

# Learning from the sharp end in a Business School: a back-to-nature student fieldtrip

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and the participation of  
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## Aim of the presentation:

- To share the experience with an alternative pedagogic method (Inquiry-based learning approach (IBL) and its strategic implications for business and management education)
- Context: visit to The Eden Project in Cornwall: Bristol MBA and MSc Sustainable Development in Practice students

## Conceptual basis/sources of inspiration:

- a. academic engagement – or lack of it – (Page and Gaggiotti, 2013).
- b. ecological crisis, globalisation and development (Cicmil, 2013).
- c. the theme of Bristol 2015 European Green Capital

## Principles of IBL

- a holistic pedagogic approach
- Participatory student and academics led inquiry into the a complex, multifaceted issue (Eden Project as a “project”, a business and an ecological enterprise)

## Strategic implications

- Challenging and changing the way we understand the nature of learning in business and management education
- Innovation and enhancement of curriculum (mainstream vs epistemological diversity)

Student led learning:

A smoke screen for badly prepared teaching?

(Garrison, 1997, Many, Fyfe, Lewis & Mitchell, 1996).

Business Schools critics:

- a. factories run on Tayloristic principles of standardisation (Hopfl, 2005, 65).
- b. Paradox: blamed in the past for either not being practical and business oriented, or the opposite, being too practical.

# What we did

- a. Invitation to visit Eden
- b. 33 confirmations; 19 participants (15 + 4 ) + the host
- c. brief outline of the purpose of the fieldtrip
- d. Visit as a contextual, embedded experience
- e. Post visit:
  - a. brief reflections about how this might link to experiences of sustainability
  - b. Post-visit meeting
- f. Limitations



*Students and academics thinking and feeling together*

To engage in inquiry based learning approach on the sustainable agenda, academics and students must each play a part. Each must take risks, overcome fears and anxieties, and trust that good intentions will help them to accept the project (Case and Selvester, 2002).

## The visit

*It is quite easy to get blinded by the day-to-day responsibilities to family and career that we do not take time to 'breathe'. I intend to practice this more often, just taking time out to 'be', to meditate and rekindle my purpose away from the hustle and bustle of the day. Student 4*



*It was extremely nice to be with my students, seeing them rather than me, being at the front, offering them to engage with me when and where they want, without imposing the fixed agenda predefined by the “module”, the “block”, the “session”, the “class”, the “blackboard”, the sound of the projector and the computer and the teaching-learning rhetoric “in this session you will be able to reflect...”. Academic 1, 2*





# From pit to paradise

Constellation of critical metaphorical associations in students and academics

“opportunity”, “rejuvenation”, “journey”.



*For me, “pit to paradise” is a metaphor on how human technology both destruct and rebuild the land. It was a “pit” because of human technology, and now it is a “paradise”, also because the human technology. Student 2*

## Conflicting rhetoric

Our idea of the beauty of a transformed and degraded pit, was also one of danger, discourse manipulation and non convincing rhetoric.

*Some of the issues that technology cannot solve are the negative impact on the local community (as the tourism can have a negative and positive impact, also the diversion of local transport to visit the attraction and the demanding atmosphere created by the hordes of visitors and its consequences for the environment). Student 9*

## Critical learning from the Eden “official” discourse (1)

*I would expect a more open discussion with (the guide), instead of him monopolising the conversation. Academics 1, 2*



## Critical learning from the Eden “official” discourse (2)



# Two strategic discoveries from the experience (1)

Challenging and changing the way we understand the nature of learning in business and management education

*Students and academics as ethnographers, observing and reflecting on their learning in a concrete situation in the living present*

## Two strategic discoveries from the experience (2)

Innovation and enhancement of curriculum (mainstream vs epistemological diversity)

Having the freedom not to be convinced by official powerful rhetoric (of both corporate marketing and truths of university management education)

*Sometimes what I need is not more information or knowledge but time to think about what I already know and how it can create more impact. For me to take responsibility of my society –people and planet (I refer to this sometimes as developing my Individual Social Responsibility) I need to tend to me. Student 4*