

Touching an Untouched Topic: The Beauty and Abuse of Sex in the Academy

A WORKSHOP FOR DIALOGUE, REFLEXIVITY AND ACTION

Introduction

This proposed workshop presents a tool and a method to begin a dialogue, reflexivity and thereafter, action on the beauty and the abuse which characterizes human relationships and emotions in academic environments. The main aim of this project is to help create spaces of trust, where academics can reflect on experiences and complex issues, which are often considered taboo, shameful or private, although these experiences have a major impact in our wellbeing and working lives.

Workshop Method

The workshop is limited to 30 participants and participants will work in groups of 5 to address different themes. The workshop will be facilitated in the style of “jigsaw” problem solving.

Each participant will get a printed copy of the group’s vignette. These vignettes are based on real-life accounts in the tourism academy and written by real people, anonymized. An example of this vignette is provided following this document.

Participants will move within groups based on the jigsaw approach, and each movement marks a time for discussion, reflection, and sharing. The sharing session ends with the facilitator highlighting the available resources and asking participants to share their knowledge on other resources they may know about and who may benefit the group.

Sample Vignette, as written and experienced by a real tourism academic.

As an early career European researcher starting his new job in Malaysia, Reza quickly notices the notion of “white worship” in Asia and the advantages he has because of the colour of his skin. He is also enjoying the attention he receives from single female colleagues and students.

Reza has been known to host dinner parties in his apartment for the females from his workplace and just as he sees no problem in having a drink with his male students outside the classroom, he also welcomes these social events with his female students. There are rumours that Reza has developed sexual relationships with at least two of the female postgraduate students and a female colleague but these were never verified.

Although there is institutional policy on teacher-student relationships, there are at the same time concrete evidences that love and long-term relationships have taken off within the school that Reza works in. Three of Reza’s colleagues (all white French men) are in a relationship with their students. Although these students have graduated, no one knew definitely when the relationship had started. During work events which these former female students sometimes attend as partners, jokes were made about teacher-student desires and seductions. In these jokes, there seems to be general acceptance for these intimate relationships in spite of the staff/student policy on professional and appropriate conduct, especially if these relationship are deemed ‘serious’.