**Developing cultural understanding through story-telling**

**Abstract**

This paper supports the notion that stories can be used to share diverse experiences and build cultural understanding.  It is developed from a case study of a module which teaches and practices story-making and story-telling to develop cross cultural communication and understanding. The paper illustrates a staged process of teaching and learning through stories, reflecting upon our experience at each stage. It explores our role as story-tellers as we engage in a field trip in Indonesia and use stories of our own lives to develop communication with our hosts, encouraging interaction and dialogue about the commonalities and differences in our lives. Our personal journeys are captured in daily journals and a post trip reflection which are used to explore our experience and learning. The paper highlights the contribution of stories to the development of multi-cultural literacy, cross cultural communication and critical reflexivity.

**Key words**

**Story-telling, teaching, learning, cross-cultural communication,**

**Intro**

“Tell me a fact and I will learn, tell me a truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever” (Native American proverb).

This paper explores story-making and telling practices as a way of reflecting upon and sharing diverse cultural experiences. A case study (Yin, 2014) approach is used to consider an undergraduate module which explores the dimensions of tourism experience and aims to develop cross-cultural understanding. The module develops story-making and telling skills and teaches students to craft stories to encourage intercultural communication and reflection during a field trip in Indonesia. In 2017-8 the module encompassed an international field trip to Ngadas, East Java, Indonesia which included students from the University of Westminster in the UK and Pancasila University in Indonesia. The trip was developed through my meetings, conversations and e-mails with a tourism academic (Dean of Tourism) and her team. The Westminster module was delivered to a multi-cultural group of students and prior to the trip we worked together to develop narratives about ourselves as a way of exploring the connection between our experiences and identity. This involved the transformation of our own experiences into meaningful stories and was influenced by Spaulding’s (2011) notion of a story-telling as a “form of giving” (2011:8). We were not developing fairy-tales, thrillers, epics or love-stories – but were sharing tales about our lives. This meant we had less poetic licence than suggested by Gabriel (2000) who identified “every storyteller’s prerogative” as the “right to twist the facts” (2000: 33). Rather than imagining a story we were using our imagination to tell a story about ourselves to a culturally diverse audience. Moscardo’s (2010) advice on creating experiences framed our story-making and helped us to develop engaging tales about ourselves which had a clear theme, were accessible, interactive, multi-sensory, immersive, personally relevant and provided learning opportunities.

During the module we explored our role as story-tellers and investigated and experimented with different ways of telling to create space and opportunity for audience engagement, discussion and interpretation. The Westminster student group was multi-cultural, comprising ten nationalities and a wider range of cultural identities, providing an excellent test ground for experimentation and cultural sharing through story-telling practices. On the field trip we shared our stories as a way of stimulating understanding and communication between the two university groups, with our hosts and across the different cultures within our own group. We envisaged that there would be challenges in communicating our stories in this multi-cultural context, knowing some of our audience would speak little English and our location in a rural village meant that we could not rely on electronic resources. In these circumstances, we developed a multi-sensory approach through the creation of “journey boxes” (Labbo, and Field, 1999) which engaged our audience’s senses and encouraged direct experiences of aspects of each story. Students were encouraged to connect with their audience, and to watch for their reactions as they guided them through different experiences associated with their stories. This paper adopts a narrative approach, drawing student stories, reflections and feedback on the module, my observations before, during and after the module (in my roles as module leader, teacher and learner) and discussion in the context of relevant literature.

**Teaching and Learning through stories**

Stories are a “vital part of our lives” (Bolton 2010:28), making our experiences meaningful and imposing “a structure, a compelling reality on what we experience.” (Bruner 2002:89 in Bolton, 2010:28). In our classes we use stories to engage our students in the complexities and idiosyncrasies of tourism phenomena and to explore a variety of approaches to understanding and managing tourism. There are many examples including case studies about tourism policy and planning (Chambers and Airey, 2001; Dredge and Jenkins, 2011; Stevenson, Airey and Miller, 2008,) destination development and branding (Kim and Youn, 2017: Stevenson, 2016). These stories are used as a way of sense making by exploring context, difference, tensions and complexity to encourage discussion and critical appreciation of tourism issues.

The interest in this paper is in an approach to teaching and learning through stories that involves sharing insights into our lived experiences as a way of developing reciprocity and cultural understanding. The following section is presented in three phases; the first focussing on the experience of teaching story making prior to a field trip and our learning as we experimented with different approaches to story-telling. The second on our story-making and telling experiences on the trip and the third on the stories developed from our journals and post-trip reflections.

**Phase 1: Before the field trip**

Story-making and telling skills were developed in five stages during prior to the trip.

1. **Imagining a Place**

The link between storytelling and the promotion of places, services and experiences is identified by many (including Chronis, 2005; Harrison, 2002; Kim and Youn, 2017). In our marketing and destinations modules we teach students how to create and communicate stories to attract people to visit destinations and to promote tourism services. We encourage them to develop rich stories for a variety of audiences that induce positive emotions and enhance perceived authenticity and memorability (Harrison, 2002; Kim and Youn, 2017). These stories bombard the senses (Rojek and Urry, 1997) combining images, words, tastes, sounds, smells and feelings to engage peoples’ imagination and emotions. They are constructed using a mixture of facts and fantasy drawing from notions of beauty, luxury and the exotic to create meaning and desire.

In the first lecture we focussed on the skills of building a story of our destination in Indonesia. We imagined the place we were visiting, the people we would meet and the experience of a rural village homestay. We then started to develop tales about the things we would do, the sights, sounds, tastes, smells we would experience and the feelings this might provoke. First, we wrote about our imagined place on our own (without the use of phones or the internet) and then started to create a shared story based upon a group discussion. We talked about the sources of information we normally use to develop our understanding and image of destinations. I introduced some ideas from literature on experiences specifically drawing attention to image formation (Cherifi et al., 2014, 2018; Kislali, Kavaratzis and Saren, 2016) and how prior images of destinations are socially produced from our socio-cultural, heritage and personal experiences (Cherifi et al, 2014; Griffen, 2013). This was useful in the classroom context because it enabled us to engage with and critically discuss those things that fix or simplify our ideas about culture including the stereotyping and idealising practices that we undertake when we start to market destinations and services. We then started to think about Indonesian culture and our own cultures, drawing from Harrison’s (2002) notion of “culture as something enormously resilient, always contingent and emergent” (2002:17). We discussed the fluidities of our own cultures and the implications of living and working in different places and of living in a multi-cultural global city.

1. **Sharing a travel experience**

Our tourism practices provide a way of mapping our identity, discovering more about ourselves and our travel stories are an important part of narrating self. Tourism is seen as part of “an existentialist narrative of freedom to become oneself” (van Nuenen, 2016:200), providing “a density of good memories” - evidence of “having lived life to the full” (Desforges, 2000:936). Transformation and personal growth are just two of the many possible reasons for people choosing to engage in tourism activities which can provide “a plane of cultural difference in which everyday life routines are contrasted and developed” (Rojek, 1997:70). The potential for learning and change is supported by the idea that while we always take a bit of *home* to the places we visit we also bring back a bit of *away* (Rojek,1997). However, Harrison (2012) argues that the transformative potential of many tourism experiences is limited as often our quest to escape from the everyday is accompanied by the search for a degree of familiarity and notions of physical and cultural comfort which are developed at home. Our ideas of what is exotic and beautiful are rooted in our own cultural worlds which means however strongly we attempt to move outside the tourism “bubble” (Cohen, 1972) often our “’self’ remains very much the same after travel” (Harrison 2002:12).

Students were asked to develop their own stories about a travel experience by selecting and sharing a photograph and memories from a previous trip. Each student presented this to the group and then I introduced four themes around travel experiences identified by Harrison (2012), namely the “opportunity for human interaction”, “expression of personal aesthetic”, a “way to understand” “home” and country of origin” and “aid to the construction of a personalised landscape” in a complex globalised world (2002:12). This provided a starting point for a discussion about our travel experiences more generally including our individual travel histories and practices, our travelling companions and relations with our hosts. We talked about the emotions and feelings we experienced through our tourism practices and of our attachment to the places we visit, making connections between our experiences and our sense of self. We considered the relationships between ‘home’ and ‘away’ including reflections upon our homes, backgrounds and how they simultaneously provide opportunities and constrain our travel. This led to reflection upon the cultural situatedness of our travel practices and stories. We thought about the expectations we have of the people in the places we visit and the way that influences our communication with them, thinking about the extent to which we conceptualise communities in terms of our experiences “before understanding communities as places of everyday life” (Griffen, 2013:859). This underpinned our exploration of the complexities and fluidities associated with our own cultures and the stories we make and tell as part of the ongoing development of our sense of self and culture.

1. **Exploring the role of a story-teller**

Then we started to think more deeply about story-telling and story making practices that are commonly found in tourism. We returned to our discussions about the way we use stories to promote experiences and destinations and in our life story practices and started to think about the way story-telling could be used to develop cross cultural understanding. We explored a broad spectrum of story-telling traditions spanning those associated with the performance of a script to those which were more participatory. We opted for the latter for our own stories which would be interactive and therefore loosely structured rather than scripted providing the “fabric rather than the ‘store bought’ dress” (Spaulding 2011:9).

Our story-work involved the transformation of an everyday experience and our job was to create a story-line and then develop it infuse it with meaning (Gabriel 2000). We drew from Tardiveau & Mallo (2014) who conceptualise a story as an assemblage “linking bodies, artefacts and spaces with expressions of meaning and narratives” (2014:457) and explored story-making as a process that involved stitching and pasting memories “scraps and fragments into a coherent and plausible re-creation of what might have occurred…”(Gottschall, 2012:169). We aimed to share something about ourselves to directly engage our audience in discussion about our cultures and experiences. Our role was to connect with our audience, watch their reactions, encourage them to participate and then to share their own stories. I introduced the idea of *living-stories* which ripen with each telling (Molbjerg Jorgensen, 2017) and we discussed how we might tell the same story to different audiences and across diverse cultures, focussing on how it might evolve in the telling or develop a different meaning. We started to think more about our audience in Indonesia, the strong possibility that many would have a limited understanding of English and very different life experiences to our own. We then discussed how we might engage our audience and develop co-creative practices and thus develop stories which were multi-dimensional, fluid and open to diverse interpretation to ensure that our engagement went beyond a play or performance of our experience.

1. **Creating multi-sensory stories to enhance cross cultural communication**

We can develop cross-cultural understanding when we tell stories of our everyday lives by sharing things that are commonplace and familiar to us with an audience who may find them unfamiliar. We can use stories to explain aspects of ourselves or our culture and engage people in a discussion around shared values and practices and those that differ. Stories can “support de- and re-familiarisation and cultural formation. (Mackenzie: 2008:367), providing the “social glue that brings people together around common values” (Gottschall, 2013:28). They can develop the “mutual gaze” enabling people from different cultures to “view, grasp, conceptualize, understand, imagine, and construct each other” (Maoz, 2006:222). This type of story-telling has a disruptive element (Eckstein, 2003) because it challenges and reframes peoples’ preconceptions and creates encounters where both the teller and audience can exercise power (Maoz, 2006). It can develop multi-cultural literacy by using “cognitive play” (Gottschall 2013:27) to provide “information and vicarious experience” (2013:28), transporting the audience to other times and places, stirring emotions and creating empathy (Craig et al., 2015). Audience participation and discussion can create an experience which is at the same time vicarious and lived; the “means through which new culture emerges via the intersubjective process of the familiar becoming strange or the strange becoming familiar” (McKenzie 2008,364)**.**

The challenge around cross cultural communication led us to explore literature on experiences. We considered Schmitt’s (1999) five strategic experience realms (sensory, affective, creative cognitive, physical behaviours and lifestyles, and social identity) as a way of thinking about how to engage our audience. Specifically, we started to think about how people might interpret and respond to our stories - how they might use their senses, what they might feel and think, how they might act and how they might relate to our narratives to their own experiences. Moscardo (2010) provided useful guidelines for us as we started to develop stories which would have a clear and consistent theme, provide learning opportunities, be perceived as authentic; be interactive and engaging, have unique features, be easy to understand, multi-sensory, engage peoples’ emotions; be personally relevant; provide social opportunities and be immersive.

I introduced a trial sensory story about my experience of living in London in the 1980’s which was accompanied by music, food, images and recollections. My trial provided a learning experience for us all, the images and experiences that were most powerful were those which resonated or contrasted with their own experiences. I used food cues which were intended to be humorous and sparked a mirthful discussion about food traditions across our different cultures. However, the punk rock musical cue was not understood as my audience could not identify the genre of music and did not make any associations between punk and London. We discussed the effectiveness of the story – thinking about audience, engagement of the senses and the use of humour.

1. **Developing and testing our stories on an audience**

I introduced the idea of creating a “journey box”– a cardboard box ”that contains a themed set of photographs, selected artifacts, literature, informational texts, entries from travel journals and maps that combine to tell a first-hand story of time, place, and culture”(Labbo and Field 1999:177). Developing a story with props provides opportunities to explain and illustrate context, engage a variety of senses and encourage interaction through “hands-on occasions for posing questions” (Labbo and Field 1999:177). The journey box takes the audience on a multi-sensory voyage, enabling them to engage in “day-dreaming and mind-traveling” (Lofgren 1999:7 in Harrison, 2002) as they see, taste, smell, hear and touch aspects of the experience.

The students worked in small groups to create journey boxes to support their short experiential story which enabled a glimpse into an aspect of their lives i.e. the places they are from, their cultural traditions or their travel practices. This story making provided vicarious and embodied experiences enabling exploration of different cultures, places, times and events using a variety of communication methods. The interactive effect of this was apparent after the class when I shared my London story. Rather than their standard practice of leaving immediately most students remained in the room engrossed in an unplanned, informal and lively discussion of traditional foods, different tastes and their experiences of food in London. This enthusiastic and engaged interaction was sustained as each group presented their stories and we discussed which aspects were more and less effective in engaging different audiences.

**Phase 2 Story-making and telling on the trip**

In this phase we used our storytelling skills to start a dialogue about our multiple cultures with our hosts. Our stories were about growing up in Romania, coming home from school in Italy, personal travel recollections, food tourism in London and religious festivity in the UK from a Muslim and Christian perspective. Our stories were shared on the first full day in the village. Photographs and artefacts were used to create multi-sensory experiences directly and enable spontaneous and direct responses. Foodstuffs were shared, music played, and pictures, herbs, perfumes and souvenirs were circulated to stimulate the senses and illustrate the multiple dimensions of our stories to the audience. The venue was a long narrow tent with noisy building work outside and intermittent electricity provided by a generator. This provided a challenging setting and meant that the storytellers had to walk through the tent to ensure people could hear and directly engage with the sensory props that they provided.

Two examples are illustrated in more depth to illustrate our experience. The first is a story told by three women who were brought up in the UK and explored their childhood experiences of Eid and Christmas. It was supported by scents they associated with the two festivals (a scented candle was used to evoke Christmas and incense and Oud perfume to evoke Eid), images of their families during these celebrations, food, music and discussions about their family traditions. One explained…

“I wanted to explain what we do during Eid and how we celebrate it in London. Some sensory samples were shared to enable the audience to experience and imagine how it feels to celebrate Eid”.

She explained how the story built into further communication, giving her confidence that people were interested in her story and wanted to share their own stories with her. Initially the audience participated in a lively discussion about the similarities and differences between Eid celebrations in London and Indonesia. This introduced her to our hosts and formed the basis for more informal conversations during the week. The story also enabled my student group to explore and discuss their diverse cultural experiences in London. They had been in classes together for a year but were in different friendship groups and often knew little about their classmates’ lives. One student said

“I particularly remember the Eid story which involved typical songs, pictures of memories, food and pleasant smells such as incense. This involved the senses and made the audience feel like participants. Indeed, this experience was made unique through sensory perceptions”.

Another story was told by three Italian women and focussed on their childhood and recollections of what they did when they came home after school. This was supported by chocolate/nut spread, breadsticks, cartoons, colouring books and pencils and images. A bunch of basil was sent around as they recollected the smell of the evening meal being cooked and we all ate chocolate spread and breadsticks. We were given colouring books and pencils and encouraged to fill them in while an Italian cartoon played in the background. Again, this story led to a lively discussion, the chocolate spread was well known and popular in Indonesia, some of the audience recognised the cartoon and the memory of drawing while the evening meal was being cooked resonated across cultures. The response of the audience led the presenters to experience a range of emotions, one discussed her pleasure in developing a connection with the audience and in realising that people from difference places had similar experiences. An audience member explained she felt this story had enabled her to “travel” to another country and culture. She felt her emotions stimulated by the story as she let her mind wander and recalled memories from her own childhood.

We had not asked our Indonesian hosts to tell their own stories and had merely intended them to develop their understanding of who we were, to break the ice and to start conversations. However as soon as we had finished they quickly came up with a response – these impromptu rejoinders generally included a verbal introduction including their names and a few details about themselves. In several cases more detailed stories emerged, one about hiking in Indonesia and one which included an impromptu dance display. The experience of being an audience to these stories is described below…

“We were all having fun throughout the process and this made me feel happy about participating in the trip as I was learning about different people and cultures.”

Storytelling provided a chance to be social, to laugh, to discover commonalities and to get to know one another. As our stories were told both audience and storyteller became aware that there were many commonalities in our experiences – our Indonesian hosts recognised the Christmas song from the UK and the Italian chocolate/nut spread. Many shared foods triggered comparisons with foods in Indonesia and discussions about different tastes. There was some discussion about the bunch of basil and a search for an Indonesian word for the same herb.

Two types of story-making occurred in the trip. We developed a “living story” (Molbjerg Jorgensen, 2017) which was collective, relational, co- constructed and had aspects that were spontaneously expressive, living and situated and encompassed embodied shared experiences and discussion. The second was more akin to a “life story” (Linde, 2013) in that it was developed from the perspective of the students as they reflected daily upon their experience and learning in their journals. The living stories started from the positive experiences of story-telling on the first day and the discussions that followed them. These encouraged students to share more stories with the Indonesian students and their host families, and in turn to listen to tales about their lives. Informal cultural sharing involved showing images and talking about home and family, teaching traditional dances and sharing food.

The dance was identified as a particularly memorable aspect of the Indonesian students’ story-telling and supported convivial and friendly exchanges throughout the week. The co-creative aspects of this story gained momentum as it progressed from an informal sharing of dance moves and gestures to more formal events. On the penultimate night we met in the tent with the students and some villagers and the Indonesian students taught us a dance. Our multinational group did not share a traditional dance and so in return we taught them the Macarena. On the last day we participated in a farewell ceremony which included the villagers, the Indonesian staff and students and our group. There were some traditional aspects of this including a display of Taub Dancing and Gamelan Music and celebratory food. We performed our routine and invited them to join us and in return they attempted to teach us traditional dances. The evening was filled with mirth as we danced together, and many villagers cried with laughter at our ungainly attempts at Indonesian dancing. That night we created a unique and memorable shared festive experience which drew together our diverse cultures. This was warmly recollected by villagers and the students the next day and is remembered by the Westminster students as a highlight of their trip in their reflections.

The life-story aspect of story-making was supported by journals which encompassed written reflections on experiences, learning and feelings each day. Daily journal writing provided a way of exploring cultural interactions and making meaningful connections between lived experiences and in-class learning (Crang et al., 2015; Zahra, 2012). The journals enabled us to respond to Feighery’s (2006) call for tourism scholars to explicitly include self in tourism research, enabling ideas and feelings to be captured as they developed and explore the “nuances of the travel experiences” (Harrison 2002:128). They went beyond being accounts of activities or what was seen and encompassed questions about pre-trip perceptions and reflections on ideas and emotions as the trip progressed. In particular, they captured some of the intense feelings and emotions experienced at the start of the trip when some felt a very profound culture shock – particularly those who had not travelled outside of Europe before.

**Phase 3 Post-trip stories**

As teachers we often encourage students develop “positional reflexivity” (Feighery, 2006:271), seeking to engage them in a “deeper reflective understanding of personal choices and meanings associated with travel” (Grimwold, 2015:371). Contemplation of our own tourism experiences and practices provides a way of thinking more deeply about ourselves and the implications of our actions on the people and places we visit. This helps students’ to critically engage in debates about sustainability, ethics, and global relations, inspiring them to move beyond the binaries of host and guest, home and away and the construction of self and other. We also develop reflexivity as we teach them to develop life stories (Linde, 2003) that tell others about their attributes, experiences, values and aspirations. Most commonly these are employability focussed, as we support them to develop career narratives in their Curriculum Vitae and vignettes to explain different skills and attributes to potential employers in interviews. We help them to craft and express their professional identity, and to explore the co-constructive elements of this as they tailor their narratives to address the requirements of different employers.

In this module students were asked to develop their personal stories through their post-trip reflective journals. These were supported by their daily journaling during the trip, photographs and reference to a least one concept, model or idea to frame their experience. In these accounts, students linked their learning to a mixture of intellectual engagement, literature lived experiences and emotional journey during the trip (Bolton, 2010; Zahra, 2012). For example, one was framed within Schmitt’s (1999) realms of experience and talked about the her feelings and thoughts as she progressed from being “excited at the idea of living in home-stays and being outside of the tourist bubble for the first time” to being “hugely disappointed” “anxious”, “drained”, “upset and demotivated” “too cold in the night and not eating enough”. This initial culture shock diminished through the week and the sense of personal growth and self-discovery became more apparent as the student reflected on her memories of the trip.

Most students expressed initial shock and disappointment at the very basic conditions in the homestay. For example, one said “the rooms were full of mould due to the humidity and a strange smell spread all over the house”. However, they quickly become accustomed to them and many felt embarrassed about their initial reaction. All discussed the discomfort of being too cold at night and some accounts identified this as being both emotionally and physically distressing. Humour was used as a coping mechanism both in oral recollections during the week and in the diaries “I slept well after I wore socks, leggings, a vest, pyjamas, a hoodie, a jacket and wrapped myself in blankets like a burrito”. Some noted that the Indonesian students coped with these discomforts without complaint and quickly learn to follow their example. Several referred to a cultural learning associated with this realising that the Indonesian students appear to enjoy themselves more by just accepting the way things were in the village.

Positive aspects “crying with laughter, having fun with the host family” were identified. The reflections include several highlights - most commonly including detailed accounts of story sharing and the impact that this had on cultural communication within the group and their own cultural learning. Many also reflected on the importance of “learning traditional Indonesia dances” and the evolving role of dance in their cultural interactions, lasting memories and post trip stories. All spoke about the experience having quite profound effects on their perceptions – so for example one talks about the experience as “a valuable lesson in humility” and appreciation of “the simple things in life that we have, and others do not” another realises “how lucky I am to have access to many comforts”. Others specifically talk about their learning “how to engage with other people, to understand their culture, traditions and lifestyle”, “not to judge people and to accept others’ ideas”.

**Reflections on developing cross cultural communication through stories**

Tourism brings people together whose language, culture and ways of thinking may be different. Relations between tourists and the people who live in the places they visit are usually short lived and cultural differences can lead to miscommunications and distortions of understanding. Jamal (2004) and Carmargo and Gretzel (2017) identify the importance of developing knowledge that recognises local people and places. This contextualized understanding requires “multicultural literacy” – “the appreciation of different cultures, values, interests, and power relations that exist between stakeholders…” (Jamal, Taillon, and Dredge, 2011:138*).* We design study trips to develop understanding of practice in specific contexts, to engage students in live case studies and problem solving. These trips can be used to develop practical understanding of culture and traditions in different places in an attempt to develop “stewardship, respect, care, high level critical thinking, reflexivity and moral responsibility” (TEFI, 2018). However, for many of our students’ socialisation with peers is a key aspect of the field trip “with host communities providing a backdrop as an exotic setting that elevates the mundane to extraordinary” (Griffen, 2013:864). The contention here is that interaction with people outside of the student group and critical self -reflection of our tourism and cultural practices are of key importance if we wish to support the development of multicultural literacy.

In the previous section I illustrated a layered approach to teaching story making and telling, starting with a story developed from our imagination and culminating in stories about ourselves which were interactive, multi-sensory and were attentive to the needs of multi-cultural audiences. We developed a storyline supported by artefacts, experimented with different mechanisms to communicate our stories and tested them on a multi-cultural audience in class, thinking about what worked and then refining them for our intended audience in Indonesia. I discussed the learning involved in story-telling and the interactions and cross-cultural communications engendered with our Indonesian hosts. We developed multi-faceted stories to introduce ourselves and to support dialogue with our hosts and create lived experiences through cultural sharing, a process which went beyond story-making as a vicarious experience of *otherness* (Gottschall, 2012). Our stories were used to break the ice and led to co-created story-making which challenged some of the cultural assumptions we held about one another, they enabled us to talk about experiences and practices that we held in common and those that differed. I illustrated an example of cultural dialogue and learning which was developed through a shared lived story about our dance interactions and experiences during the week. Dancing was recollected as many as a basis of the humorous and informal interactions and an unexpected highlight and memory of the trip.

The students completed a daily journal on the trip which developed reflexive practices by encouraging them to explore their tourism experiences and behaviours and meaning making. They provided accounts of feelings as they arose in the action-space of the field trip and enabled self-reflection on our learning to underpin our post trip stories. Our learning connected theory to personal meaning and took place “between the thought and the sensed via a range of intersubjective experiences” (McKenzie 2008:362) of friendship, community, cultural difference and similarity. Journal writing enabled the students to consider complexities and challenges associated with their own actions (Grimwood et al, 2015) and this supported reflection and underpinned their post trip stories of trip. These tales enabled students to question their assumptions about people and places, their own practices and values, and to critically evaluate the influence of cultural context on their experience.

The story-making practices developed in this case developed a mutual gaze enabling us to contribute to a shared understanding and construction of one another (Maoz, 2006), supporting dialogue, collaboration and friendships. They supported a deeper engagement with the people and places we were visiting and an appreciation of our cultural similarities and differences. Our story making aimed to inspire more inclusive, responsible and reflexive practices, creating an environment “where heightened awareness, connection, and learning for social change might thrive” (Grimwood et al., 2015:379). This was particularly apparent in the post trip stories, many of which described this as a transformative experience. This transformation is perhaps best illustrated by the decision to change dissertation topic to an area based on community-based tourism, future travel intentions and their choice of modules for the final year of their studies.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have illustrated an approach which engaged tourism students in a more nuanced and critical understanding of culture and was used to develop cultural dialogue. The stories illustrated here had a central plot but were participatory and reciprocal, with communication flowing between teller and audience. They were told from different perspectives, and drew from diverse experiences, creating a mixture of vicarious and lived experiences that built shared understanding. It is argued here that a story telling approach to learning has the potential to foster qualities that we seek to develop in our students, namely “critical thinking, reflexivity and moral responsibility” (TEFI, 2018). Our stories supported cultural interaction and reflexive practice (Belhassen and Caton, 2011; Grimwood et al., 2015) by opening up our own cultural experiences and practices to a multicultural audience. Discussion across different cultures enabled us to explore diverse and common experiences and to develop a nuanced understanding of one another. Our learning was “located in the space between being sensate and making sense (McKenzie, 2008:365) and our stories enabled us discuss experiences and feelings, opening up possibilities for shared cultural experiences through dance and conversation. Sharing multi-sensory stories about aspects of our lives and cultures developed interaction and discussion which supported a more in depth understanding of one another derived from a co-created experience. Story-making was also used to enable our students to explore their identities and practices as tourists – many post trip recollections expressed embarrassment at their initial reaction to the conditions in the home stays, our hosts and the cultural norms of the village.

This paper illustrates that story telling practices have the potential to engage our students in behaviours which are more responsible, thoughtful and sustainable as they embark on careers in tourism. However, while the effects here appear to be transformative there are several factors that require further attention. Firstly, the experience was evaluated shortly after the trip and possibly the humility and empathy expressed in the journals will diminish with time. Secondly the field trip was an unusual travel experience – coordinated by lecturers and attended by other students rather than close friends. In this context it is likely that some the learning and cultural understanding will not be translated into their usual touristic or work practices. On a more positive note the story-telling practices illustrated in this paper could easily be translated into many teaching contexts. For example, they could be used to create direct experiences and explore culture within a student group (my group learned a great deal about each other as well as our hosts) or alternatively to share festive practices in different places.

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