

Partnerships in Environmental Education: The University of Notre Dame Australia, CALM, Local Government and the Community

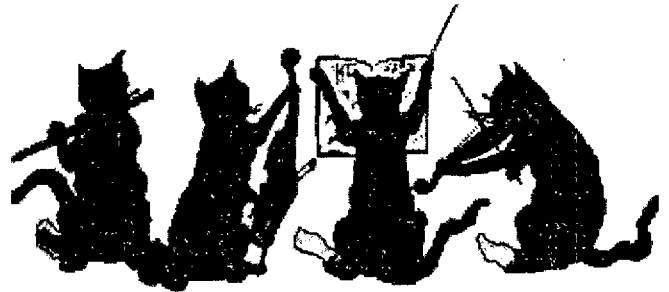
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The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), which is responsible for the management of natural areas in public ownership within Western Australia and wildlife management throughout the state, has entered into a partnership with the University of Notre Dame Australia to deliver some of the units within their Environmental Studies and Tourism programmes. CALM involvement with the university started in 1994 with the provision of occasional guest lecturers and involvement in field excursions with the students over a range of units (eg. during visits to national parks and other sites managed by CALM). More recently, however, CALM have taken the responsibility for presenting two units in their entirety: ES/BS181 Ecotourism and Heritage Management and ES280/380 Recreation Planning and Management. In addition to the partnership between these two institutions, the two units directly involve local government and the community.

This paper presents details of the two units and discusses how this partnership contributes towards community leadership and responsibility and represents effective environmental education.

CALM units at Notre Dame

In order to appreciate the educational benefits of the partnership between CALM and the University of Notre Dame Australia, a brief overview of the two units taught by CALM is provided.

The Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit focuses on interpretation techniques in natural and cultural heritage area management and the business of cultural and ecotourism. Subjects include interpretive planning, project design and evaluation as well as the planning, design and presentation of ecotours and other guided interpretive activities. A one week intensive workshop occurs within the unit which doubles as a stand alone professional development course attended by outsiders to the university (eg. CALM staff, local government recreation officers, private ecotour operators etc.). University

students attend classes before and after the intensive training week and have a number of additional assignments to undertake. The Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit has been conducted by CALM from 1996-1999.

This unit established the annual 'Footloose in Freo' activities program for the residents and visitors as an outcome of the intensive training workshop in which student guides lead their own interpretive activities for the general public. This programme of guided activities is based in and around the local Fremantle environment which offers a wide range of cultural and natural settings.

CALM is the major provider of settings for outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in Western Australia. The Recreation Planning and Management unit explores the theory and principles of recreation planning and management using local examples and practices to demonstrate appropriate techniques. Students learn the essential principles and procedures used in planning and management of natural environments for public recreation and tourism including the design, construction and maintenance of recreation areas and facilities; and the latest standards, techniques, products and materials applicable to recreation and tourism planning and management.

Offering the courses and workshops as professional development opportunities without further obligation to a university program presents an open learning environment. The university is extending environmental education opportunities into the broader community.

The combination of university students (typically young school leavers) with (typically older) practising professionals creates a dynamic learning environment. The students have plenty of energy and youthful enthusiasm which seems to inspire the older participants, who in turn enjoy sharing their practical wisdom and experiences with the students. The students get an appreciation of what life is like as an environmentalist in the 'real world' and make useful contacts for future study and work opportunities.

Community leadership

As visible and well respected educational institutions universities have an important social purpose in addition to educational objectives. Orr (1992) and Dyer (1997) argue that universities should be leaders that set a good example by promoting environmentally responsible behaviour and helping to improve local and regional communities. This is akin to eco-tourism; 'nature-based tourism that involves interpretation and education and is managed to be ecologically sustainable' (Commonwealth Department of Tourism 1994) and is socially responsible.

The location of the Notre Dame campus in the heart of the City of Fremantle permits tremendous interaction with the local community and its many cultural and environmental attractions. The campus is not one precinct as with most other universities but is spread across numerous historic buildings in a number of streets of the west end of Fremantle. The students are part of the town's character, the university part of its profile and the units discussed here are carried out in the local environment. They are part of the vibrant culture of Fremantle. CALM have located two offices on the Notre Dame campus (Marine Conservation Branch and Aboriginal Tourism, Education and Training Unit) as well as CALM's 'WA Naturally' shop. The shop is an ideal starting point for the annual Footloose in Freo program of guided activities with the public.

While the university is an established member of the Fremantle community, why should CALM locate offices and a shop on campus and become involved in community education programmes in areas other than those managed by CALM? It is consistent with the community support objectives established in CALM's Corporate Plan (undated) to 'improve community knowledge and support of CALM activities' and to 'partner with agencies and groups with similar interests'. Community relations are critical to the longevity of government corporations striving to provide community services while promoting community values. Environmental education and heritage interpretation are key strategies in protecting our heritage through enriching community appreciation, understanding and support. Maximising the experience and building the relationship should generate care that ensures a minimum of impact (CALM in press). CALM has taken its community relations role *onto the campus* to work with young (future) decision-makers and *onto the street* to interface with our constituents.

The two units, in particular the Recreation Planning and Management unit, also establish a partnership with Local Government. This is an extension beyond community education into cooperative community management. For example during the 1998 offering of the Recreation Planning and Management unit a partnership was forged with the City of Melville who were in the process of planning the development of Piney Lakes Reserve with a visitor centre, car parks, walk trails and other recreational facilities. The major task for participants in the unit was to prepare designs

for recreation facilities within the reserve. These were presented to the City of Melville in a formal showcase of the student's work at the end of the unit.

Effective environmental education

The objectives of environmental education are well established by international and national commentators alike (eg. UNESCO-UNEP 1975, Greenall Gough 1990, Environment Australia 1999). Effective environmental education can be summarised as that which meets the 'four A's':

- *awareness* of and sensitivity to the environment;
- *attitudes* - acquiring social values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation to participate in its protection and management;
- *abilities* - knowledge of the total environment including skills for critically evaluating and solving environmental problems; and
- *action* - developing a sense of responsibility and urgency regarding environmental problems and becoming sufficiently empowered to take action to solve these.

The two CALM units meet all of these objectives as the following examples demonstrate. One way *awareness* of the environment occurs in the Ecotourism and Heritage Management unit is through a 'tuning in' exercise (see CALM 1998a for details) conducted during a visit to The Hills Forest Activity Centre. Developing *attitudes* of concern for the environment are consistent with CALM's core nature *conservation* objective to conserve ecosystems and natural habitats throughout Western Australia (CALM 1998b). Students take *action* by developing recreation management plans for parks and reserves and by guiding ecotours with the public. In the process they develop a wide range of practical skills and *abilities* which are assessed in accordance with state and nationally certified competency outcomes (State Training Board of WA 1997, Australian National Training Authority 1998). Successful participants all receive a Certificate of Competency; a feature which is particularly attractive to students seeking employment in these fields when they graduate as it provides a sense of 'value-adding' to their degree qualification.

Conclusion

Environmental education at the University of Notre Dame Australia has been strengthened through partnerships with CALM, local government and the community. It is a synergistic partnership with benefits for each of the four stakeholders as well as the students and the local environment.



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