'duty', 'obligation', 'responsibility', 'accountability', 'care', 'position', 'status' and so on.

Three interrelated aspects or dimensions of personal identity *development* are useful for the purposes of this study. These are identity *formation* and *maintenance*, identity *seeking/manufacturing*, and identity *critique*. All warrant our attention in much the same way that Nikolas Rose (1996) calls for in interrogating how selves assemble themselves and Dillon *et al.* (1999) do in pointing to the problematic connections of personal and social identities. Here, attention is focused *critically* on the *hyperindividualized seeking of postmodern identities*, for which the previously outlined corporeally embodied self is a key understanding. Hence, for many individuals, I presume the boundary between a personal and 'social' identity, or historical and social self (Payne, 1994) is increasingly blurred and is co-terminous. Put practically, the fashionable cycle of identity displacement and seeking in the disembedding and reembedding circumstances of late modernity's juggernaut 'is' a major interest, or project, of many primary, secondary and tertiary school-aged learners—irrespective of their different backgrounds. For the vast majority of younger people, identity issues and options are now utterly entangled in the lifestyle preoccupations and consumptive imperatives of a technologically-replete, image-driven postmodernity (Featherstone, 1991; Lury, 1996; Miles, 1998; Storey, 1999) [2]. This postmodern phenomenon demands elaboration and critique in environmental, geography and sustainable development education because consumption has clear links with environmental despoliation and ecological disruption at each of the personal, social, local, regional and global levels. The focus on individualized identity *seeking* is, therefore, unabashedly political at the embodied, local, social, political, and cultural levels [3].

Rose's (1996, p. 154) central thesis about enterprising and challenged selves and identities is worth emphasizing because it helps clarify the postmodern nexus of hyperindividualism/subjectivism and the rise of human, cultural capital:



The enterprising self will make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become that which it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates *about* itself and that acts *upon* itself.

Like many others, Rose (1996, p. 159) believes consumption is a key site for what he refers to as 'experts of subjectivity'. Experts like counsellors and therapists increasingly 'govern' the soul, even in that traditionally ethical terrain of 'being for' and 'with' family, friends, colleagues. For Rose, autonomy, that historical certainty of the 'modern liberal identity', is now fashioned to the political demands of the market. Consumers, therefore, are constituted as postmodern actors seeking to maximize their 'quality of life' by assembling a 'lifestyle' through acts of choice in a world of goods. According to Rose, pedagogies of this self-fulfilling type work to translate the desires and dissatisfactions of individuals into 'precise ways of inspecting oneself, accounting for oneself and working upon oneself in order to realize one's potential, gain happiness and exercise one's autonomy'. Fed by by an increasing demand for marketers, consultants, grieving specialists, personal trainers, wilderness guides, but including teachers, school counsellors and curriculum experts, Rose's enterprisingly therapeutic self and its search for various happy identities is to be practised. Bearing in mind Beck and Beck-Gersheims caveat about 'precarious freedoms', Rose concludes, 'Freedom ... is enacted only at the price of relying upon experts of the soul' so that we might 'craft our personalities and discover who we really are.' *Ergo*.

Alan, a budding outdoor educator with strongly espoused environmental concern, owned a number of specially designed and manufactured polar fleece 'wilderness' jackets. His candid self-interrogation and introspection, now a form of embodied intelligence (subsequent to experiential inquiries, perhaps now as Rose's 'thought body') about his adventurous outdoor identity, elaborates the premise of governed souls, dubious consumer 'freedoms' and environmental consequences (Payne, 1997):

.. there are times when I am required to place, often unconsciously, a substantial amount of faith in my clothing to protect my life ... it is amazing to think in this small group there are at least 40 and overall in the course roughly 130 in number (some of whom owned up to five jackets), the amount of money they spend on equipment would probably be enough to keep one store in business (Alan).

In conclusion, one way of thinking critically about postmodern identity processes is that they entail an overt and covert 'designing of the self'. Many identities can be manufactured or customized by the cultural implosion of embodied-commodity relations. Identities increasingly are selected, shaped and played out in this more abstract or virtual scenario of individualized 'choice' and 'opportunity' (or precarious lack of) in a technologically-driven commodity culture. Nonetheless, despite these postmodern-like concerns and challenges (Payne, 1999a), the critical discourse and praxis of environmental education must not lose sight of the fact that identities are constructed differentially according to the 'already givens' of age, gender, class and race (Roberts, 1995).

## Operationalizing Research into Consumer Identities and Youth Cultures

Having explained some identity and lifestyle issues, I turn briefly to the sociology of identity because James Cote (1996), in particular, has developed a number of insights that mark out empirical possibilities for the study of youth and young adult identities. Notably, Cote's 'culture-identity link' is an attempt, like Giddens' (1984) 'duality of structure and agency' and Bourdieu's (1984) 'habitus', to explain human interactions at the interrelated levels of day-to-day action in socializing institutions like schools. These departures from the more customary (psychological/biological) explanations of self/identity, personality and human growth/development and modernist conceptions of the autonomous, rational self or poststructural deconstructions of it, are basically driven by the very recent acknowledgement of the effect of context, risk and culture on youth-identity development (Roberts, 1995; Phinney & Goossens, 1996; White & Wyn, 1998). Importantly, youth, like adolescence, is an ambiguous term that serves different interests deserving of attention, particularly when it marks out identities 'at risk' (Kelly, 1999).

Cote locates identities in a historical and cultural dimension of analysis and critique. Similar to Rose's concerns about the enterprising self, Cote concludes that consumption has emerged as a dominant way of identifying one's loyalties and relationships. One conceptual strength of Cote's analysis of, firstly, the historical dimensions of identity and, secondly, the components of identity is that when taken together they provide personal, social and cultural understandings useful for revealing the contradictory nature of identity formation and maintenance processes.

With regard to the historical dimension of identity, Cote differentiates the premodern, early modern and late modern youth identities. According to Cote, the late modern period in which we now exist is defined structurally by consumption, as outlined above. The modern period was production-oriented while the premodern identity was largely held captive to a folk, agrarian way of life. Cote claims that the structural transition from a modern, productive social condition to a late, consumptive condition is also marked by different modes of interaction. For example, family-type interactions have moved from an open, somewhat problematical role for parents and authority figures in the identity formation of inner-directed, individuated, achievement-oriented offspring to one where youth and young adults are now seen to be 'the primary architects of their own identities'. They strategically manage themselves among what Cote calls a 'community of strangers', adding fuel to the hyperindividualism thesis mentioned above. Cote adds that even parents become subservient to this youthful architectural identity demand. They, in fact, often learn from their young, the complete reversal of the authority of the parents in the tradition-directed, premodern era where identity was largely ascribed or preordained by relative social position, family/clan/kin status and other 'fixities' such as geographical situatedness.

Notwithstanding Rose's (1996, p. 24) critique of viewing changing subjectivities and identities as consequences only of wider social and cultural transformations, Cote's structured analysis leads him to identify three components of identity that might be used in research. These components are the social, personal and ego, which may or may not be in contradiction. Cote also believes

these components vary across societies and, therefore, provide an additional sensitivity for culturally-diverse research. Cote's notion of the social refers to how the individual positions him or herself and is positioned within given social structures. Personal relates to the concrete individual experience of interaction over which he or she has some control, while ego refers to the fundamentally subjective sense of oneself as a characteristic of personality. Elements of each of these, although overlapping and interdependent, are reflected in the views of Ned (Payne, 1997) and Kate (Payne & Riddell, 1999).

Of his revelations about the connections of the wearing of a gold chain and the personal and ecological consequences of wearing that chain, a gift from a close friend, Ned positioned himself personally in the following social manner:

I still wear with pride my gold chain, and since I undertook the research I have felt more justified in wearing it knowing, firstly the production that took place and, secondly, that I have chosen to continue wearing it considering the production process.

Ned's ego was clearly under a self-diagnosed pressure from what his inquiries revealed about the gold chain. His dissonance was intense. 'The decision of continuing to wear the chain was not as simple as feeling ...'. Yet, having struggled through a very emotive process of clarifying who he was, Ned concluded, '... I also needed to consider the sentimental and symbolic value meaning' (i.e. the gift) and within the play of ego, personal and social for a self/identity, he rationalized:

... and now that the chain is made, what is the problem with wearing it, is this really supporting the processes and production that are ecologically unsound ... Where do I draw the line?

Bearing in mind the limitations of space for detailed analysis, Ned's attachment to the chain might be viewed as a strong indicator of an identity he has assembled over experience, time and place. Kate, mentioned earlier with regard to the dismaying reality of her first 6 months of teaching, chose to engage in her pre-service teacher-training year with a new policy in environmental education. She felt intellectually uncomfortable with it, even before she might need to work from it as a 'fully-fledged' teacher. Kate viewed herself as a social critic of the policy. She believed the policy thwarted her own sense of professionalism, happy childhood and youthful memories, and pedagogical commitment to 'multiple ways of knowing':

This document gives only one, preferred version of how we come to 'know' the environment with a very specific set of underlying assumptions. I'm concerned that the interpretation of the environment we teach to determines the effectiveness of the message we convey.

Six months into her new teaching career, Kate was clearly annoyed by the combination of 'outdated knowledge' embedded in the camp programme and that 'historical knowledge' already embodied in the 'city kids' being. At her deeper level of being *for* and *with*, Kate was personally anxious and professionally confused by the ominous social realities of teaching children whose lack of interest in and responsibility for the local environment, unlike her own happy memories, were driven by what she interpreted in the kids as personal fear and discomfort. She conceded the kids were generally well informed about environ-

mental issues. Nonetheless, Kate's sense of a 'stable', 'unified' or even autonomous professional identity was seriously undermined by her initial experience of teaching. Kate's views of her future or assembled self typified what Roberts (1995, p. 115) describes as a process of 'active individualization'. Fairly disillusioned, Kate was very keen to 'move on' to 'something else', possibly different employment over which she hoped to gain more control of her professional work and identity. Another option was further study, something she had already 'invested' in heavily in commencing a postgraduate program.

Either way, Kate was 'enterprising'. She actively marked out the need for a unifying self-narrative both within herself and as a professional identity. Finally, after 12 frustratingly challenged months, Kate obtained a 'new' position in an innovative, rural, life-skills 'community camp' devised for year 9 students attending an inner-city private school. Clearly, Kate 'identified' strongly with this new educational environment, most of all the opportunity to be part of a different way of working with youngsters. One week into this newest opportunity, Kate confided:

I know that Xxxx is a step in the right direction ... it stirs something inside me that is difficult to articulate ... I feel privileged to be part of an organization that realises education, as we know it, needs to change if it is to reach and be meaningful for future generations ... Now I face a greater challenge—that of writing the story myself. I am fortunate to have a small group of people around me who are feeling, seeing and talking about the same things.

Elements of Cote's ego, personal and social dimensions of identity are clearly evident. At the time of writing, the marriage of Kate's emerging sense of a professional self and environmental identity remains the subject of ongoing study. What is constant (but admits to the possibility of never really finding an answer) is her search for working more meaningfully with younger learners. But who are these young learners a now more optimistic Kate had previously labelled as holidaying city kids? Like Shawn living on the mixed city/bush border, Kate's assemblage of a 'newer' professional identity will be susceptible to how she understands and works with these new city kids whose identities and lifestyles will be socially, culturally and 'environmentally' tested and, perhaps, transformed by their 10-week 'independent skills' in small-group living circumstances in this innovative, small rural town educational 'camp' setting! How will these differing architectural demands and assemblage of respective identities demands play out in egos, personally and socially?

Finally, in elaborating the empirical possibilities of Cote's conceptual framework it must be conceded that other individuals would have different ego, personal and social resources upon which active or passive identity maintenance processes might proceed. Kate, for example, reflects the active state, replete with uncertainties, tensions, challenges and continuities of 'being'. Alan's passiveness is marked by ambivalence, or 'learned helplessness'. Ned lies somewhere in between, where an active type of passiveness has been hyperationalized. For each, lies the propensity for individuals to 'unify' a narrative concept of selfhood and its associated identity processes.

In summary, what I hope the above conceptual and empirical snapshots show is the complexity of the architectural demands placed actively or passively by

the self on oneself for unifying an identity over time, place and circumstance. Inquiry, explanation, description and ultimately critique is eminently possible in educational and research 'work' that deals more emphatically with the self's increasingly 'challenged' and 'enterprising' (Rose, 1996), 'playing' (Melucci, 1996), 'saturated' (Gergen, 1991) or any other number of postmodern identities.

### Possible Directions?

Throughout this exploratory article I have been at some pains to create a conceptual and empirical weave of different subjectivities, glimpses of human agency (Scott, 1997; Payne, 1999a) and insights into the question of how identity might be constructed in a consumer culture. I have indicated one among many possible strategies for conducting research. The purpose of this approach is to invite other educators and researchers to consider the possibility that identity-seeking 'is' an educational cause of some importance and can be developed. The concerned environmental educator would be hard-pressed not to face up to the consequences of this (modern and) postmodern identity question. Less socially or politically-motivated researchers may take a more sanguine view of the relations of identity and environmental outcomes. They are encouraged to seek different insights and strategies. Nevertheless, my broad contention is that the 'is', the learner as the focus of reconstructive efforts in education, demands deliberation, inquiry and explanation before the 'oughts' of environmental education are imposed.

Dillon *et al.* (1999) have recently outlined how identity theory might inform questions in environmental education about the complex nature of the relationship between personal and social identities. Among other things, they call for a reconsideration of the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying those current research endeavours that seek to explain how individuals find themselves engaged with the environment and in environmental education. Where else might we turn for insight? Beyond the critical perspective developed here, my invitation is pragmatic given the dispersal of research interests in environmental education. The introduction to this article differentiates between literature that deals directly and indirectly with the question of identity. There are some studies that might be interpreted as contributing to an understanding of identity development. The literature on significant life experiences (SLE) includes a strong empirical component, starting with retrospective inquiries into what experiences different individuals might have had over time and which have culminated in the 'activist' identities of prominent North American environmentalists. A prominent source of information is Louise Chawla's (1998) recent review of the literature on formative influences in environmental education. It is important to note that Chawla's review concludes with a call for greater attention in research to be paid to 'inner nature' and how 'individual differences' influence the social-construction of SLEs. Identity processes and issues, however, are only implied in Chawla's recommendations and Joy Palmer's (1998) project on emergent environmentalism. Importantly, Steve Gough (1999) has summarized various appraisals of the research on SLEs. For the purposes here, however, 'significant' experience and 'critical incidents' must be seen within the 'insignificance' of the 'continuity of experience' (Payne, 1999b).

In many respects, the everyday mundaneness of Alan's wearing of a polar fleece jacket and Shawn's views about watching television are more telling.

Other promising avenues of empirical research working 'up' from the experiences of learners include, for example, Huckle's (1988, 1995) accounts of consumption and investigation of television, Mahoney's (1995) analysis of 'special ways of knowing', Barron's (1995) examination of 'gendered positioning, Hodgman's (1998) approach to critical consumerism, Pozarnik's (1995) inquiries into children's moral judgement, Hicks and Holden's (1995) study of children's pessimism and thinking skills about the future, Hicks' (1998) hopeful response by teachers to the 'psychology of despair', Robertson's (1995) account of the connections of thinking and 'place,' Hutchinson's (1997) investigations of children's futures, Hillcoat *et al.*'s (1995) and Connell *et al.*'s (1999) 'listening to children'. Hampel *et al.*'s (1996) study remains an important contribution to the unfortunately 'all but forgotten' concern of class interests, in particular the relationship of parental education levels and the environmental concerns of adolescents. Through the use of a critical ethnography, Cheryl Lousley (1999) has developed some keen insights into the culture of schooling and questions about the social relations of ethnicity, class, race and gender. How these and other 'completed' empirical studies may 'take on' more precisely a critical reinterpretation of how specific identities might be maintained, sought and critiqued invites a wide realm of possibility for future research.

Theory has occupied the minds of others in environmental education. Roger Firth (1995) is one of the few authors to have tackled the idea of identity. He also explores the relevance of a modified socially-critical perspective of environmental education to questions about identity politics. In so doing, Firth draws our attention to notions of power, subjectivity, the importance of context, language, and knowledge, all elements of what has been discussed above. But, his highly general use of these all-encompassing terms means little without any account of how (embodied) identities interact, are practically gendered, habituated, positioned, classed, circumstantially situated and geoculturally contextualized. Firth looks to the theoretical possibility of a reconstructive critical pedagogy, a conclusion written in hope, but one that appears to pre-empt certain 'ought' identities sympathetic to or already consistent with both social justice ideologies and environmental concerns. Admirable or questionable as this might be at the theoretical level, the lack of contextualizing detail and empirical qualifications supporting Firth's assumptions and recommendations begs more earnest probing in terms of what is educationally plausible.

Firth's poststructural-inspired, progressive 'critical' theorizing of environmental education contrasts with an increasing amount of rhetoric, again rarely empirical, emanating from North America and Australia about 'deep' identities (for example, LaChappelle, 1991; Bowers, 1993). Both Bowers and Firth rightly share concerns about the role of language in the construction of identities. The absence of power considerations and identity implications in Bowers' educational uptake of 'deep ecology' philosophy/theory is intriguing. By and large, the deep discourse stresses a different type of ideological 'ought' for selves and identities to what Firth has in mind. The deep discourse, including Bowers' version, seeks to anchor self-realizing and biocentric egalitarianism in ecological thinking and spirituality, among other 'folk' ways of knowing, within the 'rootedness' of 'place', 'longing for community' and other 'bioregional' type

sensibilities and wider 'identifications.' Bowers' characteristics, as oughts, bear an uncanny resemblance to Cote's description of premodern identities. Notably, the 'deep' theoretical position of identifying with nature has attracted trenchant moral, social and political criticisms for its 'rear vision' view of the future (Sylvan, 1985; Salleh, 1993; Cronon, 1995; Biehler & Staudenmaier, 1995; van Wyck, 1997; Heller, 1999). What Bowers, in particular, fails to face up to reflexively as a theorist of environmental education highly critical of modern 'progress' is the postmodern reality of the 'glocalization' and 'detraditionalization' of time, place and space, let alone how individual and social life has changed inexorably in urban and rural (and 'wilderness') settings (Beck *et al.*, 1995; Heelas *et al.*, 1996).

So, within environmental education research and *discourse* of a 'critical' persuasion there are numerous possibilities for pursuing the identity question, both theoretically and empirically. A pragmatically promising avenue for exploring identity issues is to revisit some of those current research findings and designs/methods that indirectly touch on identity issues. Needed, however, is a much sharper focus on embodied subjects, their *being* an identity or identities in the 'lifeworld'. Beyond the various suggestions made throughout this article researchers are well advised to also examine the burgeoning literature on environmental movements, often empirical in nature, in sociology and psychology (for example, Forgas & Joliffe, 1994; Frankel, 1994; Skogen, 1995; Donati, 1997; Doyle & McEarchen, 1998; Jones, 1999).

### Interrogating One's Self, Subjectivity and Identity

In conclusion, the key assumptions and principles of this exploratory article into the identity problematic are summarized below. These assumptions and principles may be adopted by the teacher, as researcher and reflective practitioner, and environmental education researcher. Following this summary, I reiterate certain ingredients of a 'curriculum' approach to learners' self-directed and/or teacher guided inquiries. This curriculum approach has been discussed at length elsewhere (Payne, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1999a). In other words, practice and theory 'come together' in the 'weave' of this article.

For environmental education, researchers might clarify the question of 'identity' by:

- Articulating a conception of the self and how it elaborates the processes of identity formation.
- Acknowledging that, to varying extents, identity and subjectivity are already functions of certain 'givens' such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, personality, rationality, emotionality, sociability and physicality.
- Conceding that this 'historical self' is also a 'social self' (Payne, 1994) whose body is constituted corporeally by various 'layers' of human, environmental, cultural and global influence. These mediating influences are also embodied differentially by the subject, invariably through the continuity of human experience in a postmodern condition. There are numerous 'everyday' forms of experience in which identity processes occur, often as projects, increasingly as part of lifestyle considerations.
- Elaborating how particular forms of 'social' experience provide for interpretations of agency. Interpretations are sorely needed to describe and explain

human praxis within different temporal, spatial and symbolic frames of reference. Of particular importance to understanding this enigmatic condition of human agency and action are the 'embodied relations', interactions and associations that are practised (knowingly and unknowingly) by selves in various social arrangements and cultural conditions.

- Realizing that identities are formed unevenly and are uncertain because of the tensions between the various constitutive dimensions and embodied relations mentioned in the previous three points.
- Appreciating that identity(ies) may not be self-evident or meaningful to the subject him/herself (or the teacher or researcher) and that inquiries into identity processes may provide a stabilizing or destabilizing means of 'unifying' the self.
- Being cautious about uncritically accepting or idealizing selves, subjectivities and their identities, by the subject him/herself and/or researcher her/himself.
- Acknowledging that identity processes and lifestyle pursuits can be for, ambivalent, against and neutral to the environment, however that 'environment/nature' might be conceptualized and constructed by the subject/identity, teacher or researcher.
- Critically accessing conceptual apparatus that demystifies everyday postmodern experience like Rose's 'critical ontology', Melucci's phenomenology of time, place and space, Ihde's technics of human experience.
- Critically accessing explanatory schemes that reveal interpretations of embodiment, agency and identity in different contexts and within various cultural frameworks like Giddens' 'structuration theory', Bourdieu's 'habitus', Foucault's 'technology of self', Dewey's 'growth' of 'organism-environment' interaction, Goffman's 'presentation of self'.
- Critically accessing appropriate analytical tools like Cote's 'culture-identity link', Giddens' 'duality of structure and agency', Ihde's phenomenological hermeneutics, Haug's 'memory work'.
- Re-examining methodological approaches to examining the human experience of identities through the utilization of ethnographic, grounded theory, life history, lived experience and narrative-type methods.
- Justifying the deliberations in education we make about ethics and politics so as to clarify and adjudicate individual and collective claims for pro-environmental identities and/or identifying with theoretically pre-emptive versions of 'nature/environment' concepts, environmental ethics and morality.
- Developing a 'political' praxis of research that ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically coheres with the understandings, aspirations, cultural situatedness and 'being' of the subjects whom the inquiries purport to serve educationally (Robottom & Hart, 1993).

Most of these principles of inquiry are contained in a curriculum approach I have previously referred to as a 'humanly-constructive' perspective of environmental education, namely 'a critical ecological ontology'. It precedes and complements the more established 'socially-critical perspective', whose lack of attention to the human subject and interpretation of agency is an acknowledged oversight in the critical theorizing of environmental education (Payne, 1999a). I conclude with a brief 'practice-oriented' account of how this humanly-constructive perspective of an education *for being for the environment* can make identity



issues far more visible to learners, and inevitably to their teachers and researchers. This perspective has equal relevance to the critical concerns of geography, health, physical, citizenship, multicultural, social and education for sustainable development.

Nine questions are offered in this social 'ontology' which, as the term suggests, is a study of the self and his/her *being for/with* along the lines suggested above. Effectively, these nine questions ask the learner to 'interrogate' his or her own everyday experiences so as to better see how they individually and collectively embody the environmental problematic, both positively and negatively (Payne, 1997). In all, the nine questions making up 'a critical ecological ontology for educational inquiry' target the 'glocalizing self', her/his 'continuity' of experience and actional consequences in the environment. The questions ask the learner to examine how his/her body and its self/identity is individually, socially and historically 'positioned' in various everyday practices and routines through the interconnected 'layers' and 'pathways' of family, school, local, neighbourhood and global realities. Environmental consequences are stressed, as could be health, citizenship or various other curriculum concerns. In one enactment of the ontology, students' self-directed inquiries typically focused on things ingested, personal hygiene and clothing/display—all performative aspects of the body site.

While no guarantees can be made about the efficacy of any curriculum approach, there were some interesting responses to this 'humanly-constructive' ontological approach to inquiry into the everyday of experience:

It took this research to realise that everything has connections and each pathway leads to another consequence to our fragile environment. (Elle)

I now have a tendency to examine everything closely and my mind begins to click over as to where things come from, how they were made, and many other related questions. (Lorraine)

Kim bemoaned the way in which the typical representations of the 'environmental crisis' made her feel 'part of the problem but not part of the solution'. She added:

I must have ... a feeling that my plans were achievable, positive and beneficial to myself, others and the environment. (Kim)

Findings from various applications of this ontological/phenomenological curriculum inquiry approach with primary, secondary, and university level students have been *reinterpreted* throughout this article for the purposes of encouraging other researchers to reinterpret their own studies.

Finally, Nikolas Rose's (1996, p. 166) coincidental call for 'a critical ontology of ourselves' and Alberto Melucci's (1996, p. 1) for a 'phenomenology of everyday experience' converge strongly with my own concerns about the need for a humanly-constructive, socio-ontological understanding of our individual and collective *for being for the environment*. Rose wants 'to document the categories and explanatory schemes according to which we think ourselves, the criteria and norms we use to judge ourselves, the practices through which we act upon ourselves and one another in order to make us particular kinds of being'. Melucci argues that experience has become an 'artificial construct', a product of

relations and representations rather than circumstances and contingencies, all of which require demystifying through a careful examination of what actually constitutes experience of the everyday. Pragmatically, Rose's and Melucci's respective calls to examine those everyday practices through which we act upon ourselves and one another is eminently feasible in schools. Conversely, 'normal' approaches to environmental education are often constrained by a self-imposed reliance on time-consuming and costly field trips to exotic locations, expensive laboratory equipment, safety requirements, contrived experiences of campaigns/problems and environmental knowledge 'experts'. All invite administrative, policy, financial or political resistances, begging the question of why the student 'body' and 'bodies' in the 'everyday' of experience is not the primary site of curriculum, pedagogical and research development in environmental education.

There is a paucity of research findings, methodological insight and curriculum/pedagogical development into the humanly-constructive assemblage of those students' bodies, their identities and lifestyles who act for, against or in ignorance of their environments and the natures they might include. Responses to this 'lack' are outlined above in an exploratory article that aims to shed conceptual and empirical light on this deficiency in the discourse of environmental education. If environmental education is to make more of a mark, we avoid these lacks at our individual risk and collective peril.

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### Notes

- [1] Psychology has traditionally said much about human development, personality and identity. More recently, the growth of environmental and ecological psychologies have shed descriptive light on human interaction with nature. Another increasingly popular approach

- to understanding subjectivity and identity is to locate subjects in the dominant 'discourses' of the environment (Dryzek, 1997; Darier, 1999). This approach has some value in explaining who we might 'be', noting various critics have expressed concern about subjects being treated as 'mere effects' of discourse (Giddens, 1987; Melucci, 1996; Rose, 1996; Ryle, 1996; O'Loughlin, 1997). Not explained in the literature that privileges discourse and text is how environmental educators might deal non-deterministically, dialectically, materialistically and practically with subjects who, as the idea of education suggests, are active, capable and mobile or fluid 'carriers' of different aspects of the socio-environmental problematic, among other things.
- [2] Consumption as a share of GDP in the United Kingdom is now at a record 64%, having grown steadily from a post- Second World War low of 55% in 1975. More than 40% of consumer spending is on services, including the leisure and lifestyle industries (Phillip Thornton, *The Independent*, 1 June 1999, p. 19). Meanwhile, Brian Hale reports that 'consumer confidence' in the United States has risen to its highest level in three decades. At the same time, the 'household saving rate' fell negatively to its lowest level since the Great Depression (The Age, *Business*, 1 July 1999, p. 2). In the same paper (p. 1), about the economic miracle in Australia, Tim Colebatch notes that consumer confidence remains high as real wages for those in full-time jobs has risen on average by 10% in the 5 years since 1993. Despite this wages growth, borrowing by households also grew rapidly.
- [3] At this point I also need to express the irrelevance of much of this article to those increasing numbers of people who live in far less privileged circumstances, often poverty-like situations, in both the North and the South (Payne, 1997). In the absence of 'voices' from those most disaffected by historical and social circumstance, environmental educators and researchers like Bak (1995) and Gonzalez-Gaudiano (1999) are far more qualified to speak on those persons' behalf because they are at least culturally-situated and locally-based. Clearly, the (precarious) 'freedom' and 'choice' we privilege are obfuscated or rendered inaccessible for many others by structural and historical 'limits' which we in the west cannot understand. Nor should we pretend to! Indeed, their consumption of basic goods and life opportunities requires expansion. This gives rise to a related research concern, even for those in the more affluent West and North, about differentiating the successes or not of identity seeking and achievement. Some 'poorer' or 'lesser' identities are developed by default rather than being chosen and sought. Zygmunt Bauman (1997, p. 183) goes so far as to coin the term 'flawed consumer'. Grounded in unevenly distributed life chances and choices, identity *expectations and aspirations* relate not only to the successful seeking of a preferred identity and lifestyle, but also to the negative identity consequences for those who do not have the opportunities, support or resources required to actively pursue identities outside what is 'given'. What, however, is not given to the flawed consumer or 'vagabond' all too often remains publicly visible in the media imagination and indiscriminate marketing of certain desirable goods, events and lifestyle opportunities.

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