

Journey to Sustainability: The Role of Learning in Lifestyle Transformation

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Abstract

Sustainability is a journey, not a destination, is an adage which certainly holds true for those seeking to live a sustainable lifestyle. Perhaps the essential factor inducing and guiding this movement towards a sustainable consciousness is *learning*. This presentation introduces the findings of a recent study which explored a select group of individuals' continuing journey towards a more sustainable way of life, focusing specifically on clothing sustainability, from childhood to present day. By concentrating on key events, interactions and experiences in participants' lives, what emerged was a better understanding of the triggers for sustainability learning and the learning process, as well as a greater sense of what was learned and its ultimate impact on participants' attitudes, beliefs, values and actions.

Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory (TLT) provided the theoretical foundation for this exploration, offering an explanation of the learning process underlying these journeys. TLT describes how individuals encountering situations, knowledge or attitudes which conflict with their understanding of the world may engage in a process of critical reflection and discourse in which they question and analyze their foundational beliefs, attitudes and perspectives. Such reflection may lead to a shift in their attitudes, values and behaviours or, potentially, result in a transformation of their worldview.

Seventeen individuals participated in this in-depth exploration, through interviews and a survey. Each demonstrated either a steady commitment to a sustainable way of life or had a strong desire to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle, but were struggling to do so. Drawing on these data sources, this presentation provides insight into the key introductory points for sustainability during the lifespan, the types of experiences triggering learning for sustainability, the barriers participants encountered in putting their learning into action and the importance of a strong support network.