

# Gaining a Rural Lens through Rural Immersion Experiences



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# A look ahead...



- Background
- Why place-based pedagogy is needed
- Introduce the model used in extension work
- Observations
  - Experience
  - Impact on student learning
- Discuss realities of application and insights on use in other contexts

The knowledge of the world is only  
to be acquired in the world,  
and not in a closet.

- *Lord Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield*

“In the end,  
we will conserve only what we love,  
we will love only what we understand,  
we will understand only what we are  
taught.”

*(Baba Dioum 1968)*

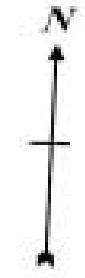
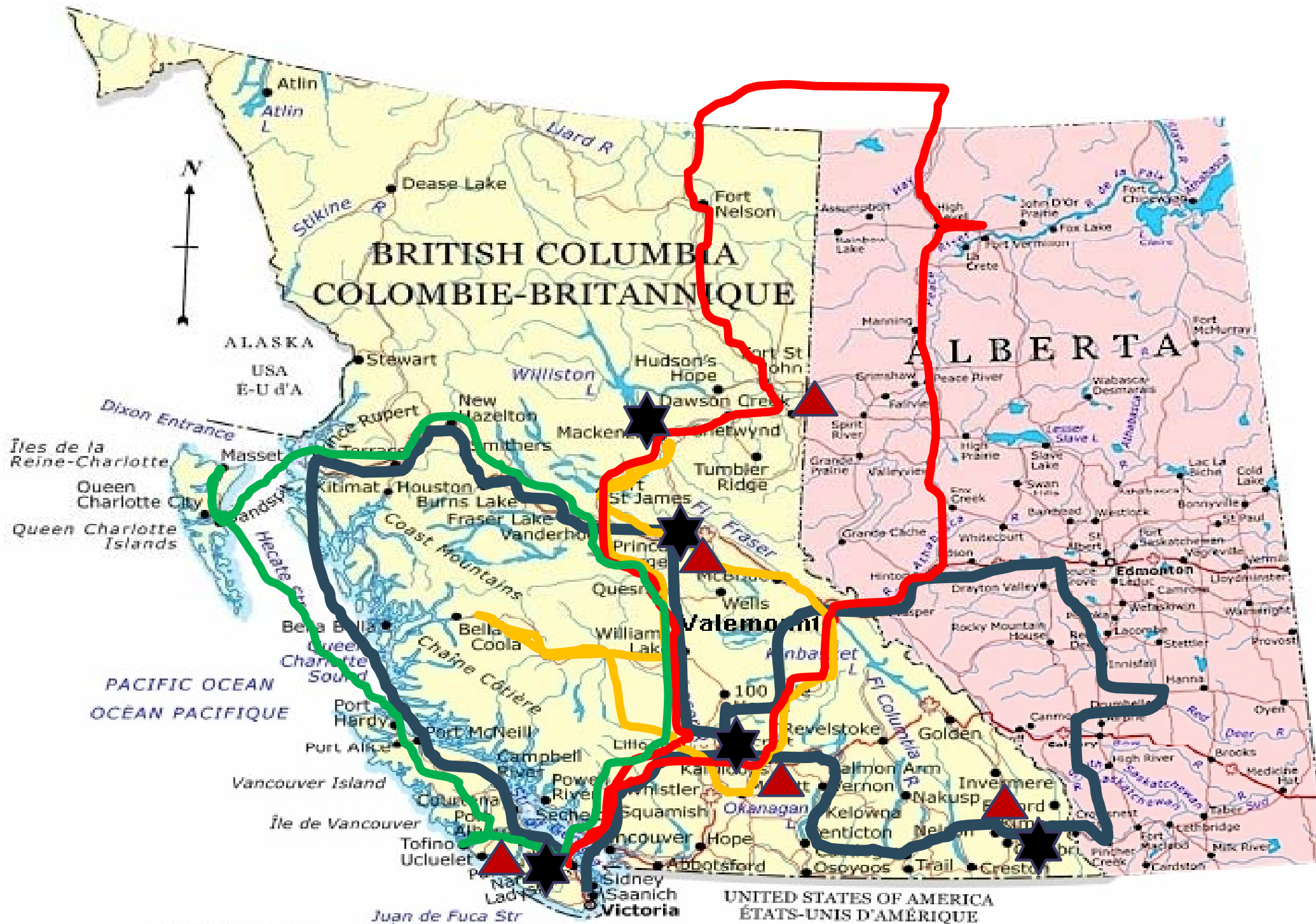
In place of actual experience with the phenomenal world, educators are handed, and largely accept, the mandate of a standardized, “placeless” curriculum...”

*David A. Gruenewald*

# Rationale for place-based pedagogy



- Rural – urban disconnect
  - Learning material content is urbancentric
  - Lack of exposure to rural realities
  - Inability to “relocate” and “apply” learning in rural contexts
- Loss of human/intellectual capital in rural areas
  - Need for young people to work in rural areas
  - Requires familiarity, ability and understanding of the rural context



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# Extension model

- Student/faculty teams reach out to rural areas of BC for 3 weeks each year
- Focus on engagement with the field
- Voluntary participation – but for credit
- Visitor perspective to gain a rural lens
- Multiple partners – *inter institutional participation*
- Backyard focus (rural) vs. exotic international
- Student participation in design and delivery
- Students as researchers (collaborative)
- Insights gained through debriefings, journaling, video records, photos





# Observations on the Learning Experience

- Experiencing the realities of being rural
  - Seeing through rural lens
  - Technology disconnect
  - Tourism development realities



*“TRIP has helped me to develop a rural lens. I am now more aware of the realities of tourism and the struggles that rural operators are facing”*



□ Culture and exoticism in our own backyard



*“...Ah-Ha moment of the TRIP was the many natural and cultural assets we have in this province that most of our group had no idea existed.”*



▣ Out of my comfort zone

▣ Co-leadership

*“... TRIP took me out of my comfort zone and made me plan and implement an itinerary and engage with local people from all walks of life.”*



*“(My) fears were quickly overturned as I found myself surrounded by a group that openly supported one another and continuously fed one another’s desires to learn all we could in the communities we were in .”*



## Richness of group interaction *(cross institution and faculty/student)*

*“...one of the most valuable aspects of the field experience were the nightly debriefing sessions where all the students talked about the day and shared their insights and observations which then initiated powerful group discussions and group reflection.”*



# Observations on Impact

- Deepened connection to people and places



*“I am from a rural community and have been already looking at life through the rural lens, but this trip strengthened my values. I didn’t realize how strongly I felt about this particular topic until on TRIP.” Student 2007*

*“I don’t know what happened to me during that performance... it was like something just overcame me. I could never have received that powerful of a message in any other way”*



Expanded  
interactions  
with people  
and exposure  
to issues



*”The depth and breadth of the field school learning experienced was brought about by an awakening of learning on a deeper level.”*

# Enhanced understanding about development

- *“The whole experience made me realize my capabilities not only as an individual but as a professional in the tourism industry.”*





# Altered personal or professional trajectory

- *“...(TRIP) was intense, and hands-on that definitely changed my life in more ways than I could imagine.”*



# Affirmed who I am...

- “I never realized how important my rural heritage has been... and how strongly I want to remain rural. Today I decided I have to live in a rural community again”.



# The return...lonely anonymity

- Back in urban areas students noticed a lonely anonymity
- *“no one knew who we were and I doubt they cared”*
- *“patterns of dress changed – we now have to learn about you through appearance vs. contact”*



*Rural isn't just a population classification, it is a lifestyle indicator that means you HAVE to do things differently. It means you hold on to what works, innovate when you can to make things better, and though not entirely true all the time (and nothing against urban living) it generally means that you have a more genuine, intimate, and supportive relationship with your neighbors. And it means you are resilient.*

*As our urban centres become increasingly aware that the lack of support for rural lifestyles has translated into a degraded quality of life for all, the definitive outcome will (with any luck) perhaps be the re-awakening of the rural way of thinking (which holds so many answers to so many of the issues we consider prevalent). Student, 2007*

# Additional benefits...

## For faculty

- Relationship building with communities
- Grounded experience and observations for research and teaching
- Ability to try innovative teaching techniques
- Access to networks at other institutions

## For communities

- Ability to share their experiences and realities developing tourism in rural areas;
  - To students and faculty
  - In writing
  - To government partners
- Ability to showcase innovative strategies and have them profiled
- Enhanced connections to education institutions

# Evolution of the model

- Extension activity now taken up at 3 of the 5 partner schools
  - Extension positions (TRU, VIU)
  - Extension tours (UNBC, VIU)
  - Extension based research (VIU, TRU)
  - Industry and community requests for engagement
- Forthcoming
  - Travelling conference – operators/students



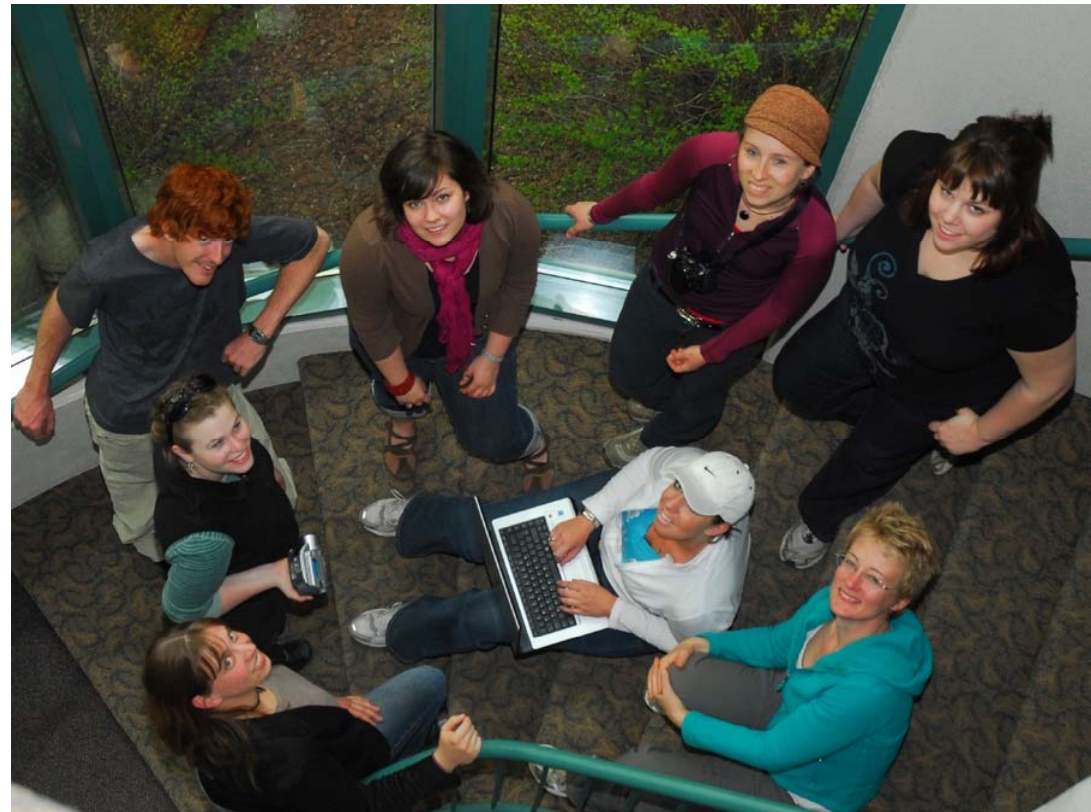
# Application in other contexts

- Difficult to entice students to their own backyard
- Requires strong networks with other institutions
- Pre-trip preparation and field research training
- Requires funding (3 weeks @ \$15,000)
- Pacing and movement balanced with opportunities for reflection and absorption
- Faculty coverage and ability to co-lead
- Strong take up in communities – must ensure follow through to relationship building
- Re-entry shock – assist students to use new knowledge in familiar contexts

# Closing thoughts

“Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit”

*David A. Gruenewald*





# For more information on TRIP and the Extension Model



[www.trip-project.ca](http://www.trip-project.ca)

# Questions?

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