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Heike Schänzel

Auckland Univeristy of Technology

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Co-creative Learning and Thinking Circles on Issues of Identity, Sociality and Happiness in Tourism

Heike Schänzel, AUT University, New Zealand

My belief is that effective teaching fosters intellectual curiosity, encourages critical reflection and allows space for creative and original thinking. According to Socrates, *I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think*. I am an advocate for active and co-creative learning that views and fosters students as embarking on an intellectual journey. For this I rely on stories from my own research on families and my own life and travel experiences which I embed in my teaching. Care for my students is expressed in sharing the deep-seated connection to myself as a woman and mother, my yoga journey, and my adventurous spirit. Equally, I always try and tap into students' prior experiences and let them share their insights and stories. This allows the students to make connections to their own lives and makes the subject relevant and engaging. I want to see my students achieve their highest potential, whatever that means to them, and set their goals and dreams high, as most look for lifestyles that can combine their love of travelling with a meaningful job. As a university teacher I do not shy away from asking the hard questions in life and communicating the emotional vitality of the intellectual endeavour.

This presentation is based on my seminar-style learning method with post-graduate students that is intensive, team orientated and student led. The course on *Tourist experiences and consumer behaviour* critically examines the psychological and sociological principles necessary to understand and predict tourist behaviour. Each week, the students are provided with recent academic readings on a topic that is then discussed and debated around a meeting or board table used as a learning and thinking circle. This allows for sharing of ideas and encourages critical thinking and communication as well as prepares the students for the work environment. Issues of who we are in terms of identity, what brings us happiness in life and how these relate to tourism are discussed (e.g. Hall, 2012). The social dimension at the heart of life and tourism experiences are debated through issues of sociality and combined with discussions on self-identity and life fulfilment. All of these issues receive scant attention in traditional research and teaching but are vital in understanding the experiential perspectives sought by travellers today. The key concepts drawn out by the students are then written up on the board allowing for patterns and relationships between concepts to be formed and critiqued. This form of learning encourages in-class discussion and participation from all students and draws on the diverse energies in the room. Ancient forms of talking circles have always relied on the magic of groups in which anyone may speak in turn, everyone must listen and consensus is achieved over time (Steinem, 2015). Most importantly such circles promote interactive methods of learning which challenge the students and myself to think in new and deeper ways about the topic. It allows for disagreements of opinions of perspectives to be voiced and pushes engagement with the topic to a deeper level than conventional lecturing. The aim of this co-creative learning approach is to care about my students by making them deep and critical thinkers about significant life issues that have relevance for tourism but more importantly for themselves.

References

Hall, C.M. (2012). Consumerism, tourism and voluntary simplicity: We all have to consume, but do we really have to travel so much to be happy? In Singh, T.V. (Ed.) *Critical debates in tourism* (pp. 61-68). Clevedon, England: Channel View.

Steinem, G. (2015). *My life on the road*. London, England: Random House.