Role Play Scenarios: An Educative Tool to Engender Critical Thinking and Reflective Praxis Regarding Sustainability Management Issues in Tourism Enterprises

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The purpose of this paper is to report on one component of an action research study, which focused on enhancing “education about and for sustainability” in an undergraduate, tourism studies enterprise management course. In particular, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of introducing role play scenarios into tertiary tourism education tutorial sessions as an educative tool to engender critical thinking and reflective praxis by students regarding sustainability management issues in tourism enterprises.

Material & Methods: The study used an action research approach (Lewin, 1948; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Heron & Reason, 2008). Action research is associated with a participatory paradigm (Heron & Reason, 2008). In this study, action research was informed by a qualitative methodology. Tutorial materials were developed based on industry guest speaker presentations, industry discourses, academic materials and popular media. Both the course convenor and tutor engaged in reflective conversations, and “field notes”. Student evaluations were generated during a focus group, in written feedback and formal course/teaching evaluations.

Results: Role play scenarios were found to be effective in engaging students in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1990), critical thinking, and reflective practice. Students commented: “The role plays were good because they stimulated debate and brought out controversial issues”. “... it’s good way to understand the operational issues and management issues from various perspectives....”. “Role play was fun, it was a unique way of integrating lecture material.” “... a great interactive way for us to learn and share our opinions, rather than just have the tutor stand at the front and talk...” “... they enhanced my thinking of tourism. ...!”

Conclusions: The use of non-assessed scenarios in tourism tutorials provided students the opportunity to engage in “active learning” (Revans, 1980), critical reflection and consideration of the interconnectivity of tourism enterprise management decision-making regarding sustainability across departments and associated practices.