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# Activating a Discourse of Change in Tourism Education

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## **Activating a Discourse of Change in Tourism Education**

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The aim of this conceptual paper is to examine the activation processes that the authors have undertaken as a way to challenge both their students and themselves contributing to social change. Our work is heavily influenced by Paulo Freire who, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), questioned and responded to the traditional dynamic between students, their teachers, and wider society. Specifically, we embrace Freire's line of thinking that one's ontological disposition is to be an active agent contributing to transforming one's world and creating possibilities that give way to a fuller life. The projects discussed in this paper are our means of resistance to demonstrate the importance of community engagement for students and for the development of a reflective and transformational education.

Our work adopts a critical approach whereby we challenge the dominant discourse in traditional westernized higher education. We challenge the measurement of productivity evident in the Western world's higher education systems that overemphasizes league tables, star ratings, and the quantity of publications. The push for career-focused paths can be, at times, in conflict with educational philosophies of scholars (Boluk and Carnicelli, 2015); and their resistance to the neoliberal agenda of universities that is increasingly placing more emphasis on the productivity of research outcomes published in journals with high-impact factors (see more in Lorenz, 2012). In this fight between external drives and internal values and beliefs, scholars can find themselves lost as pointed out by Ball (2012, p.20): "there is for many in Higher Education a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do. Are we doing things for the 'right' reasons – and how can we know?" The authors will reflect on the questions posed by Ball.

Underlying our teaching practices is a vision that focusses on creating positive social impact through experiencing situations that push us outside our comfort zones. Accordingly, we believe it is not sufficient to merely introduce contemporary issues in a classroom environment. Nor do we believe that a cooperative educational placement alone will create a truly transformative education. Rather, to foster the development of critical minds, scholars must allow their students to encounter the difficult and cruel reality of social oppression and injustice (Freire, 1970), as well as support students to collaborate with each other outside of their disciplinary comfort zones. Such experiences empower students to become transformational agents through critical reflection, and allow professors and students to experience the journey together. Still on our own journeys, we are reflective practitioners who encourage students to seek solutions and question processes, thereby living out our belief in the transformational power of education.

## **References**

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