

“How well do organisational and individual aspirations match?”

Nature conservation organisations can be perceived as encapsulating certain values, through specific projects, research and environmental campaigns. People working for these organisations may be assumed to have similar values which inspired them to choose their career paths. This study will examine to what extent this hypothesis is valid and whether staff motivations are truly understood and supported by the organisations. The study will seek to examine where the ‘inspiration’ to work with nature comes from and how it is sustained and re-created.

Researcher’s Professional background

I began my career in 1992 as a Countryside Ranger where I developed a special interest in landscape/land-use history and environmental education. I currently work as a teacher/naturalist with a wildlife trust and with local schools and community groups on environmental projects. Through my MSc studies at Edinburgh University I am studying wider environmental issues such as resource use and climate change, and how awareness of these issues can be incorporated into effective educational experiences. I am increasing my understanding of how people’s perceptions of the world around them, and Nature itself, is influenced by their personal experiences and the social settings in which they encounter these experiences.

Specific objectives of study

This research will consider whether peoples underlying values and motivations for working in the environmental field are acknowledged through current policies or staff training, development and support in the workplace. There will be a focus on considering the other ways in which participants are able to find support and development for their connections to nature through participation in other outdoor activities.

Participants of study

Nature conservation staff and organisations have an important role to play in education, through showing exemplary environmental practice and contributing to lifelong learning activities (Smyth, 2006, p. 250). Participants will be people involved in day to day nature conservation and environmental education work, selected through workshop/discussion sessions at conferences

focusing on environmental issues. Further participants will be selected using snowball sampling techniques (Drever, 2003, pp. 36-37) where appropriate.

Methodology

In investigating complex questions of perception and value it will be necessary to use qualitative methods of study where attitude and implication may have an important role to play and cannot be easily discriminated in a quantitative study (Silverman, 2000). Initial workshop sessions and questionnaires, focusing on Significant Life experiences (Chawla, 1998), will be followed up with semi-structured interviews with sampled respondents (Drever, 2003, pp. 36-37). Detailed notes will be taken in these sessions and recordings taken for partial transcription of 'rich' material (Drever, 2003, p. 63). Information gained in this way will be analysed and compared with findings of similar surveys and reports i.e. Butler & Acott (2007). Time constraints will limit the scale of the enquiry (Lewis & Munn, 1987, p. 17), however it is expected that this research will provide an indicative view of how connections with nature are valued and supported within conservation organisations. It is hoped that this will also be a beneficial exercise for participants who may not have had the opportunity to iterate and reflect on their ontological positions before (Burney, 2000, p. 516).

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