
Sustainable Tourism Pedagogy and Student Community Collaboration: Developing Core Literacies and Reflective Practice

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Introduction

There have been increasing calls to move away from the traditional disciplinary structures and research, teaching and learning approaches that have tended to 'tunnel' student learning and reinforce particular worldviews towards new forms of post-disciplinary social science (e.g. Tribe 1997; Gretzel, Jamal, Stronza & Nepal 2008). These calls have been underpinned by a need to adopt more creative and flexible approaches to investigating problems, and a more tolerant approach to the forms of knowledge that different groups can contribute to problem solving. Tourism, as a multi-sectoral and transdisciplinary phenomenon, has struggled to carve out its scholarly territory and produce a coherent body of work that might achieve disciplinary status (Etchner & Jamal, 1997; Tribe, 1997; 2004). Indeed, Coles, Hall and Duval (2006) argue that the search for disciplinary status should not be the focus of discussions but that tourism, as part of a much larger social, economic, environmental and political system, requires deeper transdisciplinary understandings; i.e. disciplinary status is not as important. An important contribution of these debates is to highlight the challenges to teachers and students of tourism who seek to unpack sustainability issues that transcend disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, and to fashion a curriculum that delivers such rich learning opportunities.

In the field of tourism, curricula and teaching and learning approaches are continuing to evolve (see, for instance, McIntosh, 1983; Van Weenen and Shafer, 1983; Jovicic, 1988; Tribe, 1997; Leiper, 2000). Indeed, the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions of tourism, and the different ways that tourism can be conceptualized (i.e. as an activity, an experience, an industry, a political problem, a cultural dilemma, a resource challenge, a social justice issue and so on) make sustainable tourism a multi-faceted, dialectical concept and a challenging topic of instruction and study (Gunn 1998). In the growing body of tourism pedagogy, the value of learning experiences built around investigations of complex empirical problems embedded in rich contexts is increasingly recognized (Francis & Cowan, 2008). Here, the importance of encouraging students to understand, appreciate and apply the concept of sustainability within a tourism context presents educators with a range of institutional, pedagogical,

resource and other challenges that are only just beginning to be unpacked (Jamal, 2005; Jurowski, 2002).

Consideration about what to teach has often overshadowed how to teach (Stergiou, Airey & Riley, 2008; Tribe, 2002). Whilst we see the two concerns as inextricably related, our aim in this paper is to give consideration to the practice of teaching and learning, and how the two concerns might be balanced within a holistic teaching approach wherein students are encouraged to develop and apply knowledge and the human qualities and dispositions required to work collaboratively within complex tourism settings. In this paper, a collaborative community-based approach to teaching sustainable tourism is outlined and discussed in terms of the contributions it made to trans-disciplinary student learning. A discussion of student experiences demonstrates that the approach provided a useful vehicle for student learning. Importantly, the paper also contributes to the scholarship of sustainable tourism education by reflecting instructor experiences gained in class and through academic-student-community collaboration.