

LOCATION BASE LEARNING PRAXIS

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Abstract

The changing and competitive learning environment in tertiary institutions has created a need for student centeredness. Within this environment location based learning was considered and developed to provide for authentic learning environments that aid the progression from concept to application. This paper presents a case of a location based learning unit in Tourism Planning. In the unit students are enlightened to conceptual application and issues with this in a controlled and constructive environment. This unit was based at Hamurana Springs, Rotorua a leading tourism centre in New Zealand. This case had multiple stakeholders with complex interaction providing a range of planning issues for students. Considerations for the development of location based learning units are provided, including authenticity of the case, enhancing students' conceptual foundation, proximity of the location, relationship with stakeholders, interaction within a controlled environment, and finally the institution's engagement with its community.

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INTRODUCTION

With moves to student centred learning and to increasingly competitive education environments it can sometimes difficult to find a state of grace where both are satisfied. Student centred learning involves a shift from lecturer as the centre of the learning environment and also involves some foundational changes to the tertiary learning environment. A number of learning theories exist and discuss the best way to provide for student centred learning (Pask, 1975; Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1984; Laird, 1985; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Spiro, Feltovitch, Jacobson & Coulson, 1991; Bruner, 1996; Kearsley, 2004). This focuses much more on considering students' approaches to learning and processes of learning. Principles from these, in many cases complementary theories, were considered in the context of the author's evolving teaching philosophy, for the provision of this student centred learning environment. What these theories provide is, as students develop their knowledge through the levels or taxonomies of learning, there is an inherent need to create more authenticity, experience and flexibility so that students will engage the content constructively. Location based learning units have been developed to provide this.

This paper presents an example of a location base learning unit implemented in the New Zealand tourism planning context. First, a brief outline of what location based learning is will be presented. This will be followed by background to the unit, *Planning – Theory and Practice*, including learning outcomes and content. Third, the shift to be more student centred will also be briefly discussed, before fourth presenting the focus of the paper, an example of the praxis of location based learning. Within this the location will be reviewed, presenting a brief history of the site and current planning issues. Then the engagement between the unit and location will be discussed. Especially noted in this section is the use of stakeholders and the assessment to develop the authentic, applied, experiential and interpretative learning environment. Fifth, considerations in the development of location based units will be presented. Finally a conclusion will present the pertinent points discussed in the paper.

LOCATION BASED LEARNING

Location based learning is not new, though a description of what it is will be useful to contextualise it within tourism education. Location based learning is a point along a continuum from in class learning to internships or placement. Along this continuum are fieldtrips used to exemplify conceptual learning in the 'real world' and location based learning.

Location based learning is the development of general and specific conceptual knowledge exemplified and applied in a specific location with an educational focus. An example may be a better descriptor. Croy and Hall (2003) discuss the development of a unit to develop tourism knowledge, as a capstone to the tourism degree. This draws on and further develops the conceptual knowledge students have developed throughout their degree programme and takes steps to apply this knowledge in a specific location within the university's charter area. Within the unit students are enlighten to conceptual application and issues with this in a controlled and constructive environment.

Differences between location base learning and fieldtrips are that there is an ongoing relationship between the student and the location; that the location, in partnership with the institution, identifies the work that is to be completed; the application of conceptual knowledge, rather than just exemplifying the concepts; and that useful results identified by the student can be provided back to the location. This is similar to work placements, though the facilitation theory principle that the facilitator creates a non-threatening environment (Laird, 1985) is also of special note, and again draws comparison between location based learning and placement. In work placement a non-threatening environment cannot be so easily provided as in the controlled setting and interaction of

location based learning. Location based learning also provides for classes of students, rather than just an individual.

THE CASE: PLANNING – THEORY AND PRACTICE

The case of location based learning presented here is a 200 level tourism planning unit (Planning – Theory and Practice) provided at Waiariki Institute of Technology, Rotorua, New Zealand. The unit (also referred to as a paper or course in other institutional contexts) was an elective in the tourism management degree. Students had at least completed their first year of the degree including three tourism units, though were generally in their final year with a number of tourism units completed, including Impacts of Tourism, Cultural Aspects and Research Methods. Waiariki has four contact hours per unit per week and the semesters are 15 weeks.

The unit was provided in the context of sustainability becoming an international goal. In this context the unit had the premises that sustainability entailed the inclusive consideration of the social, environmental and economic components and inherent provisions in planning for these. The unit further promoted a location and conceptual foundation. In New Zealand sustainability is identified as a primary goal for the tourism industry, from industry and government (Kearsley, 1997; Tourism Strategy Group, 2001). The main legislative framework towards sustainability in New Zealand is the *Resource Management Act 1991*, and it was identified that in order to achieve any degree of success in tourism planning, the ability to understand the principles and process of sustainability and this legislation was paramount. For this the unit introduced, discussed and applied the theory and practices of planning, and their application in the New Zealand tourism industry. The unit was designed to give students a conceptual and theoretical base from which their tourism planning skills and competencies might be further developed and applied. It was particularly focused on the planning and physical development of tourism enterprises within the New Zealand legislative framework. To this the unit had the following student learning outcomes:

1. Identify and discuss the development, importance and implications of sustainability in the world, the relevance of sustainability to tourism and the importance of sustainable tourism in New Zealand.
2. Identify and discuss the role of Maori in New Zealand planning.
3. Identify and discuss the purpose, principles and application of the *Resource Management Act 1991*.
4. Identify stakeholders and methods for their inclusion in the planning process.
5. Identify, discuss and analyse planning concepts and models.
6. Identify the principle sources of tourism impacts and be able to suggest ways of planning for their control.

To achieve these learning outcomes, the unit was developed to cover six conceptual and practical topic areas, Table 1.

Table 1: Tourism Planning – Theory and Practice Topic Areas

Topic Area	Content
Introduction	Introduction to planning
Sustainability	Environmentalism to sustainability Sustainable tourism New Zealand and sustainability
Maori	Maori in policy and planning
Resource Management Act 1991	Resource Management Act 1991 Environmental Impact Assessment
Participation	Planning participation
Planning	Site planning Natural environs Urban environs Rural environs
Policy	Policy and planning
Conclusion	Conclusions on planning

STUDENT CENTRED

The unit, in contrast to many of the units at Waiariki, was a discussion based unit; there were no lectures as such. The lecturer had taught the unit the previous year using lectures as the main provision of material, though noted that students often did not appreciate its application, nor draw the connections between the topics. Tutorials implemented the previous year did in part provide this. This is additionally reflected in the learning theories noted above. Thus in the incarnation presented here the unit was based on student directed discussion.

In doing this there was the provision of a reading list, in which primary readings and secondary readings were identified. Additionally, content focus, exercises, questions and learning objectives were provided to direct reading and note taking for each content area. For example for the reading on 'Environmentalism to Sustainability' it was noted for students to consider: nature; enlightenment and romanticism; the rise of environmentalism; new environmentalism; the change to sustainability; and sustainable development. This was aided by questions and learning objectives. A directive question was 'what were the main events in the development of environmentalism and sustainability?' Learning objectives for the topic included: understand the development of environmentalism; understand the change to sustainable development; define sustainable development; and understand what sustainable development means. This was reflected in a one page summary of the progress from environmentalism to contemporary sustainability students completed. Further, the PowerPoint lecture note slides from the previous year were also provided on an open server that students had access to (there was no learning support software available at the institution at the time). The lecture notes also further contextualised and constructed the readings. Each of these, readings, questions and lecture notes had the objective to prepare students' conceptual foundations for the discussion time.

The discussions were student centred, in that students provided questions and context for the discussion. These questions were provided to the lecturer prior to class. The questions were derived from the readings, answers to the reading questions, their prior learning and their own experiences. For example, in relation to 'Environmentalism to Sustainability' one student provided a question on pollution. She had the context that 'The industrial age has forced the earth into an environmental recession; and humans try to blame religion, social and economic structures, science and technology'. She then provided questions to start a discussion 'is the only thing to blame is our own greed? And, is the answer to pollution a move towards subsistent level living or trying to sustain what is left?' The discussions then sparked other questions and inherently identified and discussed areas of student's learning gaps. Through the discussions, interrelationships between concepts and issues were identified and clarified. Additionally, students each brought to class a newspaper article related to the topic to be discussed. These too were

brought into the discussion to exemplify the concepts in the 'real world' and to show the relevance of these concepts as a basis for understanding the planning environment. The programme for the unit followed this same structure throughout. Students were initially apprehensive about providing contexts and questions for the class, this very quickly changed and students were confident with leading and directing discussions.

PRAXIS OF LOCATION BASED LEARNING

Now the exciting stuff, location based learning. In developing this incarnated version of the unit, as well as being student focused it was location based. The nature of the location was authentic, contemporary and illustrated the conceptual issues presented in class. The location was also explicitly used in the assessment items.

The Location

The location used in this unit was Hamurana Springs, a natural spring and reserve on the northern edge of Lake Rotorua about 30 minutes drive from the Rotorua town centre. Rotorua is one of New Zealand's tourism centres, featuring many tourism businesses and hence tourism planning issues. Hamurana Springs includes two main freshwater springs, a short river flowing into Lake Rotorua, a redwood stand and gardens. The gardens were formal gardens, though had since overgrown and were now not recognisable. It had a ticket information kiosk (damaged and closed), a restaurant/cafeteria and offices. The restaurant/cafeteria was generally only opened for functions and organised tours. The reserve area also includes a nine-hole golf course (subleased to the golf club membership), club house, maintenance buildings and a green keeper's house.

Hamurana has been a renowned area since Te Awara's (Maori iwi (tribe)) arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand over 800 years ago and a reknown tourist spot since settlement by European in Rotorua. Hamurana was the home of Hangarau, a taniwha (a guardian being, spirit or essence) was brought to New Zealand by Ruao (who was originally left behind by Te Arawa) on the voyage from Hawaiiiki. Hangarau was one of the guardian's of Ruao's canoe. Nonetheless, due to the nature of the water Hamurana has always been settled by local Maori since Te Arawa arrived in New Zealand. Ngati Rangiwewehi, a sub tribe of Te Arawa, settled at Hamurana after conquering the area and have had an ongoing association with the it ever since. Hamurana, the name, actually comes from a transliteration of the biblical Smyrna, given to the area by missionaries.

In more recent history Hamurana Springs was donated to the public in the 1930s by its Pakeha owners, though maintaining a house on the property until the death of the owner. This was a popular picnic and social area from mid to late 1900s. During this period Hamurana was leased out on 30 year terms with right of renewal. Hamurana came under the Reserves Act 1977 managed by the Government's Department of Lands and Survey. With the introduction of the Conservation Act 1987 the area was then passed over to the newly created Department of Conservation. The lease arrangement still stood, and though this was not a common arrangement for Department of Conservation land, a few other examples exist in the Rotorua area, including Waimangu Volcanic Valley, a successful and award winning tourism attraction.

In very recent history, the time when the unit was being implemented, there was some controversy regarding Hamurana Springs. The lease holders' (a Taiwanese group) lease had finished. The lease was not renewed on a 30 year term by the Department of Conservation, though was instead replaced by a month by month lease. A few proposed reasons for only the short term lease being offered by various groups were the state of disrepair of the property and a claim for the area by Ngati Rangiwewehi under the Treaty of Waitangi. The lease holder did want to extend the lease and had plans for the reserve's development, though was reluctant to invest money into this with the possibility the lease would finish at the end of the month. The lease holder had in fact brought a nearby property and built accommodation for their proposal on the future of Hamurana Springs. Treaty claims in the area had generally taken about 8 to 9 years to be considered and settled. A

nearby claim for the Kaituna River had settled giving it back to local iwi. Ngati Rangiwewehi saw this as a precedent and were confident that their claim on Hamurana Springs would be successful.

Additionally, a local community group (Hamurana Springs Inc Society), largely made up of local Pakeha, had started up and were focusing on the management of Hamurana Springs. Due to what they saw as a decline in the condition of the reserve they were petitioning the Department of Conservation and the Rotorua District Council so that they could obtain the lease to the property. The community group applied for the lease (after the completion of the unit), though the Department of Conservation declined their application.

Overall this was a tourism, recreation and leisure attraction with a varied and interesting history. Hamurana Springs, at the time of the unit, had an interesting and active planning environment with many notable stakeholders. This would exemplify the conceptual topics discussed and provide for the learning outcomes of the unit.

The Praxis

The unit was developed and engaged with this planning environment so that the learning experience was authentic and relational to the practice of the concepts as possible. In providing this, two main themes were implemented throughout the unit. First were site visits and meetings with the stakeholders, second was a progressive assessment programme. Five main stakeholders were identified for the progression of the unit, Table 2. Though this was not a complete stakeholder list, it provided students with an indication of the complexity of planning issues and stakeholder perspectives within New Zealand tourism. The lecturer contacted each of the stakeholder groups before the implementation of the unit and discussed the possibility of using Hamurana Springs as a case for the class. Each group was very receptive by being part of this learning experience for the students. For some groups, the lecturer had the impression, they were extremely happy to be involved so they could tell their perspective, to an unbiased and malleable audience.

Table 2: Five Main Stakeholder Groups of Hamurana Springs

Stakeholder	Relationship to Hamurana Springs
Department of Conservation	Managers ('proxy owners')
Hamurana Springs Inc Society	Active pursuit of lease and interest in the restoration of Hamurana Springs
Ngati Rangiwewehi	Tribal affiliation and Treaty claim
Rotorua District Council	Implements the RMA, overall planning role for the region
The management group	Current lease holders

Prior to the student meetings with stakeholders a review of local media coverage of Hamurana Springs was completed by students. There had been quite a few recent articles, largely prompted by the local community group. From the topic based class discussions and the media coverage a range of possible planning issues and questions for stakeholders were discussed in class. A question sheet was developed in class for student note taking that would inform their assessment items and their understanding of the practice of planning in tourism. Additionally this provided a basis for asking questions if the stakeholder did not cover an issue important to the students. Meetings were held with each stakeholder group, lasting approximately an hour each. These were meetings were largely held off campus. After each meeting a class would be held to review the responses of the stakeholder and in relation to the planning concepts and assignments. This reflective practice was also insightful as to student's different interpretations of what was discussed in the meetings.

The assessment included four items. The first was a two page assignment outlining the reasons for implementing planning when developing a physical tourism attraction. Second, was a three page review of planning approaches commonly used in tourism developments in which students selected the approach best suited to New Zealand tourism industry. These approaches, though not explicitly noted in the assessment, were boosterism, economic, physical/spatial, community orientated and sustainable planning approaches. These two assignments were designed to set a conceptual planning context for the following two authentic assessment items.

The third assignment was a five page identification of the issues and stakeholders for the Hamurana Springs. In this students were also directed to identify ways to best integrate the stakeholders into future planning (participation techniques). The final assignment was a ten page report to identify, analyse, and present a plan for the management of Hamurana Springs. The plan needed to consider existing and future issues, stakeholders and the most appropriate planning approach. Additionally, students were directed to focus on the process of implementing a planning tool (such as ROS, LAC), within the planning approach, to Hamurana Springs. This assignment would identify and discuss issues that may have been encountered at each stage of implementing the proposed process. This was also to be completed with specific reference to the previously identified issues and stakeholders. Overall, the four assessment items were to provide a planning report, from a conceptual foundation to the application to an authentic area. The objective of this was for students to appreciate, understand and experience the connections between the concepts discussed in class, and the connections to practice.

In summary, the location provided an excellent insight into practical planning issues, and identifying an indication of the complexity of planning within a sustainable and participative framework. The meetings with the range of stakeholders also provided students with detailed and at times contrary perspectives to the one site, further exemplifying the complexity, not often covered in texts. The students eagerly engaged with this learning environment with its focus on learning gaps and the interaction with the authentic planning context.

CONSIDERATIONS

The provision of this unit, especially in reflection of its previous implementation, provided consideration for other tourism units. Location based learning is an excellent means to create a more authentic learning environment with the exemplification and application of conceptual knowledge in the 'real world'. This authenticity provides students with a clearer understanding of the environment in which the concepts are based and the interaction and relationships between these concepts. The inclusion of a real case, site visits, discussions with stakeholders and the explicit connections to assessment provided a deeper interaction with the location and the concepts, on the part of the student, than could have occurred with a fieldtrip to the case site. All the same there were considerations in the provision of a location based learning unit derived from this experience.

Enhancing student's conceptual foundation of the unit needs to be the focus, not the location. In this unit it was provided through class discussions, readings and the interaction with the case. In this provision, there was flexibility to cater for students' conceptual learning gaps through their direction within the discussions, both through the questions and how the discussions evolved. This also inherently, though also explicitly, drew on student's prior learning and experiences. Discussions also provided for teach back techniques in students' conceptual learning.

The location selected needs to be close, so that visits can occur, though also has to be explicitly focused on the content of the unit. In the previous year a guest speaker had talked about the implementation of the *Resource Management Act* and had used a resort styled accommodation development as the example. Though related, in the legislation and that accommodation was part of the tourism industry, most students saw this as 'building houses'. The example was also one dimensional with just the legislation implementation perspective, and limited student's appreciation

of the complexity of the other issues going on in the planning environment. Within the Hamurana Springs case students did identify the complexity and relationships, conceptually and practically, between the planning issues.

Another consideration is that there needs to be a good, if not great relationship with the location partners in the unit, in this case the stakeholders. This requires preparation of the unit and the case for learning purposes. In this unit, meetings were held with prospective stakeholders before the unit started for the semester, and also kept them informed of the unit's progress throughout the semester. One thing to consider maintaining the relationship is the provision of outputs (students' assessment) for the partners. This was not provided in this case. In providing outputs there is also the need to make sure that this does not put too much pressure on students, and realistic expectations are held by partners. Each, students and partners, needs to know, acknowledge and expect that it is students doing the work not consultants. This can also be used to provide for mutual benefits, for both the students and the partners.

Additionally, consideration that the interaction is provided in a controlled environment needs to be taken. In this case it was controlled in that the lecturer had discussed the unit and what it would entail with stakeholders before the unit had started. This provided stakeholders with an indication of their investment (time) and what would be the focus of discussion with the students, and what would not be. The classes also provided for students' preparation with exercises and discussions before site visits and meetings. This provided focus for students as well as aided in their identification of links between concepts, issues and practice. Additionally, the lecturer was with the students throughout these site visits and meetings and able to redirect discussion and provide further questions to clarify points for both students and stakeholders. The post meeting reviews were also a means to focus students to the task at hand and to further identify relationships between the concepts and practice.

The final consideration is the tertiary institution's relationship and engagement with its community, industry and locale and its support for innovative learning and teaching. Waiariki, and especially the School for Tourism and Hospitality, had a very good relationship with the local tourism industry. This was provided with memberships to the local tourism board, an industry advisory panel for the school and internship and work placement programmes run through the school. Additionally a number of the staff work with or used to work in the local industry. The institution had a relationship with the industry and supported lecturers use of that relationship for student learning opportunities. The School also supported the use of innovative techniques to enhance the student learning environment, and had in fact enacted many innovative techniques and even units, to enhance student learning and outcomes from the tourism management degree.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, location based learning provides an option for the provision of student centred learning. The case of a 200 level unit, Planning – Theory and Practice, was presented as a reincarnated unit, with a fundamental shift to be student centred. This shift also involved consideration of many learning theories to have an authentic, applied, experiential and interpretative learning environment. The unit was conceptually based within sustainable tourism planning and within the context of New Zealand's tourism industry. It was also focused toward tourism enterprise level of planning. Hamurana Springs was selected as a location case for the unit as it would exemplify many of the conceptual topics discussed in class, was local and had stakeholders that were willing to be involved in the unit. The history and planning issues at the location also provided for the learning outcomes of the unit. The engagement with the location was based on two interrelated themes that ran throughout the unit. The first was the site visits and meetings with five main stakeholders. The second was the assessment programme, conceptually founded and integrating the Hamurana Springs case. From this unit, considerations for the implementation of location based learning were also identified. These were first, enhancing student's conceptual foundation is a focus of the unit, not the location. Second, the location should

be close and specifically related to the content of the unit. Third, there needs to be a great relationship with location partners. Fourth, the student interaction with the location occurs in a controlled environment. Finally, the institution needs to support engagement with the community and innovative learning techniques. Overall, location based learning caters for much of what learning theories propose for a better learning environment for students. The main consideration, and the point that would most hinder the successful development of such a unit and finding the state of grace in the competitive learning environment, would be the amount of support for engagement and innovation from the tertiary institution.

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