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Critical Perspectives

The memory-work sessions: Exploring critical pedagogy in tourism[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The paper reports on a pedagogical ‘experiment’ undertaken by scholars aiming to critically reflect on tourism and tourism studies. Memory-work, a feminist, qualitative methodology, was chosen because it centres critical tourism inquiry within the context of sharing meaningful, personal experiences. The team met regularly to engage in supportive, critical dialogue about their memories and to spark critical reflections about tourism more broadly. Four substantive themes (embodied remembering, gendered bodies, racialized bodies, and embodying the gaze) were developed from collective analyses of initial discussions. A deeper reflection on the potential of this approach for engendering critical tourism pedagogy was also undertaken to explore its potential as critical tourism pedagogy. Five pedagogical themes (building safe spaces and developing trust, creating empathy, engaging tourism literature in ‘real life’, opening doors for ongoing reflection, and decentring power and knowledge) were identified. The paper concludes with recommendations for adapting this approach to their own tourism teaching and learning endeavours.

1. Introduction

1.1. Tourism ‘training’ and critically-reflective pedagogy

Building on the so-called ‘critical’ turn in tourism studies (Ateljevic, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2007), scholars have begun thinking about ways to promote critical approaches to tourism pedagogy. Engendering critical tourism pedagogy, however, requires unpacking and perhaps even re-framing the debates about whether tourism teaching should be aligned with industry-related goals (i.e. vocational training) or whether our role as tourism educators requires an approach that encourages students to think more broadly and reflexively about the political economic context of tourism development and experiences thereof. Authors such as Airey & Tribe (2005); see also Stergiou, Airey, & Riley (2008); Tribe (2002) have reflected on this tension and pushed tourism scholars to ask hard questions about the very purpose of tourism education.

Ayikoru, Tribe, and Airey (2009) asserted the need to challenge the vocational or instrumental nature of tourism education while illuminating the extent to which much tourism teaching merely reinforces an uncritical acceptance of the broader ideological framework of neo-liberalism. Indeed, given what we know about the potential for tourism development to exacerbate social and economic inequalities and environmental destruction, the need to ‘train’ our students to think critically about tourism is clear. Tribe

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(2002) describes “a special burden” placed on tourism educators:

It may be thought that the purposes of a vocational curriculum are self-evidently to equip graduates to operate in their chosen career. But this overlooks an important feature of big industries like tourism. In addition to generating consumer satisfaction, employment, and wealth, these industries leave their imprint on the world in other ways, by forging a distinctive industrial landscape and causing profound change in patterns of social and economic relationships. Thus, a special burden is placed on education, because as economic prosperity and consumer satisfaction are generated from the development of tourism, changes to people and place also occur. (p. 339)

Yet, and as Wilson (2010); see also Fullagar and Wilson (2012) has asked: “how do we translate critical pedagogy and theory into the classroom?” Recent pedagogical trends that are designed to invite a critically-reflexive approach highlight the importance of allowing students to become aware of their own, often unconsciously-held assumptions about the world; or what Finger (2005) has called “non-emancipatory institutions and worldviews” (p. 167). McLaren (1997) defined critical pedagogy as:

...a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation state (p.1).

As this paper aims to illustrate, opportunities for this kind of consciousness-raising can help to provide a path for all students to think critically about their own travel experiences and thereby to think critically about the role of tourism in the world. Intrigued by the role memory-work has played in tourism research (Small, 1999; Small, Ateljevic, Harris, & William, 2007), a project was designed for three graduate students to use this methodology in the classroom as a starting point for teaching about tourism. The purpose of this paper is to report on this pedagogical ‘experiment’ and to highlight the opportunities it presents as one method of critical tourism pedagogy. As is made clear below, an initial focus on personal memories of power in travel opened the door to a broader and deeply critical exploration of the complex notion of embodiment.

1.2. Memory-work and critical pedagogy

Memory-work, a collaborative, qualitative, feminist research methodology, is gaining traction in leisure and tourism studies (see for example Kivel & Johnson, 2009; Small, 1999; Small et al., 2007; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) as well as the social sciences more broadly (Haug, 2008). As Thomsen and Hansen (2009) argue, memory-work is an appropriate method to study the socially-constructed and culturally-embedded nature of phenomena because it focusses on “...illuminating the culturally constructed I through a collective interpretation of individual memories” (p. 27). While not commonly utilized as a pedagogical method, memory work, as is shown below, with its focus on encouraging an awareness of social and cultural embeddedness (thereby offering potential for social and cultural critique) can offer much to critical tourism pedagogy.

Memory-work, developed by Frigga Haug (1987, 1992), grew out of feminism and has long been recognized as a way to honor and privilege the voices and experiences of women. Indeed, Small's first ground-breaking application of memory-work in tourism (1999) was developed with this primary goal in mind. Memory-work, with its focus on social justice, offers a methodological approach that can encourage an assessment of issues of power including patriarchy, class, sexuality, and race. Feminist researchers, including those who use memory-work, are committed to challenging power and oppression and have led the way in terms of studying the issues of power and authority in research processes (Hesse-Biber, 2007). As Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, and Pillay (2012) point out:

Hence, the fundamental purpose of memory-work is to facilitate a heightened consciousness of how social forces and practices, such as gender, race and class, affect human experiences and understandings and of how individuals and groups can take action in response to these social forces and practices in ways that can make a qualitative difference to the present and the future.

Importantly, and as Tung and Ritchie (2011) have noted, memory-work also seeks to challenge the commonly-held hierarchy between researcher and participant. As Small (1999) pioneering tourism project illustrated, the memory-work researcher becomes a member of the research group and participants are co-researchers. As Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) contend, the result is a shared reflection and discussion of memories, which can lead to deeply reflexive personal and collective insights. As an educational exercise, this methodology can also offer a chance to ‘flatten’ power relationships between professor/lecturer and student (Torabian, Muldoon, Rouzrokh, & Mair, 2014) thereby leading to a shared learning environment as opposed to a typical one-way dialogue.

As a research methodology, memory-work is relatively demanding. It requires a considerable amount of time and commitment by all involved. As Small (1999) identified, the researcher who initially leads the memory-work project must take time to establish an environment of trust and much time is needed for participants to write about their memories and then to share them and engage in a collective, critical reflection process. Despite these challenges, and as illustrated below, memory-work has the potential to play an important role in identifying and exploring complex issues relevant to tourism studies and to ground the experience of learning about tourism in the learners’ own experiences and critical reflections. The next section briefly describes our pedagogical ‘experiment’ with memory-work and tourism.

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