Tour Guides as Critically Reflective Practitioners: A Proposed Training Model

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Tour guiding is an educational activity that is part of the process of interpretation. Although in the past, most tour guides were untrained, guide training is now common in most developed countries. Tour guide training is an adult education activity. Much of this training is knowledge-based and competency-based, with an emphasis on skill acquisition and while this is regarded as important, this article suggests that good training as part of an educational process should be also about values and attitudes. The article argues that a guide training course should lead to change - not just in terms of knowledge and skills, but change in the way guides think and act. It argues that if trainee guides learn how to critique their own knowledge, attitudes and behaviour they will be able to offer their clients something beyond a superficial introduction to a destination’s environment and / or culture. Current guide training practices in selected countries are reviewed and discussed. A case study of tour guide training in Kakadu National Park (Australia) indicating possibilities for future development, is presented. A model is proposed with the triple objectives of improving the quality of guiding, augmenting the commercial value of tourism and attempting to sustain tourism destinations.

Keywords: tour guiding, reflective practitioners, sustainability, transformative tourism.

Tourism has a reputation for transforming the identity of communities in tourist destinations (Urry 1990). It is understood that whenever cultural differences between visitors and members of local communities are particularly marked, this transformation (on at least one side) is more likely to occur (Harrison 1997).

Tourism can change the way people (both tourists and those in host locations) think and act and this can be a positive experience. For example, tourists from a developed country visiting a developing country may be exposed to political and social conditions that they have never dreamed of. This may help them learn to appreciate what they have and become more willing to assist those who plainly have so much less. In this context, those whose culture, or landscape, becomes the object of tourism can also be changed for the better, in that through contact with tourists they may develop a greater awareness that other people do things differently. Hence they may become aware that their current conditions do not have to be accepted as one’s lot in life (Freire 1972). This contact, therefore may contribute, in the widest sense, to the political education of the resident population.

Nevertheless, a tourism destination, or a host people, that attracts tourists can be unintentionally exploited and suffer negative consequences. This is especially the case where tourists originate in wealthy countries and they visit people and places in poor countries. In this situation, the potential for negative effects is high and these may outweigh the short-term economic benefits that tourism brings to the destination (Holden 2000, Krippendorf 1987; Lea 1988; Smith 1989). This unintentional exploitation may be no more than the effect of increasing numbers of tourists. More tourists will almost inevitably lead to a different reaction from local residents, as well as a less positive experience for tourists themselves. Over time, this may result in demand for the destination falling, until it is no longer perceived as a popular destination and therefore no longer profitable for tour operators (O’Grady 1980; Mason and Mowforth 1996).

In this paper it is suggested that the training of those who guide tourists tends to ignore that tourism transforms people and places as outlined above. A more critically reflective approach to tour guide training is presented, termed here transformative tour guiding. This proposed model of guide training involves, in addition to the conventional competency based approaches of training programmes (see Pond 1993, Knudson et al. 1995), values education, the development of cultural sensitivity (Noam 1999), and the skills of critical self-assessment. A discussion

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of likely consequences of this proposed model is also presented.

The Role of the Tour Guide

Tour guides are usually trained persons possessing a qualification, who guide visitors in the language of their choice, and interpret the natural and cultural heritage of an area (Collins 2000). Guides tend to work in one geographical area and provide services to the visitors in that area and usually accompany visitors on day tours (or possibly longer) to different venues and locations (Collins 2000; Pond 1993). Until recently tour guides were usually untrained and unpaid, but were highly motivated and wanted to share the feelings and values they held with others (McArthur 1996). Moreover, they were innately driven with the desire to promote a conservation ethic, in order to ensure what they had first experienced was maintained in the same state.

It has been suggested that a modern tour guide has five roles: leader, educator, public relations representative, host and conduit (Pond 1993). Pond indicated that these five roles may appear as separate roles, but in practice they are ‘interwoven and synergistic’ (1993:76). Pond also argued that the roles of tour guide and adult instructor are very similar. She suggested an adult educator has four key roles: a programme who sets up the conditions to facilitate learning, a guide, a content resource and an institutional representative. The guide’s role as educator has been regarded by some as the most important (see Holloway 1981; Pond 1993). Pond argued that the roles of teacher and guide, although similar, are not identical. Guides must focus on the diversity of an audience, be more flexible and be more aware of their other roles (leader, host, public relations and conduit) than teachers (Pond 1993).

Rogers (1980) has argued that the conduit, the facilitator of learning, is the most important role of an adult educator, particularly in a rapidly changing world.

A reliance on process, rather than static knowledge is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for the modern world. When I have been able to transform a group — and here I mean all members of a group, myself included — into a community of learners, then the excitement has been beyond belief (Rogers 1980:132).

The main interaction involved in tour guiding is between the visitor and the guide. The guide’s role in this interaction is as follows: telling (provision of information); selling (interactive communication that explains and clarifies); participating (being a part of activity); and delegating (giving responsibility to some future behaviour) (Howard 1997).

The tour guide plays the important role of a buffer between the visitor and the site visited (Ang 1990). Cohen (1985) considers this role to be vital, as he argued that the tour guide can act as a mediator between the local population and the visitor. The role of the tour guide in this situation can be viewed as assisting in the interpretation of the site for the visitor. However, tour guides can range from specialists in relation to a specific location or topic, or be more mainstream (Weiler and Ham 2001). Specialist guides tend to be more knowledgeable of a particular location or culture and are hence are likely to be more effective in the process of interpretation (Weiler and Ham 2001). Guides with detailed knowledge of a location or culture are often referred to as ‘interpreters’ (Collins 2000; Pond 1993) and as Weiler and Ham argued interpretation is not just one of the many roles a guide plays but: ‘when it is done well is the distinguishing feature of ‘best practice’ in guiding’ (2001:554). The relationship between tour guiding and interpretation is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Interpretation and Tour Guiding

In what is widely regarded as the first major text expounding a philosophy of interpretation, Tilden (1957) suggested that it is an educational process which employs objects, illustrative media and the use of firsthand experience. The aim of interpretation is to reveal meaning and relationships (Tilden 1957). A variety of ‘objects’, such as urban monuments, works of art and flora and fauna, as well as media including print and photographs can be used to achieve this (Pond 1993).

Tour guiding, with its key role to inform and educate visitors, is a part of the process of interpretation (Pond, 1993; Knudson et al., 1995; Prentice, 1995). A recent attempt to define interpretation (Prentice 1995) indicated that, in addition to the educational aim, the process can be place-specific and is an attempt to modify the attitudes and behaviour of visitors. Interpretation is a process of communicating to people the significance of a place so that they can enjoy it more, understand its importance and develop a positive attitude to conservation. Interpretation is used to enhance the enjoyment of place, to convey symbolic meaning and to facilitate attitudinal or behavioural change. (Prentice 1995: 55)

Interpretation can therefore be seen as part of the process of making places accessible to a public audience and providing visitors with insights into places. The more specific aims of an interpretation programme are as follows.

To stimulate, facilitate and extend people’s understanding of place so that empathy towards conservation, heritage, culture and landscape is developed (Stewart et al. 1998: 257).
Interpretive guided activities take place in recreational or tourism settings where visitors typically have freedom of choice and are in contact with natural or cultural heritage for only a short period of time. Howard (1997) suggested that those who participate in guided activities are doing so to meet certain Maslowian needs. In his hierarchy, Maslow (1943) indicated there are five tiers of needs. These needs are as follows: at the lowest level, physiological, followed by safety then ascending to a feeling of belonging and being accepted as a friend, through status and self respect needs at the fourth level, to the highest level of self development, accomplishment and growth. Maslow argued that a need creates a tension, pleasant or unpleasant, that has to be resolved and the goal of people’s behaviour is to reduce the tension.

Howard (1997) suggested that the decision to participate in a guided tour will be based on the expectation that certain needs will be fulfilled. Howard argued that Maslow’s relatively high level needs of seeking friendship, personal development and recognition appear key motivations for participating in guided tours. However, Knudson et al. (1995) suggested that many visitors find it necessary to satisfy their lower level needs and the need for refreshment, relief and details on the length of stay are uppermost on people’s minds. To maximize the positive experience of visitors and minimize discomfort, Howard (1997) suggested three principles should be adhered to while guiding. These are: i) minimize the threat to safety or to psychological needs; ii) satisfy social esteem and self actualization needs; and iii) avoid mixing groups with different needs.

However, the process of interpretation does not aim solely to provide a safe and comfortable experience for participants. As Stewart et al. (1998) indicated a major aim is to stimulate interest and develop understanding in visitors. It has been argued that visitors can respond to interpretation in two major ways: ‘mindless’ or ‘mindful’ (Moscardo and Pearce 1986; Moscardo 1996, 1999). A ‘mindless’ state is characterized by mental passivity and behaviour, while ‘mindful’ means a state marked by active mental processing (Moscardo 1996, 1999). Langer (1989) indicated that mindfulness is the active creating of categories. Therefore, to be mindful is to appreciate the possibilities of the way the world works, rather than be trapped by existing labels and preconceptions. Moscardo (1996) argued the importance of promoting ‘mindful’ tourism through interpretation programmes.

Only a limited amount of research has been conducted into the effectiveness of interpretation. Stewart et al. (1998) indicated that, for the few existing evaluation studies of interpretation, effectiveness is usually determined by how much factual information visitors can recall. Such studies, however, provide little idea of how people use interpretation to help them understand places they are visiting (Stewart et al. 1998).

Interpretation programmes are usually designed not just to inform, but to change visitors’ behaviour (Orams 1994). However, he indicated that there is little evidence to suggest that interpretation programmes will necessarily lead to a change in the behaviour of visitors. He suggested the need to conduct evaluation to ascertain any changes in behaviour and advocated the use of ‘cognitive dissonance’ as a way to get visitors to modify their behaviour (Orams 1995). The theory of cognitive dissonance was developed by Festinger (1957), and the central concepts of the theory are ‘dissonance, consonance and irrelevance’. Festinger suggested that the existence of dissonance is psychologically uncomfortable, and hence this will motivate a person to reduce this and attempt to achieve consonance. Orams (1994) argued that cognitive dissonance can be used in interpretative programmes to challenge people’s belief systems. Such programmes would be an attempt to mentally shake visitors out of their normal way of responding and open up their thinking by putting questions in their minds. Orams also suggested that the use of cognitive dissonance should elicit emotional responses from visitors, and this may be one way to counter the problems inherent in educating tourists.

This section has reviewed the role of tour guiding within interpretation. Interpretation has been presented as an educational process which involves not only the transfer of knowledge but the development of values in relation to the environment and culture of the site visited (Prentice 1995; Stewart et al. 1998). It has been argued that visitors to a site have particular needs and interpretation can be used to meet these (Howard 1997). Interpretation can also be used to transform visitors thinking and behaviour, with the intention that they become ‘mindful’ tourists (Moscardo and Pearce 1986; Moscardo 1996). Orams (1995), however suggested that there is little evidence that education programmes within interpretation necessarily lead to changes in behaviour. He insisted upon the use of interpretative programmes that provoke an emotional response, and challenge visitors’ beliefs. In this way it was hoped such programmes would lead visitors to modify their attitudes and behaviour.

Of particular importance in this paper is the recognition that interpretation is an educational process.
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(Tilden 1957; Prentice 1995). Tour guides have a major role in delivering interpretation programmes. Hence, guides require the skills of an educator. Such skills can be developed and improved through training programmes. The next section of the paper discusses the provision of education and training courses for guides.

The Training of Tour Guides

Despite its long history tour guiding has no theoretical base and that consequently there is a need to create benchmarks and best practice principles (Howard 1997). Ang (1990) argued that guiding should be a more professional activity, and claimed that training is vital. In her view,

‘... (Guides) exist not merely as a mouthpiece, mindlessly rattling information or as a merciless shopping salesperson ...The job calls for commitment, enthusiasm and integrity as the entire experience of the tourist lies in their hands’ (Ang 1990:171)

Pond (1993) suggested that guides need the following qualities: broad based knowledge about the area they are guiding within, enthusiasm, commitment to life long learning, empathy and sensitivity for people, flexibility, pride in serving others and the ‘ability to interpret by painting mental pictures’ (1993). She argued that some of these qualities could be developed through training. Knudson et al (1995) also presented basic qualities of a guide when discussing how to be an effective speaker. These are amiability, enthusiasm, confidence, delivery and organization. While Knudson et al. (1995) acknowledged some of these qualities are not subject to an educational input, they indicated it is vital that interpreters are trained. Good interpreters usually develop slowly through careful study, experience gained from practice and continued training (Knudson et al. 1995).

Cherem (1977) argued for the best possible training for all in guiding. Stressing the importance of the skills of delivery over the actual knowledge, he claimed all guides are interpreters first, and subject specialists second. Hence, Cherem argued for courses in interpretive methods, as well field courses, research, and theory. Pond (1993) indicated, however, that there are great variations in guiding standards and qualifications across the world.

In the mid-1990s there were at least 130 universities in North America providing a professional education for interpreters at undergraduate and post-graduate level (Knudson et al. 1995). Academic programmes on interpretation in the USA tend to be broad in scope (Knudson et al. 1995). There may be a focus on natural sciences and a focus on resource management and conservation. There may also be the development of public speaking skills and communications theory. Undergraduate courses tend to give a broad view of the philosophy, principles, and methods of interpretation and environmental education, while at the post-graduate level there is more concern with theory, research, design, and management (Knudson et al. 1995).

In the UK guides are required to attend courses, complete coursework and take exams. By law, qualified guides are to wear the highly respected ‘Blue Badge’ (Pond 1993). In London obtaining the Blue Badge takes approximately 28 weeks (320 hours) of study and all guides must pass both oral and written exams. Likewise, guides in Vienna, Austria are also required to take and pass exams (Pond 1993). Besides having fluency in at least two languages, good health and a basic knowledge of the city, potential guides are required to take courses in art, music, drama, politics, history, geography, Austrian history and additionally speaking techniques. A course takes three years to complete and exams take place in all subjects, a foreign language, alongside another language which the guides will adopt for professional communication with tourists (Pond 1993).

In Canada attempts have been made to produce a nation-wide set of standards for guide training (Pond 1993). The organization attempting this is supported by Tourism Canada, the official government body for tourism. In the early 1980s, the Yukon State (Government of Yukon 1982) proposed a model of guide training which was concerned mainly with developing knowledge and understanding. This model also had a particular emphasis on skill development, with a focus on leadership skills. Additionally, the model makes reference to guide ethics and responsibilities (Government of Yukon 1982).

In Australia and New Zealand, courses for guides tend to be skills-based and as such are part of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, rather than being based in universities (Christie and Young 1994). In Australia, the National Training Authority oversees the accreditation of courses and the production of core modules. The nationally accredited course for tour guides is called Certificate 2 in Tour Guiding. VET providers use national modules as the basis for their own customized courses (Christie and Young 1994).

Undertaking a certificate course in tour guiding has many advantages — it offers prospective tour guides a modularized course that can be undertaken in stages, a nationally accredited award on completion and much lower fees than apply in higher education (HE). But there are also...
shortcomings. A major concern with such competency-based training programmes courses, is the lack of a philosophical and theoretical base (Foley 1995). This can lead to an over emphasis on developing those skills that can be easily measured by some form of competency-based assessment, while ignoring the development of qualities that are more difficult to measure, including the capacity for critical, analytical thought, the ability to communicate in cross-cultural situations, and the techniques to help tourists deepen their experience so that it benefits them as also the site they visit.

VET programmes work particularly well for training people in practical skills — skills that a trainee can demonstrate rather than describe. Tourist guides in Australia are expected to complete a module in health and safety, including elementary first aid. Such a skill can be tested at the completion of a course and this is one of the strengths of competency-based training (Gonzi 1992). An assessor in this system is generally less interested in how a trainee arrived at a competency than in the level of the skill they demonstrate on graduation (Christie and Spiers 1998). Trainees who already have skills when they begin training, or are particularly quick at picking them up, can be fast-tracked through a programme. While this system works well with skills-based programmes it would appear not as appropriate for training programmes where less tangible qualities are inculcated. This point can be best made by reference to an actual course. The setting for the course is Kakadu National Park, a World Heritage area in the Northern Territory, Australia, and it is discussed in the following case study.

Case Study: Tour Guiding in Kakadu National Park

The Kakadu National Park is home to a large range of fish, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, butterflies, and birds (Brennan 1991). Apart from the natural beauty of the Park and its unusual and dangerous wildlife (crocodiles are common), visitors are drawn by the fact that Aboriginal culture is still strong in this part of Australia. Within the Park are over 5,000 sites of Aboriginal rock art dating back at least 8,000 years and Kakadu is one of the most important sites globally for rock art (Ryan 1998). A number of these rock art sites have become tourist attractions. Ryan emphasised the important role that Aboriginal people have in tourism in the Kakadu National Park. He indicated that such involvement has benefited both the Aboriginal groups themselves, and also tourism.

However, for the Aboriginal people living in and close to Kakadu, the rock art and the Park’s natural features mean that it is a living entity (Ryan 1998). This provides a challenge for those whose responsibility it is to provide interpretation there. Trainee tourist guides for Kakadu National Park can undertake the National Certificate II in Tour Guiding, or a Certificate 3 in Tour Driver Guiding. Training takes place at Jabiru, a town in the heart of the Park. All students receive practical training in the use and maintenance of four-wheel drive vehicles, first aid, health and safety, and other skills. These specific skills fit well in a competency-based training package and the course does have a strong competency-based dimension. Figure 1 indicates the modules offered within the Certificate II in Tour Guiding as of 2002. It also shows the nominal hours for each module. As Figure 1 indicates the great majority of modules are either knowledge or skills-based. However, the training course also aims to develop the cultural awareness of participants (Christie and Spiers 1998), and, as Figure 1 shows, one module of 20 hours focuses specifically on this. Developing cultural awareness and the ability to interpret Aboriginal history and lifestyle are recognized as important aspects of training for Kakadu National Park guides. Nevertheless, the emphasis in the course on knowledge and skills means that even though developing cultural awareness is a feature of the course it may be perceived by those studying it (and those delivering it) that this area is less important than gaining knowledge and acquiring skills.

The ways in which the course is assessed may also contribute to the knowledge and skills aspects being regarded as more important than developing awareness and sensitivity. It is relatively easy to assess the skills-based part of the course (Christie and Spiers 1998). If a trainee guide can change a tyre in a competency-based test, it is possible to indicate with some confidence that in the ‘real’ situation the guide will be able to do this and hence he/she can be deemed competent in tyre changing. However, it is in relation to assessing cultural awareness that there is far less certainty (Christie and Spiers 1998). As Christie and Spiers indicated, a course participant may give the impression that he/she can demonstrate cultural awareness through a competency-based test, but could, in fact, be doing little more than mouthing cross-cultural platitudes.

In the mid-1990s, approximately 40% of those involved in guiding/interpretation in the Kakadu National Park were actually Aboriginal (Ryan 1998). Most of these Aboriginal rangers had also undertaken the Certificate III in Tour Driver Guiding (Christie and Spiers 1998). This course involves all the modules of the Certificate II in Tour Guiding,
The definition of transformative tourism is more specific than the one presented and discussed so far. It can and in addition specialized modules concerned with tour vehicle operations, campsite operations, land ownership and guiding in parks. Hence, these guides were both skilled and, it may be assumed, culturally aware and this situation would appear to offset the possibility that guides would be unable to act as effective cross-cultural communicators. However, 60% of the Park guides in the mid-1990s were non-Aboriginal and the intake for the 1997-98 guide training courses was made up of not just Aboriginal people from communities with tourist facilities, but also non-Aboriginal people (Christie and Spiers 1998). They observed that this had led to concerns about the course in terms of the following: the training of a ‘mixed group’ of participants in relation to the cultural environment; methods of assessment for this group; and the issue of potential guides, who were particularly hostile to Aboriginal culture, being able to interpret that culture competently.

The need for guides who are culturally sensitive as well as skilled and knowledgeable about a specific destination is well expressed by Ridenour (1995). He relates the story of two friends visiting the Canyon de Chelly in the USA, an area once inhabited by significant numbers of Navajo Indians. One of the two friends makes an unguided walk and returns later with a broken piece of pottery. Her colleague, somewhat knowledgeable of Native American traditions, is annoyed and scolds her friend for picking up the shard. This provokes the response: “What is wrong with me taking it, since I value it”. The other friend counters with a question: “Would you feel happy if somebody took a silver spoon that had belonged to your grandmother from your house, simply because they valued it?” Later in the day, with this situation still unresolved, the two friends take a walk led by a Navajo guide. During the walk the two learn about Native American spiritual beliefs and values. The one who took the shard is so taken by this new perspective that she admits what she has done and asks if she should return the shard. The guide responds: “No leave it with me. I will cleanse it and pray over it before returning it to the earth. You may pray that the spirits return to it.” (Ridenour 1995:xiii)

This section of the paper has raised the following question: How appropriate is a competency-based training programme for teaching and testing the ability of trainee guides to provide a culturally sensitive interpretation of a destination? In response to this question, the authors suggest that tour guiding in cross-cultural situations requires sensitivity as well as erudition and this is better taught and tested in a more holistic programme. A model for such a training programme is presented and discussed below.

**A Model for Transformative Tour Guide Training**

Competency-based guide training courses rarely ask the bigger, philosophical questions that go to the heart of what has been referred to in this paper as transformative tourism. It is suggested that any educative experience (and the tourism experience fits into this category) results in some form of change. Such a change might be slight — the acquisition of some new facts or a new insight into the way other people live. On the other hand the change could be considerable — a rejection of certain stereotypes and attitudes or a new way of viewing the world, as in the story related by Ridenour (1995) cited above. If change, however minuscule, is inevitable should guides be trained to be aware of the changes they may deliberately or inadvertently effect? It is argued in this paper that the tour guide has a role to play in transformative tourism.

The definition of transformative tourism is more specific than the one presented and discussed so far. It can
be defined as 'the practice of organized tourism that leads to a positive change in attitudes and values among those who participate in the tourist experience'. The good tour guide offers his clients the opportunity of seeing the world differently (Knudson et al. 1995; Pond 1993), hence guide training must prepare guides for this role. This is not to suggest that a guide should badger or indoctrinate clients. In the model proposed here, any change, to be effective, must be voluntary. Hence, it is up to the clients to act on their new insight and so transform themselves.

There are a number of assumptions in the preceding paragraph. It is assumed for instance that the good guide will not simply entertain but also facilitate learning. These two things are not viewed as mutually exclusive. Learning can be fun, just as fun can be instructive. Many of us have experienced the horror guide who appeals to the lowest common denominator in a tourist group by regaling it with sexist, racist or distasteful jokes about the people or places they are visiting. At the opposite end of the spectrum there is the well-meaning guide, besotted by the target country or culture, who patronizes clients by an over enthusiastic explanation that assumes ignorance of, or antagonism towards, that country or culture. Both extremes are bad for the tourist industry and guides should be trained to avoid them. Within that assumption lies another; the assumption that good guiding should help preserve and enhance the natural and cultural site that has attracted the tourists in the first place. In the context of this paper the most important assumption is that the right sort of training can help prepare guides who can satisfy their customers' basic needs (Maslow 1943) while at the same time offering them the opportunity to change the way they think and act. In this way they may become 'mindful' tourists (Moscardo 1996), who develop a better understanding about, and positive attitudes to, a location (Prentice 1995; Stewart et al. 1998).

A training programme that concentrates on skill development alone fails to take into account the complex nature of such guiding. Graduates of many competency-based programmes may have all the organizational skills needed to move people physically but too often may lack the skill to move them intellectually and emotionally. What is proposed here is a programme that gives guides a thorough knowledge of their subject (or the means to attain it), practical guiding skills and the capacity to transform themselves and the people they guide. Such a transformation should always be for the better and therein lies a dangerous assumption. Who decides what is better? How does one decide this? What follows in this paper is an attempt to provide a better alternative to training guides than what has gone before. It would be difficult to find disagreement with the notion that a well informed, contextualized explanation of a tourist site is better than an ignorant, prejudiced one. Likewise, an explanation of another country or culture that modifies a tourist's ethnocentric attitudes and behaviour would also be, it is suggested, a change for the better. Similarly, a tourist experience that is organized and presented in such a way that it helps sustain the natural and cultural 'object' visited is better than one that hastens its destruction.

The notion of transformative tourism proposed here and a training system that prepares guides for it, draws heavily on the writings of the following adult educators and theorists: Boud et al. (1985); Brookfield (1986, 1990, 1995) Cranton (1989, 1992); Dewey (1911, 1933, 1938), Jarvis (1983, 1987), Knowles (1975, 1980, 1984, 1990), Lindeman (1926) and Mezirow (1990). The notion of transformative tourism is linked most closely with Brookfield's (1995) modification of Mezirow's (1990) theory. However, all these writers have contributed to the concept of transformative learning. Dewey insisted that people learn best from experience but that such learning is only effective when it is acted on. In this sense, tourism provides a perfect opportunity for learning because people experience as well as read about the places they visit and can act on their new knowledge immediately.

Tourists can do this in a self-directed way and many backpackers and travellers take this approach. There are, however, others, who for various reasons, seek the services of a guide to interpret for them the site that they intend to visit. In doing so, they hand over responsibility to the tour guide assuming that the information they will receive and the actions they will perform will be monitored by an expert. Both sets of tourists learn but the ones who pay for a guide can expect to avoid the sort of cultural gaffes the unwitting backpacker makes and hopefully have less impact on sensitive environments. If we concentrate on the latter group we can begin to argue for a model of tour guide training that incorporates the best elements of adult and vocational education theory.

Knowles (1984) focused on the importance of discovering the needs of the adult learner (in this case the tourist) and catering for those needs. While the principle is sound, the good guide needs to do more than this, if he or she is to practise transformative tourism. The guide who simply tried to cater for the needs of all clients would find him/herself tugged in several opposing directions, not all of them desirable, since tourists have a variety of needs and interests (Howard 1997) and it is not always possible to meet all of them. Fortunately, visitors who take tours usually
understand this and hand over responsibility for the tour to the expert. What tends to happen is the tourist agent or guide decides what is best for their customers and setup an experience that he/she assumes will be the most interesting one for the majority of their customers. Economics and ease of operation are often the deciding factors in this process (Arsenault et al. 1998). Guides and agents, however, who receive the type of training recommended in the model proposed here can add value to the standard tour by finding ways of accommodating individual differences among their clients. The guide who learns a spiel by rote and delivers such an interpretation of the site without reflecting on the appropriateness of the spiel is unlikely to entertain or educate clients.

It is possible to assume, as Knowles (1990) does, that many adults are self-directed learners, that they have a wealth of experiences that can be utilized in the education process, that they learn best when they reach a developmental transition point in their lives and, that they prefer problem-centred learning through the discussion of abstract issues. However, simply catering to adult needs does not necessarily make a good adult educator. The adult educator, or, in this case, the tourist guide, has to be proactive rather than reactive.

The educator’s role according to Freire (1972, 1974), Mezirow (1990) and Brookfield (1995) is to raise a learner’s consciousness, to question the political status quo and devise a means of changing and improving the learner’s circumstances. Such writers argue for the importance of helping learners realize that they view the world in a particular way and that their thinking and actions are often circumscribed by their world view. Hence, the adult educator’s role is to provide their learners with the tools for ‘hunting assumptions’ (Brookfield 1986:297; Mezirow 1990:354), in other words the means of judging whether their assumptions are valid or invalid. As Brookfield and Mezirow argued adult educators should also provide learners with the motivation to change invalid assumptions and the behaviour that stems from them. The process of ‘transformative learning’, as proposed here, should be incorporated in the training of tourist guides. In keeping with Freire (1972) ideas it is important that both teachers and learners involve themselves in this process (Bell et al. 1990).

Thus the proposal presented here requires modifying the competency-based nature of tourist guide training. In addition to studying a skills-based curriculum, guides would learn a number of techniques that promote critical reflection of their own values and assumptions. Brookfield (1990) argued that all education is bound up with the values of those who teach and learn. He insisted that we cannot separate ourselves from our values, even in a classroom. Those values are based on assumptions that he refers to as paradigmatic, causal, and prescriptive. In the first of Brookfield’s categories we assume that the world works in a certain way. We say ‘this is how the world is’. In the second we say ‘things are like this because of such and such’ and in the last we say ‘this is how things should be’. We rarely think about our assumptions unless required to do so. Challenges to our assumptions can occur when we have unexpected insights into the world of others through travelling or reading; when we are knocked a little off balance by a ‘powerful’ person with different values and assumptions; or when we encounter a disorienting dilemma that forces us to accept that the assumptions we hold are not necessarily valid. In such moments we are surprised to find that other people assume different things about the way the world is, or should be and have different reasons for explaining these beliefs and values. If tourist guides can be convinced of the significance of values in education, then there is chance that they will be better critics of their own practice and even better interpreters of the sites they visit.

Hence, transformative tourism is based on the belief that no action is value free. The tourist company and the guide who declare themselves to be apolitical, unbiased and a-cultural are deluding themselves. The declaration is in itself value laden. Better to recognize the ubiquity of values, ‘hunt the assumptions’ (Brookfield 1986:297; Mezirow 1990:354) on which the particular tourist experience is based and critically assess it for validity. This will normally take place in a culturally circumscribed context, but even the admission is an advance on the position that assumes those guided and those visited share the same world view. Rather than deny the existence of entrenched values and assumptions among prospective tour guides, the course recommended here would focus part of the curriculum on it.

It should be noted that the process advocated here is a challenging and at times threatening one. Before introducing it, teachers must be sure they have undergone the process themselves, and continue to employ it in their teaching. In addition, adult educators must ensure that critical reflection occurs in a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere and that change is always an option rather than an imposition.

There are a number of activities that promote critical reflection. Cranton (1992) provides a straightforward summary of many of these techniques. However, the use
of

• journal writing
• life histories
• case studies
• critical incidents
• idea writing
• small group discussion
• role playing

could assist learners to confront their own assumptions and decide whether or not they are valid. Nevertheless, learners will not necessarily be grateful for having their inconsistent and invalid assumptions highlighted. Quite often the first reaction will be anger and denial. Over time, it is suggested, some of the insights gained in this learning process will settle in the individual’s consciousness and gradually lead to positive change.

In the model proposed here, good guides are trained not only to ‘hunt out assumptions’ (Brookfield 1986:297; Mezirow 1990:354) underlying their own lifestyle but also to detect the assumptions upon which tours to specific sites are based. Obviously a newly employed tourist guide will not risk the sack by criticizing his or her employer’s schedule. However, if the guide is capable of critical reflective thought this will inform any interpretation of that site. There is another advantage — if the guide has been trained to keep a journal or note down critical incidents, reflection on them should help improve future presentations.

The habit of critical reflection will also enable the guide to clarify the aims and objectives of particular tours within a context of broader tourist aims and objectives. This assumes that one can define appropriate aims and objectives for particular tourist experiences. One of the best ways for a regional or national tourist body to do this would be through research based on the experiences and evaluations of individual tourist guides and their clients. Critically reflective guides would be able to provide excellent data from their journals, critical incidents and tour evaluations. Such data would help a researcher make general conclusions and recommendations over time and place. Better still, researchers could be encouraged to utilize action research methods that involve guides as co-researchers, thereby improving both research and practice.

It is difficult to conceive of any tourist guiding that is value free. Values interpose themselves into the way guides interpret a site, in the way they relate to the local population, and the way they interact with companies they use to supply accommodation, food, and transport at the tourism site. If this is accepted, then it makes sense to train tourist guides to recognize values in themselves, their interpretation, their clients, and the sites they visit. This is not a skill that can be easily taught or tested in a competency-based programme. In a more holistic programme it can be introduced, practised and internalized. The true test of the ‘transformative’ tourist guide is his or her professional practice. The most appropriate examiners are the employers, the clients, the people who are visited, and the self-reflective guide. It is important that companies, training institutions and guides recognize the pervasive nature of values and assumptions and, in becoming conscious of them, analyse their impact on the people and places they visit. One crucial criteria for judging the validity of the values and assumptions upon which they operate is whether or not the people and site they visit benefit from the visit. If such an evaluation generates debate within the industry and training milieu and leads to agreed-on standards, then the tourist industry will be the richer for it. Enrichment ensues from self regulation, being attentive to the needs of both customers and the sites that are visited and through interesting and intelligent interpretation of sites.

**Conclusion**

Tour guiding is part of the process of interpretation. Although tour guides were usually untrained in the past, guide training is now common in most developed countries (McArthur 1996). Tour guides are adults and hence training is an adult education activity. Training tends to be competency-based with an emphasis on knowledge transmission and skill acquisition. This has benefits particularly for commercial tour operators who hire qualified guides. The possession of a Certificate in Tour Guiding, gained in a competency-based programme, can offer some guarantee to a tourist company that the guide has the sort of competencies they require. It also benefits the trainee guides themselves since they can fast-track their training by gaining recognition of prior learning or leapfrogging segments of the course in which they are already competent.

However, as this paper has argued, there can be limitations to this type of training. Hence, tour guiding is not just about getting people to a tourist destination and giving them facts and figures about it. Tourists want more from a guide than an introduction to a site and attention to their physical needs. They are increasingly keen to view
the site in its social and cultural context and rely on the guide for an informed and subtle presentation of key issues relating to this. This paper has proposed a new model of guide training which will involve not just gaining knowledge and acquiring guiding skills, but also developing an understanding of how adults learn, an appreciation of differing values, and a way of accommodating and possibly offering tourists a chance to change their own values. This could be particularly important if the current tourist values threaten the ‘object’ of tourism itself. It is hoped that such a model will improve the quality of tour guiding and that this approach may even add commercial value to the tourist industry.

References


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