

A reflexive account of fieldwork experiences: Interviewing tourist guides about the meaning of work during a pandemic

ABSTRACT

Reflexivity is a methodological practice for qualitative researchers to show how their own subjectivity influences the entire research process by conducting self-critique and self-appraisal in order to justify knowledge creation. Situated within the axiological assumptions, values are an unusual albeit important subject of discussion. Positionality influences the decisions taken to conduct a study. This paper presents a reflexive account of the fieldwork experiences of a doctoral student undertaking semi-structured interviews focused on the Meaning of Work for tourist guides. Literature on unexpected circumstances during fieldwork remains limited and provided the impetus for this paper. Unforeseen contextual factors can alter well-laid-out research designs. In March 2020, the participants in this study, tourist guides, lost their source of income as borders closed due to the pandemic. The construct of inquiry, the Meaning of Work had taken on a different meaning, literally. Amidst the backdrop of a pandemic, this doctoral study proceeded to remain cognisant of the situation at all times. The method used to structure reflexive accounts was to apply four typologies of reflexivity focusing on contextual, personal, interpersonal and methodological reflexivity. Accounts presented include a short biography of the researcher, an appraisal of being an outsider with insider knowledge, the use of Zoom to conduct semi-structured interviews, obtaining a purposive sample, selecting and gaining access to participants. Additionally, the relationship between the researcher and participants was appraised and provided useful insights on making choices. Interviews were akin to therapy for the tourist guides and the researcher showed empathy and respect toward their role in the tourism industry. This novel paper will be of interest to novice researchers who have yet to embrace reflexivity as a necessary component of trustworthiness.