

Chapter 7

Exploring the Global in Student Assessment and Feedback for Sustainable Tourism Education

Stephen Wearing, Michael A. Tarrant, Stephen Schweinsberg,
Kevin Lyons, and Krystina Stoner

Abstract This chapter examines a values-based approach to teaching sustainable tourism management and the related student assessment and feedback mechanisms that reinforce it. The chapter considers and describes how this values-based approach is pedagogically activated by employing critical thinking, self-directed and experiential learning techniques. It draws upon a number of subjects taught by two Universities: one in the USA and one in Australia that use values associated with global citizenship and lifelong learning as frameworks that provide a personally meaningful link between students and the concepts central to sustainable tourism. Particular attention is given to describing alternative assessment and feedback tools that support a values-based approach to sustainable tourism education and to the use of assessable learning contracts, and learning modules.

Keywords Experiential education • Lifelong learning • Sustainability • Global citizenship

7.1 Introduction

In 2012 the United Nations enacted the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative as part of the Rio+20 Summit. This initiative aims, by June 2015, to provide opportunities for ‘thousands of university students across multiple disciplines [to gain] knowledge of sustainability concepts that can be applied in the

S. Wearing (✉) • S. Schweinsberg
University of Technology Sydney, Ultimo, NSW, Australia
e-mail: Stephen.Wearing@uts.edu.au; Stephen.Schweinsberg@uts.edu.au

M.A. Tarrant • K. Stoner
University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA
e-mail: Tarrant@uga.edu; kstoner@uga.edu

K. Lyons
University of Newcastle, Callaghan, NSW, Australia
e-mail: Kevin.Lyons@newcastle.edu.au

marketplace and in living more sustainable lifestyles' (United Nations, 2012). Growth in youth interest in green consumerism (Autio & Heinonen, 2004), along with an increasing alignment of tourism industries globally to Pine and Gilmore's conceptualization of an experience economy has made the youth market who are seeking experiences and green product has made tourism a fertile ground for sustainability scholarship. This trend is evidenced in the development of designated journals (e.g., *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*) and academic think tanks (e.g., BEST Education Network). It is also, unfortunately we would suggest, often too closely connected to what Belhassen and Caton (2011, p. 1389) describe as the alignment of education to 'the logic of capitalist relations of production and consumption'.

Over the past 20 years there has been a formal realization of the value of sustainability education (see Ecologically Sustainable Development Steering Committee, 1992). Schweinsberg, Wearing, and McManus (2013) have noted that such sustainability pedagogy is particularly relevant for the Business Schools in which many tourism educators are now housed. Quigley (2011) has noted that 'in the wake of the global financial crisis, universities were widely condemned for schooling their business graduates in the ruthless pursuit of profit and failing to instil in them a broader set of skills needed to successfully lead business' (p.10).

Of course, not all courses on sustainable tourism are located within business schools. Increasingly, schools of environmental science, geography and forestry are offering such courses. However, the challenge still remains as to how to best prepare students of sustainable tourism in such a way that it can inform their personal and professional lives in the future. To this end, the BEST Education Network has called for tourism students to be equipped with a suite of more generic skills relating to ethics, stewardship, professionalism, knowledge and mutual respect (Sheldon in Liburd & Edwards, 2010, p. viii).

In this chapter we explore how such ambitious goals can be realised through the development and application of a values-based approach to teaching sustainable tourism management. Later in this chapter, we describe and discuss how assessable learning contracts, and learning modules are particularly useful in forging personally meaningful connections to the principles of sustainability as it applies to tourism. However, before exploring these more applied features it is important to describe how a values based approach involves personalizing sustainability. Rather than treating sustainable tourism as a topic to be learned and regurgitated in an examination or essay, a values-based approach asks students to personally engage in experiential learning that is potentially transformative. Such an approach challenges students to consider what it means for them to be global citizens who enact sustainable principles as part of a lifelong learning process.

7.2 Global Citizenship, Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Tourism Principles

A values-based approach to sustainable tourism education is grounded in the value sets associated with becoming a ‘good’ global citizen. Arguably, in the twenty-first century, the nation is no longer the exclusive framework for social, cultural and political identification (e.g. Banks, 2004). Issues such as climate change, international population flows, cross-border exchanges and the supply and equitable distribution of international resources are undeniably global in scope. Transcending national borders, these issues impact and challenge the very notion of a nationally bounded citizenry (Kofman, 2005). As a result, citizenship is shifting scale, moving away from national affiliations toward global forms of belonging, responsibility and political action (Lyons et al., 2012).

To educate for this it is generally accepted that within these notions exist three key dimensions (Morais & Ogden, 2011; Schattle, 2009; Tarrant et al., 2011): social responsibility, global awareness, and civic responsibility. The authors approach to sustainable tourism education seeks to engage the student in a shift of worldview towards one of global awareness and citizenship. By aligning student assessment and feedback with transformative and reflective experiences, we seek to facilitate students in achieving, fostering and cultivating social good through the deployment of social capital in both host and guest environments. This is a process which has emerged as an important conduit of change and an enabling mechanism in fostering an interconnected global citizenry. An example of this and related assessment techniques as it has been implemented at the University of Georgia are described later in this chapter.

Indeed, the sustainable tourism framework provides a platform by which to engage students as socially responsible citizens (Sheldon, Fesenmaier, & Tribe, 2011; Tarrant, Lyons et al., *in press*), an educational opportunity that, we believe, is occurring at critical junctures in the students’ life course. Encouraging students to grapple with, reframe, and reflect on the ‘bigger questions’ in this arena (i.e. issues of social justice and equity) will, arguably, impact on young people’s life direction, the self-identity of the student, and their relationship to broader social and cultural values and ethics. Results suggest that it is the combination of location (abroad) and academic focus (sustainability) that yields the greatest increases in global awareness and citizenry. Consistent with the values-based approach inherent in the UTS subjects, the conceptual underpinning of Tarrant’s model (Wynveen, Kyle, & Tarrant, 2012 an adaptation of Values-Beliefs-Norms theory) is that sustainable tourism promotes a global citizenry by nurturing a sense of justice, pro-environmental behaviours, and civic obligations (Tarrant, 2010).

Consistent with the values-based approach inherent in the UTS subjects, the conceptual underpinning of Tarrant’s model (an adaptation of Values-Beliefs-Norms theory) is that sustainable tourism promotes a global citizenry by nurturing a sense of justice, pro-environmental behaviours, and civic obligations (Tarrant, 2010, p. 439). Figure 7.1 suggests that values and worldviews act as filters for new

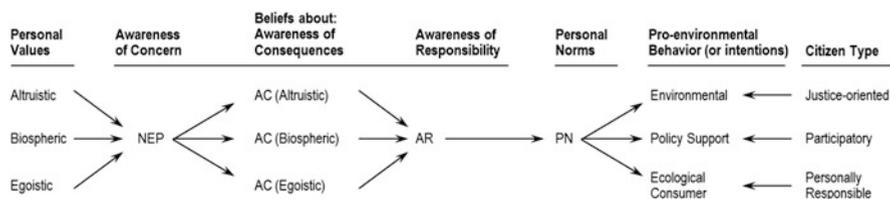


Fig. 7.1 Adapted value-beliefs-norms theory of global citizenship

information in the development and formation of congruent beliefs and attitudes in students which in turn predispose behavioural intentions and ultimately pro-environmental behaviours.

Shepherd (2007) has suggested that sustainability assessments must facilitate the identification of student value positions so that their personal development over time can be monitored. Knowledge of sustainability is a life time process and the critical reflection skills being taught in sustainability units must have relevance beyond the completion of a student’s degree, instead laying the foundation for a student to engage in lifelong assessment of complex social situations (Boud, 2000). Blewitt (2004) identifies reflexive life-long learning as one of the principle challenges facing society. Depending on their future career choices, students will precede either into positions where they control the direction of society and its relationship to the natural and social world. Or alternatively they will form part of the wider human society that holds policy makers to account. Whatever their future, students must be provided with the tools and opportunities to drive their own learning processes. This is not to deny the presence of affective skills oriented, learning patterns (Shepherd, 2007). It does, however, call into question the balance between cognitive and affective learning patterns in higher education institutions (Shepherd, 2007).

Effective sustainability education is underpinned by the premise that education must provide intellectual and ethical skills, along with sufficient breadth of industry specific knowledge. Measuring the success of these dual objectives is challenging. While knowledge of tourism industry processes can be measured in exam answers, success of industry internship placements and ultimately job attainment; student appreciation of the intangibles of ethics and stakeholder values will only be illustrated in the way that they respond to ethical challenges in their own business lives. University educators are fortunate to be in a position to lay the groundwork for the development of good corporate citizens. To this end it is important that educators provide opportunities for students to immerse themselves in literature peripheral to their study focus on tourism. Schweinsberg et al. (2013) have proposed that the study of tourism’s foundational disciplines (including geography and sociology) may provide the basis for students to appreciate the complexities of tourism’s social, economic and environmental relations. Paradigms provide the epistemological lens and access to ways of thinking on subjects such as power and place, which we are argue are essential for ensuring the necessary global awareness to truly appreciate the complexities of the human condition.

Fig. 7.2 Elements of a tourism education for sustainability approach

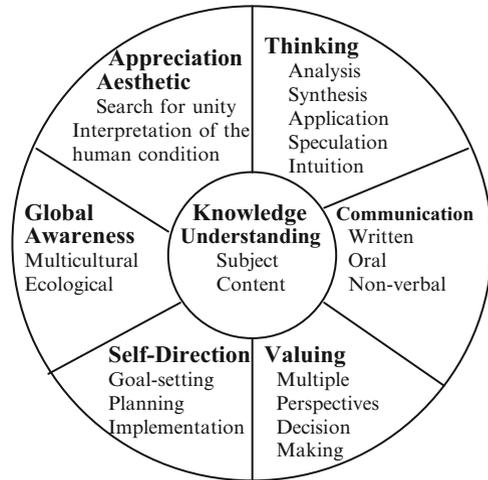


Figure 7.2 shows how this can be broken down for the purposes of educational practice; it provides a conceptual view of how elements are related and which components can be grouped.

Blewitt (2004) has identified that sustainability education must be student led, embracive of uncertainty and cross disciplinary based. When students become locked into discipline specific knowledge there is the potential for spontaneity and creativity to be the first casualty of a relentless pursuit of an industry economic imperative. For this reason sustainable tourism educators must work hard to ensure that students recognize the relationship between higher order theoretical discussions and the day to day milieu of a student's practice based education in a business school environment.

Christiansen (nd) suggests that student centered learning is best achieved when traditional power relations are abandoned and the lecturer and student become partners in academic discovery. This is challenging given the tendency for the ever increasingly internationalized student body seeing education simply in terms of passive absorption of data. As Gamache (2007, p. 277) notes; 'many students need an alternative epistemological view, one that enables them to see themselves as creators of 'personal knowledge''. Lea, Stephenson, and Troy (2003, p. 322) identify that student centred learning involves strategically 'increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the student'. Determinations of agreed levels of responsibility start with a learning contract. This contract can introduce the notion of the global along the lines of 'Think globally, act locally' into a practical values based educative approach that relates to the students lifestyle and the effects they are having on their own environments both at home and when they travel. This then leads to relevant ways to assess and provide feedback within this approach.

To illustrate the mechanisms and merits of values-based approaches to student assessment and feedback in sustainable tourism education we refer here to two diverse examples. The first is two subjects at the UTS Business School in Australia

where a values-based approach has been adopted. The second is a modularized experiential approach used at the University of Georgia, in the USA.

7.3 Assessing a Values-Based Approach Through Learning Contracts

At UTS, Sydney three subjects form part of our approach to Sustainable Tourism two at the undergraduate level in our Bachelor of Management in Tourism (subjects: Tourism and Sustainability, Planning for Sustainable Destinations) and one in our graduate course in our Masters of Management in Tourism (subject: Sustainable Tourism Management). The core objectives in teaching these units are to:

1. Create individualised curricula of study that embrace their own values, as well as the university's notions of "competence".
2. Consider the definitions of their own professional areas of competence and discuss the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of sustainability as it relates to competent professionals in these fields.
3. Develop proficiency in creating learning contracts as tools for enhancement of self-directed learning about sustainable tourism.
4. Practice and review writing skills; use tools in this manual to maintain a program of continuous improvement.

On successful completion of these sustainability subjects we suggest that participants should be able to:

- Create individualized curricula of study that embrace their own as well as the university's notions of 'competence' in relation to a sustainable tourism related project.
- Define within their professional areas of competence the idea of sustainability through the identification of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of professionals in their fields through involvement with a sustainable tourism related project.
- Create learning contracts as tools for enhancement of self-directed learning.
- Apply the appropriate skills obtained in a university educational setting to hands-on sustainable community projects.
- Maintain a program of continuous improvement and critical thinking related to sustainability.

The assessment and feedback for these subjects in sustainability is based around a learning contract. At the most fundamental level, learning contracts enable students to engage in a process of collaboration with their teachers to establish agreed upon learning goals (Kearins & Springett, 2003). The contract for the subjects in sustainable tourism management is similar to other contracts in that they are statements of agreements and commitments between two or more parties. However, the approach taken in these subjects is that they are designed to model

principles of social sustainability. The processes employed explicitly enacts equitable negotiation between student and teacher, modelling key principles of symmetric two way communication between groups where power might be asymmetrical. Such communication is central to building social capital—a foundation for building social sustainability (Chia, 2011).

The learning contracts developed in these subjects also enable students to develop critical thinking skills that place themselves at the centre of that critique. Rather than a prescriptive set of assessments, the development of a learning contract in these subjects requires students to proactively assess and negotiate customised learning goals that, in part reflect their own career and life goals. Such an approach prepares students for the non-linear career paths that dominate the tourism industry (Lyons, 2010). This resembles what has been described as a portfolio career path, which is strategically crafted by individuals and is based on their perception of the capabilities and attributes they possess in relation to opportunities (Lyons & Brown, 2003).

Central to the task of preparing students for portfolio careers is the establishment of mechanisms whereby students are able to articulate how a particular learning opportunity can contribute to building a skills portfolio which they can access in varying combinations as their lives and careers progress. In order to do this, students need to be given the opportunity to take ownership of their learning goals and these learning contracts provide an ideal tool for this.

In effect, these learning contracts become meaningful to students because of their inherent self-directedness. Students are then motivated to include in their contracts activities and objectives that are specific to their own interest and needs. They then use the learning contract as a means to assess progress toward those objectives.

The first step is a pre-contract worksheet this sets up the subject and learning experiences and to some degree the assessment and feedback mechanisms. The second step looks at learning possibilities, where the student is encouraged to write sentences about what they might learn in the subject and what they might do. Generally we consider it best to begin all their sentences in one of three ways:

1. I'd like to know sustainability and ...
2. I'd like to be able to ...
3. Maybe I will ...

The third step is to select learning objectives. Students are told, 'of the things you said you might like to know or be able to do by the end of the subject, select the ones most important to you.' Having done this, the student can then look at what they said and what they might do to learn these things. They are told that the best method to achieve this is to select those that seem most promising or most interesting, and most likely to help them learn about sustainable tourism and to then list these "activities". It is then time for some feedback and coaching that can be given by the academic. A review of the objectives and activities and then some coaching on how they might be achieved will let the student know whether they are on track, while also providing them with suggestions that might improve what they

have and wish to do. Step four is to draft a subject description which gives the reader a brief, general overview of what the subject is about, what areas are to be introduced and covered, what kinds of activities are to be engaged in. It is written in the third person. A good subject description is usually about 100–150 words long (approximately one-half page of close writing on notebook paper or double spaced, typed). The student is encouraged to use their lists of objectives and activities and to write at least 250 words then edit and reduce it to at least 100 but no more than 150 words. They can then compare it to the subject outline and take or send it all (objectives and subject outline) to the subject co-ordinator for review.

Finally, at the end of the subject the student writes a Student Evaluation, a narrative summary of their performance in the subject. It is not part of the contract, but it should be well-connected with the contract. It might include their judgements about how well they feel informed about sustainable tourism, how their completed objectives, matched up to their original intentions with regard to sustainability. The basis for this approach to teaching and in particular assessment and feedback is to provide critical dimensions in this area. As Einstein once said: “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them” (as cited in Milkman, Chugh, & Bazerman, 2009, p. 382). Changes towards a sustainable economy are extremely broad in scope and will require changes in the relationship between people and nature, the relationships between business, government and society (Porter & van der Linde, 1995) and this can only occur if students of sustainability are able to critically evaluate what they see. Without question, these subject contracts could be written more easily, quickly and efficiently. We as teachers could sit down and draft a subject outline in a half-hour or less. But whose subject would it be? Who would be truly responsible for its success? Whose commitment would it have? For the next generation, students need to accept, to some degree, responsibility for what they learn and teaching need to ensure that student have the opportunity to have input into what they learn. Learning Contracts give students the opportunity to construct a learning plan that comes from their own positions, needs, and capabilities. This is the kind of learning plan that is most likely to foster real, significant, and durable learning about sustainability in tourism. Such an outcome is reflected in the following feedback:

I was quite pleased with what I produced—and actually really enjoyed this assessment! It’s surprising how much you actually enjoy doing an assessment when it’s something that really interests you. . . This subject is challenging but very beneficial—the aspects of self-directed learning etc. are really great skills to have worked on. (UTS Student Feedback Forms 2009)

7.4 Assessing Modularised Experiential Learning: The University of Georgia Approach

One example of a field subject assessment model can be taken from a suite of University of Georgia (United States) educational travel programs in the South Pacific. These short-term (approximately 4 weeks), experiential programs focus on

themes of sustainable development and human-environment relationships (Global Programs in Sustainability, GPS). The GPS programs use field modules as an instructional approach to introducing topics of study. Each module relates to a specific theme and/or geographical location and consists of (a) a background/introductory narrative, (b) related readings and other associated material (e.g., field activities and instruction, classroom lectures), and (c) several questions (to be answered as discrete essays, peer-review integrative essays, group debates, group projects, field quizzes) about complex ecological, ethical, economic, and social issues relating to sustainability (the “quadruple-bottom line”).

The module approach to assessment effectively guides and directs students to construct a ‘big picture’ of issues relating to sustainable development. Answering each module question requires students to bring together their experiences in the field (which may include service-learning projects, field-based scientific projects, interactions with specialists, and other field activities) along with the material and information from lectures, background readings, group discussions, and individual reflection. In doing this, students actively engage in their own learning process by putting together the various pieces of their experiences to create a holistic view of human relationships with the environment (Tarrant et al., 2011). Indeed, Ewert and Sibthorp (2011) note that a range of confounding variables including precursor, concomitant and post experience conditions may influence the experiential learning process. In the process of creating this global ‘big picture’, students engage with different stakeholders’ perspectives on, and beliefs about, these issues, forcing students to reframe and reconsider their own personal orientations of values and beliefs within the realm of sustainable development.

Such values are assessed through two primary techniques: (1) digital stories and (2) socio-scientific issues (SSI) based simulations. The role of digital stories, as an assessment tool, is described in more detail in a separate chapter of this book and readers are directed to that particular chapter for more information. The focus here will be on SSI’s.

For many students, a natural/forested landscape may represent a community of different trees with each species known intimately by one student, or it may simply be a mass of brown and green woods to another student. The former student knows everyone at the party, while the latter may find his or herself alone in a corner knowing no other person. The story to be told, however, does not rely on knowing each species, or indeed even one species, rather it concerns the mosaic of meanings or values represented by the forest. Such values ultimately enable the student to see the forest through a different lens, or worldview, in a way that previously would not have been translated or even considered. Moreover, the values are lived experiences—students form a relationship with the landscape by residing and learning in it—shared amongst one another and with their instructor in both a personal and professional context. The landscape is no longer a collection of trees but a representation of history, politics, and society through the inter-disciplinary module questions that are posed.

In translating this to our students, a primary goal has been to emphasize values—however rudimentary they may be—above pure knowledge. Consistent with the

thinking of Aldo Leopold (Leopold, 1949), considered by many to be the Father of Conservation, the importance of simple awareness, appreciation, and sense of interdependence with nature is far greater than the value of knowing the science:

He who owns a veteran bur oak owns more than a tree. He owns a historical library and a reserved seat in the theater of evolution. . . Education, I fear, is learning to see one thing by going blind to another (Leopold, 1949, p.30).

Leopold's Land Ethic teaches us that unless nature is loved and respected, humans will continue to abuse it as a commodity. Instilling humility is therefore a pre-requisite to establishing a long-term *ethical* relationship that considers the rights of all living species in the community and not solely the dominion of humans. Ethics prompt us to cooperate as members of a community to which we belong and, in an attempt to incorporate ethics into our instruction, we have framed science within a socio-scientific issues (SSI) based approach.

Socio-scientific issues are value-laden and consider the sociocultural and ethical context of real-world scientific problems. In one of the GPS programs, for example, students role-play characters in a simulated local council meeting to develop a deep-water marina in Noosa on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. We have developed a resource package containing political, social, cultural, and economic arguments that reflect the diverse range of opinions from pro- to anti-development. The purpose is to connect students with local decisions that reflect environmental, social, and health issues in their own community. The exercise also seeks to empower students to be active and responsible citizens by equipping them with "the capacity and commitment to take appropriate, responsible, and effective action on matters of social, economic, environmental, and moral-ethical concern" (Hodson, 2011, p. 29).

7.5 Evaluation of a Values Based Approach to Sustainable Tourism

Strapp (1972: 32) sets a number of requirements for environmental education that guide any evaluation of what is learned in sustainable tourism. It includes the following questions:

- Did they get a strong general (global) education, which will help people to develop a 'questioning mind'?
- Do they have an understanding of our natural resources: characteristics, status, distribution and importance to humanity?
- Have they developed an ecological awareness: this being a blend of previous experiences which will develop interest and respect towards the environment?
- Have they developed an economic and political awareness: an understanding of the factors (political and economic) which interfere with conservationist policies?

To achieve this it is necessary to practically engage the student in a reflective critical analysis of their learning about sustainable tourism. One avenue we have found useful is to undertake a subject review through a piece of reflective writing. In psychology and education this is called metacognitive thinking (Flavell, 1979). If you sat down this very minute, and wrote for a minimum of 5 min about what you have learned so far in one of your subjects, that would be like a subject review. Usually, when a person writes for just 5 or 10 min, it is to reflect on the learning accomplished in the previous hour, rather than the past 2 or 3 weeks. When done in an interactive environment where discussion is enabled this reflective analysis provides a platform for reinforcing the importance of values and sustainability.

While we suggest four levels of conducting the subject review, there could be a number of variations. In each case the directions are relatively simple: Ask the student to write about what they considered the most significant elements in what they did and what they learned. Encourage them to talk about what activities held significance, what they read, what they wrote, what they heard and said, and what they felt. This reflective piece should be handed in and reviewed by the subject co-ordinator with the student where possible.

The importance of this evaluation can be seen if one looks at the document *Caring for the Earth* which outlines a plan of action to move towards sustainable living, stating that the benefits and the cost of resource use and environmental conservation should be shared fairly among different communities and it seeks to focus on development as a means of improving the quality of human life while seeing education as a major priority. Within this framework, changing personal attitudes and practices to promote values that support a sustainable way of life is fundamental, and informal and formal education are seen as a means to achieve this, with formal environmental education for children and adults becoming a part of all education levels.

7.6 Conclusions

This chapter outlines how we approach the teaching of sustainability and specifically how assessment and feedback can be used to create a learning environment where the student is offered the opportunity to become self-directed and critical. This perspective is offered as both a part of the University of Georgia Study Abroad program and as a central part of the UTS Business School teaching of Sustainable Tourism. The University of Georgia breaks these learning experiences into a modular process creating this global ‘big picture’ which is built on smaller interactive learning experiences,

For UTS there is a context where Knight (2010), for example, has reported that business schools are constantly criticised for their lack of social responsibility and accountability of graduates which had an indirect impact on the global financial crisis. There are also positive reasons for change as environmental careers have become more abundant and lucrative. In response to these pressures, a great number

of business schools are revising their courses and introducing new subjects on sustainability into their curriculum. The UTS Business School has recently signed the United Nations: Principles for Responsible Management Education (UNPRME) designed to serve as a framework of continuous engagement. It has also cultivated a reputation as a leader in sustainable teaching and was featured in the ARIES report on *Education about and for Sustainability in Australian Business Schools* (Tilbury, Crawley, & Berry, 2004). This context is considered essential to ensure that the delivery of subjects in the area of Sustainable Tourism creates students that are actively engaged. Particularly as sustainability is an inherently vague and complex concept (Phillis & Andriantiatsaholiniaina, 2001) and there is no consensus on its meaning. Its usage in the business community is very loose and has generally tended towards weaker forms of sustainability (Kearins & Springett, 2003). Sustainability has been used to mean different things in a variety of contexts; however, recently sustainability has emerged, not as a concept with some essential meaning, but rather as an important enabling and organizing concept (Miller & O'Leary, 1994). We believe that our approach to teaching is enabling and pragmatic and will hold the student in good stead, and that our means of assessment and feedback builds a student that will engage with the issues of sustainability.

This then meets our responsibility as educators in facilitating change in the society. In the past the role of business education in society has experienced a degree of controversy. Following the Global Financial Crisis there has been considerable discussion on the nature of business education, with particular regard to ethics and corporate governance (Burgan, 2010; Mintzberg, 2010). This builds on two decades of literature critical of business education (Clegg & Ross-Smith, 2003; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Neelankavil, 1994; Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Welsh and Dehler (2005) point out that there has not been any fundamental change in the models of content nor the process used to educate managers. Our approach seeks to recreate methods that have been established in areas such as environmental education around values based education and adapting them for the area of sustainable tourism education.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2013) has estimated global tourism receipts for 2012 at US\$1075 billion. The continued profitability of the sector through the Global Financial Crisis necessitates educators treading a fine line between theory and practice (see Jurowski, 2002; Che, 2009). It is not possible for tourism educators to deny their symbiotic relationship to the tourism industry. Neither, however, should educators fall into the trap alleged by Kreisel (2011) where we become beholden to industry masters and engage in pseudo debates and avoid rigorous scientific engagement with the tourism space. One means of avoiding this trap is to ensure the learning environment contains a degree of both critical thinking and individual learning experiences and to link this to student assessment and feedback based on affective outcomes of values, attitudes and behaviours which encourage the valuing of the student and providing experiences in that learning that expose them to circumstances that engage them.

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