

Connecting Nature with Organisation Goals

Case Study: A comparison between Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand – Strategic Goals and an Outdoor Education Field Journey.

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Introduction

Throughout New Zealand there are organizations offering outdoor education services to a wide range of ages. Since 1962, when Outward Bound (2009) was founded and in 1973 the Sir Edmund Outdoor Pursuits Centre of NZ (OPC) was founded by Graham Dingle (**Peebles** 1994), there has been an explosion of outdoor education programmes throughout New Zealand with many tertiary institutes now providing long term professional outdoor instructor and guide training.(refer table 1). The first to start a tertiary programme was Tai Poutini Polytechnic (Polytechnic 2010). Otago Polytechnic were next (Polytechnic 2010), now offering a range of outdoor programmes based either in Wanaka or Dunedin, South Island. This paper will focus on one of the Otago Polytechnics (OP) outdoor education programmes, Diploma in Outdoor Leadership and Management Level 5 (DOLM), now based from Dunedin. It will use this programme as a case study to consider how the tutors and programme structural content help students connect with nature. This paper will use the four priorities and the core values of the Otago Polytechnic organization and will argue how from the organizations strategic level an outdoor education programme may use these to help engage learners to connect with their environmental surroundings, yet disconnect from the technology that surrounds them. It will also suggest possible ways this case study may be missing some opportunities and give recommendations on how this could be applied more successfully.

From Management Big Picture to Ground Level - Inspiring Capability

Otago Polytechnic, from a management leadership level to a programme level has statements that allow the educationalists lecturer to connect these for students attending the DOLM.. Critical to this success is lecturers that deliver programmes walking the talk and ensuring on a daily level management statements are being achieved by staff and eventually by the customer; the student.

Otago Polytechnic has up to six hundred staff with over three thousand full time students per year, plus another seven thousand part time students that come to complete qualifications in certificate, diploma and

degree levels. At the heart of the organisation the leadership team has identified their core values as: caring, responsibility, partnerships, learning and excellence. The organizations catch slogan, 'Inspiring Capability' which umbrellas these core values has four priorities that drive these:

Priority 1: To lead our sector in the achievement of educational excellence

Priority 2: To be financially sustainable

Priority 3: To achieve the highest level of confidence from our communities anticipating and exceeding expectations, including our commitments to Kai Tahu.

Priority 4: Lead our sector as a socially responsible and sustainable organisation'

(Polytechnic 2010).

Keeping the organizations overall strategy in mind, the DOLM runs a 32 week, two year programme. Up to twenty four students will complete the first year and somewhere between fourteen and sixteen complete the last year. There is a natural attrition due to the young age of the learner, still finding out where and what they really want to be. People who leave the first year still leave with a certificate qualification. This attrition from first to second year raises the question; is the programme attending to all the students needs, or is this just a natural progression. More research is required; however all staff are attempting to address this for 2011.

At a programme level there is a document that drives and binds the courses together. Sustainability actions are entwined in all courses and there are some separate identified objectives that give resolute focus for the programme (Refer: Example of Sustainable Practices at a Programme Document Level). For management statements to meet tangible reality for students, lecturers play a critical role in bridging this gap. Key to its success is how it is done.

Applied case study - Rock Climbing Journey to Wye Creek, Queenstown

A typical trip that occurs may consist of leaving from Dunedin, South Island and travelling over to Queenstown to go rock climbing at Wye Creek, (Refer Map of New Zealand) based on the eastern side of Lake Wakatipu. This journey has the potential to fulfill the organization and programme statements; however, once grounded in reflection may also show there are gaps and needs for improvements.

Planning

Prior to any trip happening there has to be a level of planning. Integral to all planning is how all people may be able to operate in a sustainable way and connect with their surrounding nature. An Activity



Operations Plan is completed that is site specific. Discussion at staff meetings and in corridors set the scene for how the trip is to be undertaken. Key considerations might be: Length of journey, where are the stopping points along the way, composting, excess rubbish issues, equipment required, safety management systems and readings about the place we may visit.

Discussions with students on what camping and climbing equipment to take is generally already established throughout other journeys that have occurred previously. What we need to reemphasise is minimisation of the use of food packaging, where the excess food waste and human waste may go and to remind students of not taking the 'kitchen sink'. By doing this we are encouraging a sense of responsibility towards the environment they are going to travel too, we also lighten their load on their back they will have to carry up hill. This will allow them to enjoy the fruits of the surrounding environment. Too often students will still be overloaded with equipment, bring inappropriate belongings that are not required, however the seed is replanted and so the process begins over to engage and think about the area they are going to be visiting. Still stuck by the influences of modern technology, it is challenging to free a learner from their shackles of a concrete jungle and influence from friends. It is the lecturers responsibility to attempt to disconnect the students from the technology they seemed glued too every day. Cell phones, I Pods and other techno gadgets are not allowed once we leave the vehicle. These seem to be the wireless connection to their friends and others they crave liked starved vultures on the hunt.

We may discuss issues that may arise about their impact and footprint they leave when travelling through the country to pursue personal climbing goals. Already a relationship is starting to build and the overall aim of engaging with this sort of activity is to help the student to become less focused on self and establish a broader, balanced focus on connections with nature, including their fellow students.

Travelling

Travelling to the destination has many opportunities to connect students to their surroundings. Too many times vehicles travel from A to B, without stopping at points to reflect on why a certain event may have occurred and its effects on the surrounding area. An example of this may be the Clutha River Dam in Clyde. Originally in the 1980s and right up to the 1990s the Clutha River was a raging, wild and lively river that flowed from Lake Wakatipu out to the East Coast, past Balclutha. It was famous for its gold mining in the 1800s and had some of the best white-water kayaking in New Zealand available at the time. In the 80s the New Zealand government decided to dam the river for a hydro power scheme. The government coined the phrase on all these projects throughout New Zealand as "Think Big". This particular project caused a lot of controversy, as the country was going into large debt and the project was being built directly along a major earthquake fault (Rush 2010). Today, the dam has flooded the majority of the river forming what is now known as Lake Dunstan. It also flooded an existing township, Cromwell, of which the inhabitants have been relocated to higher ground. I distinctly remember cycle touring past this river when I was a fourteen years old and I have old photos of the river prior to the dam. It was so raw with power and beauty; my photography did not focus on anyone, just the water and ability to cascade ruthlessly through the gorge, bouncing off jagged valley walls. We cycled through what is the old town of Clyde. I pass through now, hardly recognizing the area, trying to imagine where I might have cycled, now submerged below 20 meters of slow still dark water.

The journey for our students almost follows the river valley all the way to its source, Lake Wakatipu. This

allows for many countless opportunities to stop, which we do, to connect and reflect on the history and implications of the Clyde dam. This part of the journey works well to link to another course; Environmental Science and Education 2. This course asks the students to take on an 'Action Project' where they plan, prepare and engage some sort of action that will have an effect on the environment and a small community.



Key to getting students to make nature connections initially is ensuring the listener is engaged. To have '...no physical threats and be in a positive, respectful learning environment without fear of ridicule'. (Union 2006) requires this culture to be set well in advance. This is achieved by actively working with the group earlier in the year and maintaining consistency around the core values of the Organisation i.e. Otago Polytechnic (Polytechnic 2010) and the values that are agreed to by the students in a meeting to absorb these early. (Refer Photo of Student Agreed Values). If I can be confident the group has had these group cultural foundations laid out the story and journey may begin with the prospect of a better connection with place.

Finding a place that is relatively comfortable is crucial; otherwise people are not receptive to what is happening. I believe Maslow's hierarchy of needs still (Union 2006) plays a large part in enabling education successes. Learners need to feel physically secure (warm), fed and watered and their basic needs addressed. (Union 2006). Selection of an appropriate site to engage with the environment satisfies these basic necessities helps to increase the 'receptiveness' of the student and teacher. Weather can also play a large part in site selection. Sometimes, we may stop at the dam and I have asked students to take a photo with their phones. It is surprising how many students have this technology readily available. We may have a discussion of way of introduction about the area and then travel to a place that is supportive to a learning environment. There I can connect the dots on why we stopped. There I can plant the seed that there is more to the land, when travelling at 100km / hour and it can be important to engage along the way and not forget.

Using story telling is a technique that allows our students to connect with the teller, themselves and the wider environment. It is a powerful teaching tool. In every story, no matter what is told, there is always an element of truth and our stories are no different. Often the art of telling a good story is adding your own flare and personal touch. After all; that's how legends are born! It is important not to try and fill the learner with facts. Using the acronym E.R.O.T. (Crabtree 2002) as a basis this often guides me with whatever I may chose to deliver. Stories have to be E=Entertaining, R= Relative to the situation, O= Organised, containing a start, middle and end and T= Thematic: contain some sort of theme. Stories can connect people with nature and the power of the imagination can be boundless if harnessed the correct way. The Clutha River offers many opportunities for stories. It is riddled with history to the present day; gold mining, geological science based, artistic poetry. I use these along the way at the stops to connect our students with what they see. I am learning too. This is a shared experience, inspiring me to research further.

Destination

On these journeys people's perception, once they arrive at the destination can be altered. Already there has been discussion, thought and transference of their relationship with the surrounding nature and themselves as adventure participants.

Stories have been told, discussion may have occurred, questions will still be unanswered on the learners connectivity with earth, water and themselves.

Arriving at the destination is a chance to ground people's connection. Leaving a vehicle, carrying a pack full of heavy climbing and overnight equipment and walking up a steep hill for two hours is a great medium for slowing the pace and allowing people silent space to reflect.



No technology allowed from here on in. This is the chance to completely disconnect our students from the wireless plethora etc. Climbing up, some gasp, some handle this ascent with ease. Some miss their phones! There are regular breaks in the climb, allowing people to catch their breath and take in the majestic vista of surrounding mountains and lakes. As a facilitator, it is imperative the teaching moments are utilized. We are looking for these at all times, ready to enhance the learners experience by turning the right learning combination lock on (Beard 2002). Beard (2002) discusses the analogy of the learner having a complicated combination lock and it is up to both parties to find the right code to unlock the learners potential. He describes, *“methods that enable people to make sense of their experience, as well as methods to develop and practices new behaviors. The techniques include mood setting, drama, creative writing, art, meditation, environmental modification and routine rituals”*. Being with learners that are in an inspirational environment can enable them to find clarity and focus on the beauty surrounding them. It may heighten their senses to what they may value and believe in. They may forget their personal baggage, unshackled from the city and engage with nature in a more sincere way. Climbing up to our destination, Wye Creek, camping there and returning allows for these experiences to be unleashed, and if the facilitator is skilled enough, allow these to be of great benefit to the learner.

Arriving at the site it is awe inspiring. There is little room to move. Steep ground falls away to the valley below. Put something down wrong and it is automatically bounding and rolling towards the bottom valley. We are there to go climbing, that is the now the focus. And with such exposure, that is their focus. Until they become comfortable with the surrounding, safety is paramount. The rest of the day is made up gymnastics on the rock face. This is still the facilitators' chance to connect the learner with nature even here. They are close to the rock, hands, and feet and sometimes face. They can now smell the rock, a plant and almost taste it, sometimes they do; grit in the mouth, blown from the breeze. Discussion can occur over the day as to what sort of rock it is, how it was formed and what is their relationship with this area.

The pure act of climbing is a powerful and exciting pursuit, no matter what level people are at.

Professional Climber Brittany Griffith describes her first experience, *“The first day I ever tried climbing was the first day of this road trip (vedavoo, Wyoming). My attraction to the sport was immediate. The lifestyle really appealed to me – living, eating, waking, sleeping, and playing outdoors. I had never felt so natural in my whole life. It was the first thing that ever really made sense to me.”*(Brown 2009). Emersion into a natural environment, even for a short period can have a profound effect on many participants. Ethics are discussed. Should people put bolts in rocks, should chalk be used?

Questions are raised about what they are doing, and, is it right to be here?

These discussions are not about conclusions. They are about

challenging people's paradigms, heightening awareness of actions for future considerations on how they



may work in harmony with nature, not against. It is the process of discovery, not the end result that matters in these conversations'

When night time falls, during and after dinner the view is spectacular. We all sit with our warm clothes on fending off the evening chill, laugh and chat about the day, and gaze out onto a vista which is hard to ignore. Students often compare their living room space back at their flats and compare the view. Nothing compares in the end. It's a view so stunning each person connects only on their own way and on their own terms. Even the lights of far towns, although artificial enhances the experience. For that is the learners and facilitators connection back to familiarity. That is where they have come from, the concrete jungle where life seems to be able to be down loaded at a terabyte per second. In Norway there is a word, 'friluftsliv' that is associated with outdoor life, originally coined by Henrik Ibsen (Dahle 2003). Dahl (2003) describes: "*I believe that friluftsliv, first and foremost, is about feeling the joy of being out in nature, alone or with others, feeling pleasure and experiencing harmony with the surroundings— only being in nature and doing something that is meaningful for me—here and now*". Sitting, looking out with, bellies full, this is a time where 'here and now' can be the most prominent feature in people's minds. This has become evident in some verbal feedback I have received from these journeys.

Returning

Two days in the field, climbing with sore bodies now and the time is at an end. We must descend back to the transport and travel back. Waste, including human feces', is carried out in compostable bags. The impact on this small yet delicate environment has been minimized, however no matter what people do, there still is an impact.

Learners and facilitators are torn between wanting a clean shower, yet not wanting to leave this stunning area. Their connection with the land has been heightened. All participants travel easily, cutting the ascent time by half, descending back to vehicle. There are still teaching moments available. At the vehicle we chat. There is a time of silence where people sit facing a view and reflect on their experiences. Reflective journals are used as a record, documenting the thoughts and moods. Time for quiet is critical in enabling learners to connect with nature. There are moments throughout the whole programme these can occur, however if a facilitator is not tuned to these times they can be lost – forever!

Travelling now often consists of stopping for food and fuel and travelling back to home. There is not much room in the minds of learners for more reflection. Their hierarchy of needs is focused on texting their friends, getting on social medias and getting a shower. This is often not the best time for a facilitator to enhance nature's connection with the learner, however as time allows, days later, reflection naturally occurs. This is the value of having learners on a two year programme where we can meet again a week or two later. We can reflect on what happened in the field and how their relationship with nature changes? The time can be programmed in so as not lost. There are other times when pursuits are carried out and these can be connected with past experiences so as these connections can become stronger.

If the experience has been well orchestrated by the facilitator, these experiences can be what priest describes as 'Peak Experiences' (Priest and Gass 2005). "*The state of mind concept dictates human behavior and , in turn, is driven by human perceptions of reality*".p160 (2005). Hitting this sort of a mark with a student is what we aim to do.

Links to Organisation

Meeting organisational goals that are developed at a management level and then implemented at a tangible practical level is easily lost in translation. Lost because they are not prominent on a trip and easily forgotten in big organisations' and the hurry to get the trip completed. This case study has managed to identify some core values and priorities laid out by management that were met. For example, there is no question that tutors were caring, responsible, strive for excellence and richer partnerships between the students, land and pursuit. However to what degree and depth is still subjective. How does a tutor know they have met the management aims and how do they gauge this. Management do not offer any way for this to be qualified directly linking to the core values or priorities. Only at the end of a course or programme are there surveys conducted to gain qualified data from the students experiences.

Did we Inspire connection with nature without harming nature? The Otago Polytechnics core values are critical to this being achieved. We were caring with our students and our environment by bring all our waste out, however we burnt fossil fuels in our vehicles to get there, used food that may have had large air miles and wrapping that will go into the land fill for five hundred years or more. We were financial sustainable with our camping. No camping fees or access fees; however staffing was the biggest costs. With safety ratios for lead rock climbing at 1:4 this meant there had to be two facilitators present. It costs for the vehicle, facilitator's food and overnight allowance. We developed partnerships with each other and I could argue we developed a better partnership with the environment. We return to this environment every year. This enables our staff to develop a relationship with this area and the connecting areas along the journey. All relationships take time, and this one between human and place are no different. Students often say *'they are inspired and blown away from being in this place'*. What is more valuable, is when the return under their own basis. They revisit, adding the ingredients themselves and making their own personal connections. However we may not have developed a strong partnership with the Tangata Whenua i.e. connecting people and land to the indigenous people. This is a disadvantage when not Maori and having a lack of understanding, or resource of people to connect with. This deserves further effort to enhance this possibility, which in turn will help facilitators connect better to place.

Did we meet our four priorities?

We may consider we lead with educational excellence, however what is this compared to? Defining the word excellence is another paper and this leaves questions in my mind. I have mentioned financial sustainability. Could we have all caught some public transport? What is the trade off for the time it may take to get to our destination and not being able to stop along the way? We did not engage with local communities on this trip, however we had started to lead our sector (the outdoor industry) in a social and responsible way by engaging with stops along the way, connecting our learners to historical issues and the present and caring for the environment while in the area.

Conclusions

By having a wider understanding of the Otago Polytechnics and the adventure programmes values and overall goals these can play an important part of the planning and every day applied education. In this paper I have presented the Otago Polytechnics strategies and linked these to an applied case study - Rock Climbing Journey to Wye Creek, Queenstown.

This case study enabled learners to be connected to nature based on a sound process of the 'before'; discussion, planning meetings. The 'journey'; traveling and stopping at areas that connect to place. The destination; slowing the pace down, discussion and becoming closer physically to the land and rock and; The 'follow up': traveling back, reflection and later in weeks connecting students to previous trips in other areas. While time is short, i.e. this journey only lasting three to four days, the programme allows for

further reflection afterwards and follow up, allowing the student to continue to connect with their experiences thus connecting with place in a very different spatial way.

Planning served an important role in setting the scene and enabled different factors to be considered prior to the trip. Through staff meetings and discussions with students we could consider a better sustainable way of approaching the journey. It also opened opportunities to engage the learners about their approach with packing and preparations. Their initial expectations are heightened, yet there is still a mystery about the journey they are about to embark upon.

Traveling to the destination is a journey within a journey. This is a critical stage where the facilitator can alter and open up the minds of the students to a different perspective of the land, people's influences and how it may affect them. Too many journeys travel to their destination without taking time to embrace areas along the way. In this case study we were able to follow most of the Clutha River to its source and stop along the way and discuss what changes that have occurred and how they have had a dramatic impact on the landscape all the way back to Dunedin. Although our travel pace is on average between 80 to 100 km / hour, we knew where to stop, ensuring the basics of the students were still in fresh supply i.e. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, we could engage the students along the way. Right up to our final parking spot before we completed our climb to the climbing area and camp site.

At our destination, Wye Creek, we are able to ground the connections with our students and surroundings. The pace is slower as we move on and camp in the valley. It requires more effort however the rewards are personally high. These are not realized until they are undertaken. There is time for discussion and this is where the Norwegian word 'friluftsliv' plays a prominent part. There 'here and now' (Dahle 2003) is at its strongest. Often a facilitator will let that be and not interject any suggestions or questions. Nature here can be at its strongest for student and place.

Returning to home is often more focused, however there are teaching opportunities' along the way. Maybe while descending, at the vehicle. The value of a long programme, i.e. two years is that we can still help the students transfer their learning into their every-day lives. Inspiring capability in students' long term has life-long benefits to the individual and to the communities they may chose to be a part of.

Organisational core values and key priorities are possible to blend with grass root field trips, however there is room for further research as to how to better quantify this within a programme. Enabling regular data gathering that is not cumbersome to the student and lecturer will continue to be a challenge to assure these two are better entwined in an outdoor education programme

Example of Sustainable Practices at a Programme Document Level

The outdoor adventure industry has a vested interest in sustainability, - social, economic and environmental. This programme will have: an embedded focus on being pro active around contemporary sustainable theory and practice within the outdoor industry, taught in the specific disciplines and theoretical papers.

Graduates of the Otago Institute of Sport and Adventure will understand the complexity of sustainability in society and outdoor education. In particular they will have the ability to apply sustainable practices to their outdoor profession.

They will learn this throughout their courses with a focus on:

- Developing a connection with the natural world around them through experiential education,

- Developing a deeper level of communication between others,
- Achieving a deeper ecology practice by investigating their own self realisation,
- Role modeling of best practices in sustainability,
- Transport minimisation such as car pooling, using public transport, providing events where minimal or equalised transportation is considered for participants;
- Nutrition; healthy eating for optimal health and performance, antioxidant and nutritional benefits of organic food, food miles, farmers markets, GM foods, fair-trade,
- Issues with water and land conservation,
- Outdoor and sporting products; traceability, fair trade, fuel miles, waste minimisation, rethink, reduction, redesign, reuse and recycle
- The understanding that physical activity has a role to play in the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.

(Thompson 2010)

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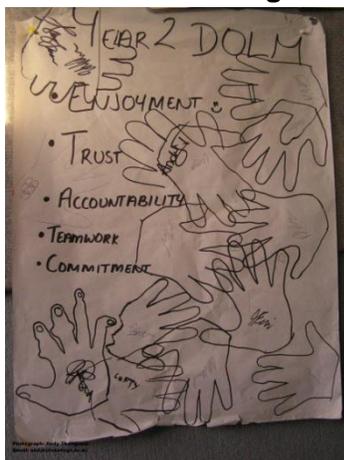
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Table 1: Time-line Summary of New Zealand Prominent Outdoor Centres

Year Outdoor Programme Established	Organisation
1962	Outward Bound (OB)
1973	Sir Edmund Outdoor Pursuits Centre of NZ (OPC)
1978	Boyle Lodge
1979	Tihoi Venture School
1986	Taranaki Outdoor Pursuits Centre (TOPEC)
1992	Tai Poutini Polytechnic
1995	Otago Polytechnic (OP)
1996	Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT)
1995	Whitireia Polytechnic
1987	Army Adventurous Training Centre (AATC)
1991	Auckland University Technology (AUT)
2006	Outdoor Pursuits Centre - Great Barrier Island
1994	Peel Forest Outdoor Pursuits Centre
1989	Hamilton Skills Centre

Photo of Student Agreed Values

New Zealand Map. Source: (Google 2010)

