

ABSTRACT

MOVING FORCE: CASE STUDY OF A SUSTAINABILITY TOUR AS A POTENTIAL VEHICLE TO ENHANCE APPLICATION OF LEARNING

Despite concentrated efforts by sustainability practitioners and educators around the world, very little progress has been made in terms of creating more sustainable communities. Many of those same practitioners and educators are now calling for a paradigm shift – a new story that will move us away from the view of the world as a machine to one in which the world is seen as a network, a holistic system of interconnections and relationships. Experiential educational methods are acknowledged as the most effective means for teaching and learning “systems” thinking, a key sustainability competency. This is an exploratory case study of one such method – an annual sustainability tour course within a larger certificate program for sustainable community development in a continuing education unit at a major BC academic institution.

The purpose of this research was to gain a better understanding of the perceived influence that an educative experience in the form of a sustainability tour had on participant learning, the features of the tour format that contributed to participant learning, and factors that participants believe enhanced or inhibited application of what they learned. In keeping with a long tradition in adult education research of employing multiple lenses in order to assess program effects, a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework was developed that included theories from systems thinking, sustainability, adult education, program planning and evaluation, application of learning, the sociology of tourism, and cognitive science. Qualitative research methods were employed; both course participants and facilitators from the wider certificate program were interviewed, and a number of course-related documents were analyzed. Findings indicate that the tour format has unique features that produce a “tour effect” that may not only enhance learning, but contribute to deeper embodied learning, and thereby increase the likelihood for applying learning. The tour itself was found to be a flexible, multi-vocal mobile storytelling vehicle, one that can play a critical role in moving us into a new story.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

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