

What we Heard (DRAFT):

Proceedings from the 'Dialogue' on advancing environmental education within the Education pre-service program at Mount Royal University

Friday, February 17th, 2012

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes of this Dialogue were that 'Participants will...

- Identify where environmental education instruction is currently taking place on campus
- Identify opportunities and strategies to advance environmental education in programs at Mount Royal University, such as the Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership and Bachelor of Education programs. The ultimate outcome is that students will learn how to integrate environmental education into their work throughout their careers.

(Below: Jeff Reading, ACEE Chair; Dr. Stephen Jean)



Process: Participants worked in small groups to consider their answers to the following questions, and recorded their answers on 'placemats.' Kim Rowe of Alberta Culture and Community Services then facilitated a plenary discussion of participants' answers. Notes from that discussion, and from the 'placemats,' are recorded below. Cenovus Energy generously provided funding for lunch.

1. Question: What can we celebrate? What initiatives in the Mount Royal University currently support the goal of advancing environmental education?

- Initiatives in place include GNEED courses that offer environmental options, the Ecotourism option, the sustainability centre, and natural sciences courses that discuss current environmental issues
- MRU is physically well-positioned: it is close to outdoor learning opportunities in the Weaselhead Natural Area, and close to several great schools that already deliver on good environmental education, including the Calgary Science School

2. Question: What are our opportunities? Given what we are doing now, what are our opportunities to continue forward and advance environmental education within programs at Mount Royal University?

- At MRU, the Department of Education and Schooling is a very new and relatively small department, and is still in the process of developing new courses; as such, it is small and nimble, and could rapidly implement new environmental education content
- The Physical Education option has the potential to integrate outdoor and environmental education
- Other courses such as the Ecotourism degree have great potential for partnering and integration with the Education program
- Environment is mentioned in MRU mission statement: Excerpt: '*...Dynamic in our thinking, we adapt quickly to changing environments and are making Mount Royal the place of choice for students at all stages of their lives.*'
- MRU already has 'on board' expertise in this area

3. Question: What can you do? What will you commit to doing to deliver on the ideas talked about today?

Participants committed to...

- Exploring ways to make environmental education a core component of the Education program (a small example: use environmental education in teaching demos in Year 1)
- Creating a partnership with Ecotourism and its placement program

- Creating an Environmental Education Club with an action project focus
- Connecting with the existing Outdoor Adventure Club
- Investigate opportunities to find student placements in schools and with cooperating teachers that practice environmental education
- Explore the potential to link environmental education with the current emphases on inquiry education and integrated education
- Creating demand among the students for more environmental education content

4. Question: What message would you like to send to the Alberta government? What should government policy documents (the new 'TQS' document) call for when it comes to teacher preparation, in order to best prepare them to be environmental educators who will create students who are 'engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit?'

The new TQS document should...

- Use the environment, and environmental education, as a specific and stellar example of engaging, authentic, and worthwhile learning
- Use the environment, and environmental education, as a specific and stellar example of learning through inquiry
- Ensure that assessment to support engaging and worthwhile learning is supportive of and sympathetic to the environmental education process
- do all it can to 'enable' environmental education, creating the potential for excellent environmental education in both teacher pre-service and in-service programs
- look for ways to support the integration of environmental education throughout teachers' work. By analogy, the past years have seen Information and Communications Technology go from a specific 'topic' to a way of learning and teaching that is imbued throughout and integrated into every corner of the curriculum; the same should happen with environmental education.
- Emphasize the importance of performance-based assessment and support teachers in developing their competencies in creating this form of assessment. The real action-based work that students do deserves to be valued and assessed.
- Emphasize and support Alberta Education's emphasis on quality over quantity when it comes to content in the program of studies
- Support teachers' professional learning so that teachers can quickly and readily learn how to teach new curriculum and new environmental concepts
- Orient teachers to the potential of alternative learning settings such as outdoor education, and emphasize the importance of providing teachers opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to teach in a variety of outdoor settings

5. Question: What should ACEE do to support this initiative?

The Alberta Council for Environmental Education should...

- Get the ACEE resource database link on official sites – 2learn.ca etc.
- Offer workshops on environmental education, support students
- Support MRU in development of curriculum
- Help Spread the word about MRU programs
- Help MRU find the schools that are doing the excellent environmental education, and send students there
- Help vet resources
- Showcase projects that teachers are doing
- Tell the stories of teachers that do excellent environmental education
- Provide Alberta examples and modifications to programs
- Create a portal for excellent teacher professional learning and best practices