

SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY: SERVICE LEARNING IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM

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Abstract.—In the effort to augment hospitality and tourism education beyond classroom instruction and internships, the added instructional methodology of community service learning is suggested. Service learning is an instructional method where students learn and develop through active participation in organized experiences that meet actual needs, increasing their sense of social responsibility and citizenship.

For the purposes of this paper, 60 hospitality and tourism students completed service learning activities in a variety of communities that were connected either to a course assignment or as an expectation of a student organization and excluded internships. Participants were able to address issues relative to value, satisfaction, and competencies obtained. This experience has proven to be successful in that it was unique and flexible and offered a variety of opportunities for students to learn from the community. Findings indicated the majority of the participants were mostly satisfied with their experiences and their preparation for future employability and civic duties.

1.0. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Evidence on service learning effectiveness is limited, especially as it relates to hospitality and tourism education. This exploratory paper describes the extent and types of involvement of hospitality students in community service activities, their perceptions regarding the value of their experiences, and the ability of the experiences to prepare them for future hospitality and tourism employment. By integrating efforts to increase

student involvement in public service with hospitality and tourism curricular reforms that encourage active learning and critical thinking, it may be possible to establish a model of undergraduate education that promotes the development of responsible citizens.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning is complex and multidimensional and appears to be inextricably connected to the learners' experiences (Dewey 1938, Knowles 1988). Humanistic learning theorists see learning as grounded in experience, involving both affective and cognitive processes that lead to pervasive changes (Rogers 2005). Socio-cultural approaches to learning are based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbolic systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development (Knowles 1988, Vygotsky 1978). These theoretical underpinnings emphasize that learning takes place not only through observation and modeling, but also in social settings.

2.1. Constructivism in Education

In applying constructivism to learning, two primary models, those of Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) differed in the focus of attention and the role of formal academic knowledge. Piaget's (1970) "cognitive constructivist" (p.10) model focused on the individual and his/her construction of meaning, emphasizing the importance of language and social interactions. He wrote "There is no longer any need to choose between the primacy of the social or that of the intellect; the collective intellect is the social equilibrium resulting from the interplay of the operations that enter into all cooperation" (p. 114). Vygotsky's (1978) model of "situated social constructivism" (p. 3) focused on language and social interactions in which cultural meanings were shared and internalized. He suggested that "increased learning will occur if the specialist uses a learner-centered approach, where facilitators utilize the learner's experiences and knowledge in the learning process, where they develop methods in which students interact and reflect on the subject matter" (p. 3).

Meaningful learning takes place when the subject matter is relevant to the personal interests of the student. According to Bostock (2000), educational identities are shaped by curricula in three domains: those of knowledge (based in discipline-specific competencies to develop subject specialists); action (competencies acquired through clinical practice), and self (educational identity formed in relation to a subject). Freire (2000) focused on the learner's experience as essential to the ideology that places the learner at the center of the process of education and describes the process of "conscientization, by which adults achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it" (p. 64). The importance of social construction of knowledge and reflective *learning* in the workplace is further supported by Marsick (1988), whose central arguments are grounded in the need for people in modern organizations to be prepared for change: to be capable of independent thinking and risk analysis to a level commensurate with expectations in a globally competitive society.

It appears, therefore, that a learner-centered approach with opportunities to explore through questions, discussions and action learning are necessary. Working within the social constructivist framework, Trentin (1999), states that the concept of learning rests on a view that knowledge is something that is not delivered to students, but that emerges from active dialogue. Drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) theory that conceptual understandings are developed through verbal interaction, Bostock (2000) found that a socially constructed learning environment is essential for effective learning.

2.2. Service Learning

Bingle and Hatcher (1995), supported service learning as a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity in such a way that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Service learning, a form of constructivist's education, engages students with meaningful community service that is linked to the student's academic experience. The power of learning

through experience allows students to use multiple senses, and increase retention of what is learned as the process of discovery of knowledge and solutions builds competence and confidence. Extending the classroom into the community provides opportunities for reflective activities designed to develop students' critical thinking skills.

2.3. Service Learning and the Hospitality Industry

Goodman and Sprague (1991) believed that career and vocational educators focused too much on preparing their students for the needs of the prevailing job market and not enough for the future. Other educators agree; Schlager et al. (1999) support the combination of on-the-job training and classroom learning as the most effective way to prepare future managers for productive careers in the hospitality industry, providing students with breadth and specialization. Knowledge sources are de-centralized, as practical teaching shifts from the instructor, and students learn lessons from their interactions with industry leaders and customers (Smith & Cooper 2000).

The changing hospitality environment and the development of graduates are fundamental to the evolution of a flexible, efficient workforce. Usher and Edwards (2001) described learning that is oriented to performativity, as that which seeks to optimize the effectiveness of economic and social systems. A solution is to engage hospitality and tourism students in community-based academic service learning which links the outside community with university instruction or learning activities. Service learning represents an effective teaching tool providing students with valuable academic, practical, and introspective knowledge as well as direct experience with a variety of people (Papamarcos 2005). A strength of service learning projects is that they contain both concrete experiences and reflective opportunities. This allows students to be responsive to service learning experiences regardless of their learning styles. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model supported the claim that service learning has a positive effect on students and the community. He proposed that

individuals may cognitively process knowledge in one of four different ways: concrete experiences, reflective observations, abstract conceptualizations, or active experimentations.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological qualitative methodology was used to provide a descriptive account of service learning from the perspectives of hospitality and tourism students. Phenomenology is a descriptive method that seeks to grasp the essential character of the object's experience. A qualitative approach originating in urban studies and other social sciences permits the researcher to focus on developing an in-depth analysis and allows approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis (Creswell 1998). The design of the questionnaire and descriptive interview questions was to discover "what events, beliefs, attitudes, or policies [shaped] the phenomenon being studied" (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 33).

3.1. Selection of Participants

The 60 participants were current and prior hospitality and tourism students who were over 18 years of age and had completed a minimum of one community service activity. To select the participants, we used purposive sampling which, according to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p. 48). Balance was achieved based on the different service learning experiences.

3.2. Instrumentation

The self-administered questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part 1A with seven questions, explored the participants' demographics. This descriptive information identified the participant's age, sex, major and area of concentration, type of service experience chosen, community sites, and competencies obtained. Part 1B with 10 questions explored the experience and perceived post-graduation employment skills using a four-point Likert scale—the most appropriate tool for measuring attitudes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) - based on the following range: (1) strongly agree; (2) agree; (3) disagree;

and (4) strongly disagree. Participants were asked to circle the value of each question that best matched their experience and two types of cumulative percentages used:

- a. cumulative agreement percentage which combined strongly agree and agree categories; and
- b. cumulative disagree percentages which combined strongly disagree and disagree categories.

Each interview consisted of six questions and allowed participants to address issues relative to value and satisfaction that may not have been reflected in the quantitative areas of the questionnaire. The wording and sequence of questions were determined in advance to allow respondents to answer the same questions, thus increasing comparability of responses and facilitating organization and analysis of the data (Patton 2002). Interviewing also allows "participants perspectives on the phenomenon of interest [to] unfold as they view it" (Marshall & Rossman 1999, p. 108).

Several factors acted as limitations. First, the questionnaires were randomly distributed in hospitality and tourism classrooms and at community service sites. The time lapse between enrolling in the community service experience and participating in the study may have affected students' impressions of their experiences and it is not possible to determine if the students completed the questionnaire, or answered the questions accurately or without bias. Second, it is possible that the interpretations of the participants' perceptions could be viewed differently by other researchers. Third, due to the sample size, the demographics of the population may not be representative of the more general population. Creswell (1998) points out that small or non-representative samples can cause concern about reliability. Although the data might suggest that this group is representative of a similar culture, generalization cannot accurately be ascribed to similar populations in other institutions. Thus, discussions are specific to the participating field of hospitality and tourism and are not generalizable. However, according to Yin (1994), generalizability is not an emphasis in qualitative research since assumptions of this design reflect specifically to real individuals and contextual interpretations.

Table 1.—Distributions of participants by concentration

	N	Percent
Bachelor of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management with a concentration in:		
Hotel and Resort Management	21	35
No Concentration (Hotel Administration)	12	20
Convention and Event Management	10	17
Restaurant and Culinary Management	15	25
Tourism Management	2	3
Totals	60	100

It has been assumed that the participants responded truthfully to both the questionnaire and the interview questions, and that the researchers' interpretation of the data represents a reasonable picture of the phenomenon under study.

3.3. Procedures

All qualified participants completed a questionnaire. Responses were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 12.0 for Windows to compute frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. Participants completed face-to face interviews which were approximately 20 minutes in length. All participants were asked the same six open-ended questions, although probe questions were often added. Transcripts were analyzed for statements that fit into categories; themes and patterns were sorted, providing the context for the findings and discussion.

4.0. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Participants were able to address issues relative to value, satisfaction, and competencies obtained, providing significant understanding of perceptions regarding service learning. Service learning is most effective when there is context in both application and experience. This experience has proven to be successful in that it was unique and flexible and offered a variety of opportunities for students to learn from the community and committed professionals. Findings indicated that the majority of the participants were satisfied and felt their confidence and skills were positively influenced as a result of participating in service learning.

The findings are presented in three sections. The first and second sections focus on the results of the questionnaires

from 60 participants. The third section presents the results of the open-ended interviews with 27 (45%) participants. Themes, many consistent with the elements of constructivist theory, emerged. In presenting the findings, pseudonyms are used and interviewees are quoted to capture the finer nuances of the responses.

4.1. Participant Questionnaire: Part 1A - Demographic Survey

The participants represented diversity in age, service learning experiences, sex and educational level: 42 (70%) were females, 19 (32%) were between the ages of 18-20, 36 (60%) between the ages of 21-24, and five (8%) over the age of 30. The participants represented five different areas of study (Table 1). The majority of the participants 22 (37%) participated in six or more service activities (Table 2). and completed their service learning activities at 166 combined sites and/or activities; the highest concentrations were associated with food, clothing, and/or book drives (n=39) and food and beverage worksites (n=22) (Table 3).

Twenty-three participants chose their activities voluntarily, 19 were part of a course assignment, and 12 participated through outreach programs/students' organizations (Fig. 1). Some of the participants attributed the success of their experience in part to the fact that they could decide the type of service institution and the

Table 2.—Service activity participation

Service Activity	N	Percent
1	08	13
2-3	20	33
4-5	10	16
6+	22	37

Table 3.—Distributions of service learning worksites

	N
Hospitality and Tourism Industries	
Food and Beverage	22
Event Planning/Meetings/Convention	18
Lodging	13
Chamber of Commerce	8
Theme Park/Recreation/Museum	4
Tourism Office	4
Charitable Organizations	
Drives – Food (19); Clothing (13); Book (7)	39
Outreach Programs	28 (Salvation Army, Red Cross, Habit for Humanity)
Before/after School Programs	19
Soup Kitchen	11

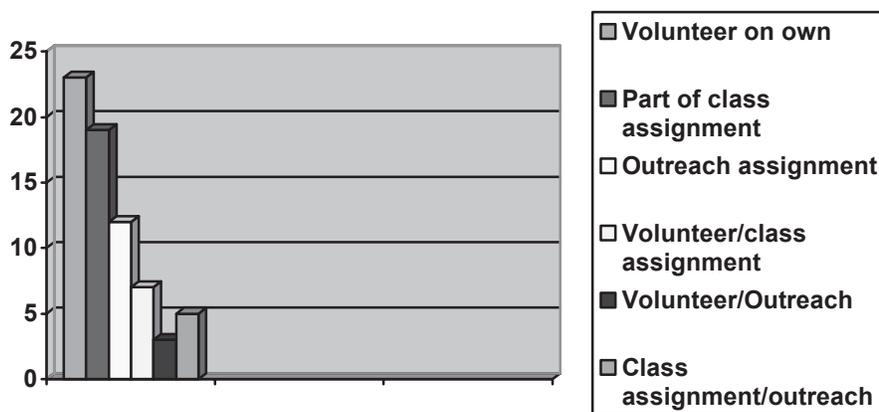


Figure 1.—Choosing Experience.

location and nature of the activities. Manchester observed that an advantage of the service learning activity is “the freedom to choose organizations you are interested in.” She completed service learning activities in a variety of positions and organizations. Allowing students to choose their own experiences supports the argument made by Usher and Edwards (2001) that “in seeking to enhance students, we may be enhancing their capacity to self-regulate in relation to workplace discourses” (p. 26).

4.2. Participant Questionnaire: Part 1B – Exploration of the Service Learning Experience

Outcomes of the 10 questions suggest that hospitality and tourism students are satisfied with, and are in favor of, service learning experiences that are positive and constructive. The majority of participants 53 (88%) stated that service learning has been a valuable learning tool throughout college and 36 (60%) believed that the experience helped them make sense of classroom theories.

Fifty-three (88%) strongly agreed or agreed that the experience provided meaningful applications (skills and knowledge) for future hospitality or tourism employment (Table 4).

The everyday practice and engagement with authentic activities during service learning were consistently viewed as effective and indicate that students were mostly satisfied with their experiences and their preparation for future employability and civic duties. These results support Bostock’s (2000) view that the construction of knowledge requires interaction with more expert others and that situated learning is co-constructed from cognitive processing and sociocultural interaction.

Table 5 provides the competencies learned. Thirty-nine (65%) participants cited social responsibility as the area in which they experienced the greatest learning, 35 (58%) cited leadership skills, and 31 (52%) cited

Table 4.—Part 1B: participant questionnaire results

Statement	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree
1. The organization provided orientation to my job description and/or role.	80%	20%
2. The organization provided organized and efficient training.	72%	28%
3. I was assigned a mentor who offered advice and help	55%	45%
4. I understood and complied with the corporate culture of my service employer	95%	5%
5. Service learning has been a valuable learning tool throughout my college years	88%	12%
6. Service learning should be a required part of the university curriculum	93%	7%
7. I was provided with a diversity of experiences	78%	22%
8. My service learning experience provided me with new knowledge about the hospitality and tourism industry	77%	23%
9. The service learning experience helped me make sense of classroom theories	60%	40%
10. My service learning experience (s) provided me with meaningful applications (skills and knowledge) for future hospitality or tourism employment	88%	12%

Table 5.—Learning competencies

	Number of Participants Obtaining Competency	Ranked Level
Social Responsibility	39	1
Leadership Skills	35	2
Analytical and Problem Solving Skills	31	3
Communication Skills	30	4
Critical Thinking Skills	24	5
Civic/community responsibility	23	6

analytical and problem-solving skills. Student responses to more general questions confirmed this, as exemplified by the comment, “I found this experience to be rewarding; not only did I find out about myself, but also about the community in which I live” (Sara). Service learning also gave many students their first meaningful experience with diversity. As stated by Angel, “during my work at the African Center, I learned a lot of valuable knowledge about another culture . . .it helped to break down stereotypes. Another said, “the most challenging part of this experience has been the diversity between those I helped and myself. . .being from a small town, I have only worked with people like me” (Kim). “It gets different types of people together . . .to share experiences (Mike).

Fifty-six (93%) participants believed service learning should be a requirement and added to the hospitality and tourism curriculum. “The experience has given me confidence to face any challenge and opportunity that may arise each day. . .to get out there and not be afraid; to get your point across. . .for the future” (Jade). “As a manager, you need to know all aspects of the business. . . how to make people happy. . .it [the service learning experience] gave me great insight into what goes into the process of running a business, especially a non-profit” (Jane). “Service learning provided me with an experience not encountered in the classroom. . .I consider it to have been the highlight of my university education. . .I encountered obstacles not found in a normal academic setting, [requiring] the autonomous resolution of real

Table 6.—Domains and categories

Interpersonal Development	“learned to work as a team”, “demonstrated service “enjoyed helping others”; across gender and cultural groups”, “assumed leadership roles”, “patience”.
Intrapersonal Development	feeling of accomplishment”, “self- reflection”, “self esteem”, “confidence”, “exhibited critical thinking skills “managed time and balanced priorities”, “exhibited self-discipline and responsibility”,
Communication	“understood the principles of effective communication to a range of audiences”
Professional Development	“understood the necessary competencies and professional opportunities of chosen industry”; “contributed to academic growth”

world issues...The practical education I received, as well as the gratification of helping others, is unparalleled” (John). It is argued that service learning in management programs provide students with opportunities to enhance their managerial potential by honing interpersonal and leadership skills while gaining a great appreciation of the need for ethical and citizenship behaviors (Papamarcos 2005).

4.3. Participant Questionnaire: Part 1B—Service Learning Exploration

Community sites structured around service learning experiences inspire interests, nurture personal and professional development, and give students an experience which generally would not occur alone in the traditional classroom. Students are provided with the opportunity not only to put the theory learned in the classroom into practice, but also to bring the lessons learned from that experience back to the classroom, thus enriching the learning environment for others.

Emerging from the discussion are three dominant themes: social responsibility, competence, and confidence. Participants expressed general awareness of social and ethical responsibility to their community, competency in the distinctive learning that occurred, and confidence, especially relative to their preparation for careers in the hospitality and tourism industry. Table 6 is a representation of the participants’ statements.

Personal and Professional Development. The service experience had a powerful impact on the participants’ personal and professional development. “The experience has changed me forever. I met people from all over the world, learned tolerance and the danger of not practicing it. There is only so much you can learn in the classroom

versus the real world” (Megan). Oslo worked with the Red Cross...“that helped me on my resume...it has given me self-esteem and confidence during job interviews in the hospitality and tourism workplace.” “Employers like it and you get good teamwork and leadership skills” (Paul). John was also positive about his experience: “I encourage everyone to do it...even when you are not paid; what you learn pays off more than the money. “I believe that academic growth, especially in the hospitality industry, should include working with customers. The hospitality industry is driven by customers and their level of satisfaction. Service learning means providing a level of hospitality for customers that are greatly in need of your services. Understanding these specific needs can only come from experiencing them in person. This is essential for understanding the nature of the industry and should be the background for all classroom material” (Annie).

Fosters shifts in perspective. According to Sam, “I did something for another person who was not a family member or friend...I like being able to help and seeing the benefits of my work.” “I think everyone should participate in service learning...everyone has their own qualities and can give back to the community (Paul). Megan stated that “being involved in service learning makes you want to be a better student...you walk away with a rewarding experience...what you put in is what you take out.”

The statements made by the participants are supported by Piaget’s (1972) notion that the capacity for abstract thought develops over time through experience with the concrete. Kolb (1984) also stresses the continuous movement back and forth between the concrete and the abstract.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study succeeded in several major areas, and the findings are congruent with the theory of constructivist learning. The study generated themes that represented specific outcomes of the participants' experiences. These emerged themes make clear the models of Dewey (1938), that learning from experience requires purposeful engagement with the experience, and Kolb (1984), that limited learning takes place without conscious attention to one's experiences.

Social responsibility and citizenship are the key objectives of service learning and hospitality and tourism education. Service learning enables students to act as agents of change, fosters the development of competence, and encourages the act of working together in an informal education process that contributes toward lifelong learning. Fundamental to experience in citizenship are the principles of interaction and continuity. Dewey (1938) views active involvement of students in the learning community as key in preparing them to take control and responsibility of their individual actions.

The success of these students suggests that hospitality and tourism institutions need to implement service learning as part of their graduation requirements. By offering projects based on community activities, students were actively engaged in multiple forms of learning; developed social responsibility, leadership, and analytical skills; and became ethically more sensitive.

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