

ONLINE LEARNING: REFLECTIONS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TWO UNDERGRADUATE TOURISM MODULES - SUSTAINABILITY AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Within travel and tourism education, there is a growing emphasis on values based education as well as an increasing focus on sustainability, corporate social responsibility and business ethics as embedded and stand alone curricula content in undergraduate student courses and programs of study.

Using an action research approach, online modules addressing sustainability and corporate social responsibility were developed, trialled and implemented as on-going "living" components of an undergraduate tourism enterprise management course. The learning materials included written text, visuals, audio recordings, links to related readings, video and digital media as well as self audit and personal calculators/indices related to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. A key component in both modules was the incorporation of a reflexive journal. Prompts, using questions and reflexive points embedded in the modules, initiated journal entries.

Action research was chosen since it is an effective way to implement, monitor and evaluate changes to educational curricula. Paradigmatically, action research has an ontological or worldview that is collectively constructed, and an epistemology which is embodied, situated and hermeneutically framed. In this study, the methodology was qualitatively founded. Axiologically, the study was value leaden with a transformation intent of improving educational curricula, specifically, values related to sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

The action research participants were the course convenor, tutor, and tourism students involved in the tourism enterprise management course. Empirical materials included qualitative conversations between convenor and tutor, convenor or tutor with students, written learning-teaching materials generated by students as well as reflexive journals kept by the convenor and tutor. The empirical materials were interpreted using constant comparison.

During the semester, students engaged in the modules in lieu of regular face to face learning-teaching interactions. The students indicated that the modules were a change from face to face interaction and added variety to the course's suite of learning contexts. Such independent study experiences increased student reflections and there was a strong appreciation of having a teaching-learning engagement, which did not have to be supported by academic references but rather with student critical reflections.

While on the surface, it may appear that the two modules provided students with stand alone learning opportunities, this was not the case. Students were regularly required to engage with module content in lectures, tutorials and assessment tasks. Further, student reflections on their own learning indicated that they had gained broader perspectives and understandings from engagement in the modules and used those in other learning components of the course.

Improvements to the "living" content of the two modules relate to: the constant need for maintenance and review for currency; offsetting module text density and complexity with regard to English language ability of students; clarifying perceptions of repetition; and coaching students' effective decision-making when offered diversity and choice in media with which to engage.

Overall, the modules were an innovation to the course's teaching-learning engagements and were viewed by the students as effective means to reflexively engage with course content.

keywords: online learning modules, sustainability, corporate social responsibility, action research.