Designing a 'refinement' short learning programme (SLP), in the service-learning arena

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Abstract

As institutions of higher education develop their public purposes, new models on how campuses establish partnerships and interact with their communities in ways that intentionally guide programme design, implementation, investments into human capital, and growth are at the heart of renewing community engagement (Kellogg Commission, 1999).

Few theorists would argue that professional education of any kind struggles with integration of theory and practice, with much of even procedural knowledge remaining to a large extent of the "declarative", procedural type (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).This means that skills are described or "declared" and not necessarily practiced. This article addresses the issue of combining service-learning with the needs of a fast growing industry. Struggling refers to the ability of industry to understand the importance of marrying the outline of the academic guidelines into the practice, i.e. (learning guide). Learning guides are provided to industry upon the student's entry into the WIL component.

Keywords: Short Learning Programme (SLP), skills, service learning.

Introduction

Service learning is one way in which a university can meet its obligations to prepare future citizens. It is also regarded as an effective for enhancing students learning, improving the quality of students' experience, and increasing higher education institutions' visibility and responsiveness to the neighborhoods and communities in which they are situated.

The objectives for the short learning course clearly indicates that they would be able to more effectively manage organizational resources. The course will enable participants to obtain current knowledge by learning more about the key concepts specifically related to the Food and Beverage sector in the hospitality industry. Service learning was established in response to legislation in South Africa in terms of (state the Act and year) and was primarily supported and funded by the Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) programme from 1999 to 2008. In 2008, the programme was transferred to the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Since the transfer there has been very little visible support from the HEQC or the CHE for the continued development of service learning and therefore for community engagement. Internationally, community engagement includes integrated service learning as a strategy of which the main beneficiaries are the community and students. The primary goal of service learning is considered to be the provision of

service to the community and the enhancement of learning through the rendering of this service (CHE, 2006). It is against this background that the idea of developing a (SLP) started. Not only will this provide a service to a selected community, but it will enhance skills levels in the hospitality industry because…... This article seeks to show that industry is also in need of superior service standards. Currently service providers within the hospitality industry agrees that standards should be improved to accommodate a growing hospitality industry.

Background to the study.

From their encounters in the hospitality industry, the researchers' have noticed an increased awareness of industry towards paying attention to service standards. It realizes that these need to be taken to the next level, or as stated previously, become superior service standards. Due to the researchers' concerns for the development of community engagement within communities, this study was further undertaken to determine if they could combine the two factors, namely enhancing service quality and promoting the further development of people skills while simultaneously catering for unemployed persons from what are referred to in South Africa as disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore the development of this SLP became an important issue to pursue.

Service learning has introduced a new approach to the concept of partnerships in higher education (Department of Education, 1997). The concept is underpinned by a notion of reciprocity in learning and exploration, which produces a range of benefits that flow from joint endeavours by, and interaction between, the university and other service providers. Carriere (2006:16) defines this partnership as a collaboration of equals. The continuation and development of these partnerships is also a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of community engagement and service learning. Breier (2001) comments that at an institutional level, responsiveness to the needs of individuals and of society has become a key theme in most university mission statements. The mission statements alone are not enough; there needs to be relatively large accompanying economic and academic support for the implementation of service learning and community engagement. The researchers are adamant that this SLP should be sustainable and that both sectors, namely industry and the disadvantaged should benefit from it.

The research questions

There are three research questions posed in this study which are listed below:

- Are there benefits for the Hospitality industry in sending their employees to the Schools of Tourism and Hospitality for an SLP?
- What would the impact be in the immediate community?
- Is there awareness within the two sectors that an appropriate SLP could benefit both? It is critically important that the mind-sets of the industry partners are focused on the probable positive outcomes of this initiative.

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to create a SLP that would benefit industry as well as reach across to the unprivileged people within a particular community. The structure of the SLP would probably demonstrate that both parties would benefit from this initiative. This was ultimately done by gaining insight into whether there was such a need in the minds of both parties concerned. It would also be important to determine if, as planned, this SLP would pave the path for further studies for the participants in the SLP.

The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study stem from the research questions and purpose of the study and were to:

- determine if there was awareness in the hospitality industry to send their employees to the School of Tourism and Hospitality for enhance skills development.
- research, what the impact be in the selected community would be.
- determine that both sectors would benefit from this SLP.

Literature Review

While the name 'service-learning' has been imported from the United States of America, it is receiving significantly increased attention of late from South Africa academia. It is for this reason that the researchers decided to have a 'theory' part attached to the SLP. Tim Stanton, an American academic who has been involved in the local Service-Learning development in South Africa since 1999, called the growth of interest and expertise "a quiet revolution", nothing that "in these few short years, Service-Learning has taken root in South African HEIs" (Higher Education Quality Committee 2006a, b, c, p. xxi). The increased interest in and use of service-learning can be seen, *inter alia*, in

- a growth in local literature and conference presentations (Henning 1998; Castle and Osman 2003; Fourie 2003; Bitzer and Melkveld 2004; Van Wyk and Daniels 2004; Osman 2005; Nduma 2006). In 2005, Bringle and Erasmus, the latter from the University of the Free State, served as guest editors for a special volume of a local academic journal containing nine articles dedicated to research about service learning in South Africa. In studying these nine articles the authors found a strong synergy linked to the concept of the newly developed SLP.
- the convening of local dedicated conferences, for example, at the authors' University of Johannesburg (2005) and University of Stellenbosch (2005), and The Higher Education Quality Committee & JET Education Services organized conference in Cape Town in 2006. In June of 2006, a subsidized conference focusing on capacity-building for service-learning attracted delegates from every higher education institution in the country.
- South African contributions in American publications (McMillan 2002; Gelmon et al 2004).
- the development of government policies on higher education (e.g. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) 2006 a, b) which focus on service learning.

Service-learning appears well placed to fulfill many of the goals of an African university and is being explored by local academics as a means through which to:

- access indigenous knowledge systems (Von Kotze, 2004) and produce new methods of assessment (van der Westhuizen 2014).
- produce applied (Mode 2 type) knowledge (Subotzky, 1999).
- bring community voices into the knowledge-making arena which is currently somewhat exclusively occupied by higher education, the State and business (Bawa, 2003).

The strengthening of community voices within higher education, the two-way flow of knowledge, and relationships is characterized by dynamic equilibrium and equity were emphasized in the development of the (SLP). The strong relationship and support and understanding from several industry partners made us confident to develop and have this seconded by the University of Johannesburg as a (SLP).

Research Methodology

When one refers to research methodology, they refer to the extraction from the data (Leedy and Ormond 2010). However before one can decide on the methodology to be used in a study, the researcher as to ensure that their topic is viable and must have understanding of how they wish to collect, analyses and interpret data. In our case we experienced a great amount of requests from industry to train and uplift skill in the service sector. That opened the incorporation of the service-learning side into the (SLP).

Community service-learning after theory.

Structure of the Short Learning Programme

Short learning programme called: Food and Beverage Skills	
Structure of the SLP	
Participants from Industry enter into this SLP. This is paid by the service provider, and this payment will subsidize the participants from the community. The participant is employed by the service provider. For the purpose of this article, we will work on *5* participants to clearly show how this planned and then incorporated. These participants will be carefully selected by the service provider in conjunction with the university. **Purpose of the selection:** • **To provide the participant with superior service skills that could be beneficial in promotion for the future.** • **During the selection stage, it would be undertaken to make sure that the participant will have the correct qualifications for further studies.** (To be explained in full later).	Participants from a community enter into this SLP. **Participants will not pay, as their fees are subsidized by the service provider side.** **The participant *is not employed, and will be employed by the service provider,* at the end of the SLP.** For the purpose of this article, we will work on *5* participants to clearly show how this planned and then incorporated. These participants will be carefully selected by the service provider in conjunction with the university. **Purpose of the selection:** • **To provide the participant with new superior service skills that would allow him/her into the work market.** • **During the selection stage, it would be undertaken to make sure that the participant will have the correct qualifications for further studies.** (To be explained in full later).
10 Participants enter the SLP.	
Course Content	
The purpose of the Food and Beverage Skills Development SLP *is to provide/introduce* the necessary skills to provide excellent and professional service in a Hospitality environment. *For* employed staff from the Hospitality industry, as well as unemployed people from a disadvantaged background. *So that* previously unemployed participants could take up permanent employment within the Hospitality Industry, as per our agreement with service provider. Already employed participants would return to their current employment with enhanced skills. In short we will offer the following over 8 weeks at the School of Tourism and Hospitality: • Week 1, we introduce basic theory subjects, with theory in the mornings and practical demonstrations in the afternoon Quality Service skills, part 1 and 2, hygiene, Menu knowledge, Management skills, manage people, time and costs. • Week 2, participants will receive coffee training from the CIRO Coffee Academy, in coffee served in a coffee shop environment. • Week 3, Practical exposure in the operational venues. • Week 4, Practical exposure in the operational venues. • Week 5, Practical exposure in the operational venues. • Week 6, Practical exposure in the operational venues.	

- Week 7, Practical exposure in the operational venues.
- Week 8, This week assessments will be condensed and 2 x functions will be held to demonstrate the new skills acquired over the previous 7 weeks

Food and Beverage Skills, the professional waiter Follow this link for a full view of the manual to be offered.

Main Findings

Response from discussions with industry

Industry had a concern that they would not find the participants with the correct qualifications for further studies, at any institution after this SLP. The authors then conducted two oral surveys, with people in the service sector, waiters/waitresses and we found between 60/70 people that would eagerly take up this opportunity as they have the correct qualifications. Surveys were done in operational areas across Gauteng, mainly in four and five star Hotels. This also included Head waiters/waitresses, if they were found to lack skills. All interviews were conducted on a face-to-face method.

South Africa is faced with many challenges. Many of its communities are vulnerable and faced with problems such as lack of housing; lack of sanitation; diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria; environmental degradation, water shortages, and so on. Service learning can also occur across the country. This would enable the participants to use the skills obtained to be used for own development within the hospitality industry, (i.e. promotion). With this qualification participants would also be able to become more 'transportable', meaning they could move around in an operational area, as they have the skills to better their positions.

The service providers that we engaged with all expressed their gratitude that this SLP would allow people from the community to have full participation in the practical field as set out in our structure of the SLP module.
Both the participants would enjoy the power of the new skills training provided. When discussing this concept with the community leaders they were very pleased with the structure, as we immediately empower the community participants to experience the concept of learning on the floor from the industry participants.

We feel that our SLP would give participants the opportunity to learn from each other. The group coming from a Hotel sector already, could help and support the group from the community. The group from the Hotel Industry would be seen as a 'safety net' for the group from the community. South African students can engage communities that are physically far removed from them. This SLP would bring two sectors of the community together, hence both would learn from each other. In coming from 2 backgrounds our participants will also have a better understanding of each other's backgrounds. Fraser (1993) argues that we need to take advantage of shifting solidarities within and between nation states that globalization affords.

We feel that the SLP, would offer participants the opportunity to add value to any Food and Beverage operation within the hospitality industry, an industry that changes rapidly.

Conclusions

Analysis of the engagement of higher education academics teachers, community members and service providers through the medium of service-learning has highlighted the dynamic nature of the relationship between power and participation which characterizes such

engagement. With the infrastructure from the university and the expertise from staff this relationship can go from strength to strength. Structural arrangements, especially in relation to participation and roles of the various parties, and place and time emerged in the surveys, as factors which impacted on the influence exerted by, and active involvement of those collaborating in scholarly endeavours. In most cases both parties entering this SLP, would have to get use to the 'class room' environment, and then match that with the daily activities, experienced in the operation. These factors affect the extent to which the doors of local institutions are opened to community expertise and influence, and, thus, the degree to which local higher education institutions are rooted in Africa. Community engagement, imbedded in the curriculum of the School of Tourism and Hospitality, has proven that we prepare future citizens with a strong background of civil citizen ship.

The research questions that we posed in the beginning of the article, have clearly showed that the proposed SLP may have an impact on industry as well as serve the purpose of making a difference in the communities where the participants would be sourced.

An Africanised higher education sector faces the twin challenges of more meaningful and equitable engagement with other societal sectors, together with the promotion of scholarship around engagement itself and this is why there needs to be a refinement of short learning programme (SLPs), in the service-learning arena. This will also improve the image of the country in the eyes of foreign tourists, since service quality will be enhanced. This will ultimately improve the economy in a small but important way.

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