Management Education: Valuing 'Differences' in the Classroom

Gloria Gordon, PhD, *London South Bank University*
MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: VALUING ‘DIFFERENCES’ IN THE CLASSROOM

Gloria Bravette-Gordon
School of Hospitality, Food and Product Management, South Bank University
103 Borough Road, London

Fifth Annual Hospitality Research Conference
Council for Hospitality Management Education (CHME)
April 1996
The Nottingham Trent University
ABSTRACT

In this paper a discussion is presented for the inclusion of the valuing of ‘differences’ between people as the cornerstone of hospitality management education curricula using a three-pronged approach. The models advocated for achieving this aim are ‘Identity Development’ (Myers, 1991), Action Learning (Revans, 1969) and Awareness and Competence (Howell, 1982). It is argued that the nature of the hospitality industry and the global environment which it serves demands such educational processes if self-aware, critical and ethical managers are to be developed. Empowerment of students through the development of critical thinking skills will enable them to become aware and reflective of their own role and identity in the world and in particular in relation to other people – staff and customers alike and to raise them from the current mode of ‘unawareness’ which typifies the practice of many present day managers. The author draws support for her conclusions from several sources: her own work with students in the classroom; the diversity of cultures (‘differences’) represented in the tourism and hospitality industry; the work of other writers, for example, identity development and reviewing recent studies on diversity and ‘differences’ in the tourism and hospitality industry.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is both conceptual and reflective and is intended to inspire dialogue and debate leading to action. It draws on my own experiences of introducing students to the subject of ‘difference’ and witnessing the embarrassment and discomfort with which many students respond and their attempts to hide and deny ‘difference’ when faced with it. It is also the difficulties I have experienced and have also witnessed colleagues experiencing in these situations which have prompted me to write this paper.

I am a woman of African Caribbean origin. I recognise that my ethnic heritage and gender give me particular ways of experiencing and understanding the world and so I make my subjectivity known at the outset. I am an action-researcher and as such I continually investigate, through personal inquiry, which includes being a ‘reflective practitioner’ (Schon, 1991), into my practice and life experiences (i.e. how I go about doing my work, questioning assumptions, beliefs, value systems and actions). This way of being has enabled me to achieve a level of ‘awareness’ in my practice which I might not otherwise have. As a result I have identified the values which are important to me, and also those which may be espoused by students, the institution and others in my professional field. However, I frequently experience important espoused values as being violated through the lack of tolerance of differences which, in my experience, is endemic in our society. I am committed to seeking ways of opening up dialogue with students in my classes, through encouraging them to work with process, in order that important learning opportunities are not neglected (i.e. how we relate to one another in the classroom). This is achieved through actively encouraging the development of critical thinking skills in order to ‘enable’ them and me to test our assumptions and how these affect our understanding of the text, world and of others.

In this paper I take examples from the classroom and attempt to make sense of them in order to improve my own practice. A fundamental goal of action research is to make research findings public so that views are exchanged and learning takes place collaboratively. This is as true for me in the classroom as it is in academic circles and so I develop theory from my practice. Even as I write I am aware of the contradiction between my commitment to enter into dialogue with my students in
order that two-way learning can take place in the classroom and the reality of student resistance to the ‘empowering pedagogy’ I advocate. [Paulo Freire (1972) describes such pedagogy as ones where both teacher and students take on dual roles, i.e. ‘teacher-student’ and ‘student-teacher’.] I then notice within myself the inclination to fall back into traditional pedagogical forms and adhere to social taboos and boundaries in order to satisfy their conception of what makes a ‘good’ lecturer (Hager et al, 1994) and also to maintain within myself a sense of safety. My intention, therefore, in writing this paper, is to theorise some of my experiences to advance personal learning and also to share them in order to open up dialogue on an issue which is growing in importance as we consider how to prepare hospitality and tourism students for managing a global workforce and clientele.

The format of this paper will be as follows: a definition of what is meant by ‘difference’ in the context of this discussion. Two incidents from the classroom will be outlined to support my thesis outlined above. A selected review of the literature enables me to present a case in support of this paper. In linking the importance of these issues to the nature of the hospitality and tourism industry I attempt to make sense of them. This sense-making process leads me to then recommend three models/tools which can be used to contribute to a ‘deep-structure’ approach to learning about and valuing ‘differences’ while taking a holistic approach to personal development. I specifically draw on the work of Revans (1969); Howell (1982) and Myers (1991) before drawing my conclusions.

‘DIFFERENCE’ DEFINED

The term is inclusive and is used to describe any and all of the multiplicity of ways, as individuals, in which we differ from one another. Differences range from major social issues such as race and gender to differences in eye colour and clothes size. Kleinian psychoanalytic theory postulates that there is a universal dislike of difference which will inevitably lead to conflict between those who are culturally or otherwise different. Kanu Kogod’s (1991) acknowledgement that the best way to deal with diversity in the workplace (or classroom for that matter) and thus defuse/work through conflict and potential conflict is to recognise, identify and discuss differences lends support to my case. In this paper it is acknowledged that there are opportunities available for each one of us to be both oppressed and oppressor thus limiting the inclination to place blame elsewhere. (This discussion of ‘difference’ is not meant to detract from the deep-seated nature of some forms of difference, i.e. class, race and gender). Studying ‘differences’ (as opposed to ‘equal opportunities’) allows us to take account of less obvious biases and prejudices and enables us to respond to people’s individual needs.

SELECTED REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The nature of my post-graduate research enables me to engage with my practice in a practical and deliberate fashion engaging with the mundane as well as with complex and frequently controversial issues. Support in this work is drawn from my supervisor, Judi Marshall (1995), who models this way of being in her own practice as well as from the work of, for example, Schon (1991); Argyris et al (1985) and Torbert (1991) who have all argued for a more reflective approach to the way in which we go about our lives. This way of being and working means my practice is under continual review with a theory of practice continually being developed.

The natural consequence of researching into my own practice inevitably places my students within my research remit in order to ensure that their needs are also being met. The needs of industry and
A critical pedagogy is adopted which enables students not only to focus on subject content but also to engage in double-loop learning (Torbert, 1992); teaching and learning strategies are carefully designed to foster creativity and personal responsibility; personal experiences are built into the learning context thus enabling students to identify their own theories-in-use (Arygris and Schon, 1974); responsiveness to change is also actively encouraged.

Schon (1991) talks about practitioners making the choice to work ‘... in the swampy lowland, (where) messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions’: this amply describes the subject area I have chosen to discuss in this paper – the valuing of differences. Views range widely over this fairly emotive subject area. O’Keefe (1994) argues against ‘differences’ being taken on as a policy issue since Western life has now been almost universally accepted. This view must be weighed against the realities of a global market where the ability to work effectively with cultural differences have been seen to affect organisational success. Indeed, Mullins and Davies (1991) called for ‘... competence at dealing with people’ saying that ‘... this must be a central focus in the education and development of hotel managers’. The assumption that the majority of hospitality students are ‘people-oriented’ types (Burbidge, 1994) and therefore likely to be competent in interpersonal relationships is also questionable and does not acknowledge biases and prejudices which result from our cultural socialisation – all of which cannot always be hidden (Kotler, 1992). Burbidge (1994) seems to also abrogate management education responsibility when he notes that ‘... hospitality programs cannot and should not be held responsible for attitudes, values and beliefs on which they can have little impact’.

Both the views expressed by O’Keefe and Burbidge go contrary to the general theme of this paper. Burbidge, in particular, seems to be abrogating organisational responsibility in the area of values and denies what in fact societies and organisations have been doing for centuries – determining the cultural basis of their success through inculcation of key values and beliefs. In fact Hofstede (1991) argues strongly for organisations (including the university) providing the ideal opportunity and environment for bridging embedded national cultural differences. From the educational perspective Williams (1994) notes that most graduates of hospitality and tourism programmes lack an understanding of how to manage adverse workforce. This view seems to be supported by Fulford and Herrick (1994)who argues that hospitality education should prepare the "industry leaders of tomorrow" to work with 'differences' and to understand how they affect the nature of the industry. With reference to gender differences, they go as far as to discuss the need for a vision. We, as educators, are encouraged to accomplish these goals via all three of our roles: teaching, research and service. Umbreit and Diaz (1994) also highlights the need to ‘... recognise discrimination and stereotyping (in the industry) and (for students to learn) ... how to react positively for change’.

Brownell (1994) pinpoints hospitality educators and managers as having an opportunity and obligation to foster the key communication competencies needed in the decades ahead, and to ensure that organisational diversity is valued and not just managed. Holt et al (1994) notes that "Hospitality managers must realise that no longer can a leader permit differences in people to be an
obstacle to human interaction and interrelationships." Baum (1995) also suggests that "Colleges and universities, offering tourism and hospitality programmes, could readily support learning in this area (differences)". Pizam et al (1994) contends that students also need to be made aware of the cultural 'differences' implications of an expanding tourism industry and the need to value traditional cultures.

Many of the above arguments acknowledge the value and call for the development of a more expansive worldview in which students learn how to value 'differences' in the classroom and to become more inclusive in their interactions with others.

CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES

"Not knowing may not be your fault; not wanting to know is criminal" (Anon)

In this section two classroom experiences have been selected which highlights the types of incidents which could be more effectively drawn on and used to enhance student learning. (Please note that these examples should be read with the proviso that they have been lifted out of their original context to make a point and that there are many variables which cannot all be addressed here.)

Classroom Experience No. 1

I have witnessed, and indeed have experienced the contradictions students experience when the subjects of race, gender, sexuality, class, for example, are opened up in the classroom: becoming silent, being unsure of their experiences in a public arena, being afraid of having their cognitive experiences denied; wanting to contribute to class discussions yet being afraid of what their words and thoughts will reveal about them as people, i.e. being labelled racist, sexist. This results in what can perhaps be described as unconscious collusion in the belittling of an important issue in the classroom. This occurs amongst both minority and majority students, who claim not to feel the subject is worth the time and emphasis placed on it in the curriculum.

It could he argued that this is indicative of the degree of discomfort which students experience and the almost unanimous "no!" I received in response, in one class to the question would they recommend the film on difference to others. One student acknowledged the film 'Tale of O' (Fant, 1980) as simply describing the realities of life which people don't really want to have to think about! In this respect I also acknowledge my reluctance and concern about not moving students beyond their 'comfort zones'.

Classroom Experience No. 2

The anxieties raised became even more acute when the same first-year undergraduate students were invited to write down three characteristics of the person sitting next to them based on their perceptions of that person. Immediate inquiries were made: "do we have to tell them what we have written?"; "I cannot do it because I do not know
them well enough!"; "I cannot pass judgments on this person like that!", and so on.

For me, and evidently for the students too, this exercise highlighted the reluctance experienced in testing out the assessments and assumptions we individually but regularly make of others on a day to day basis. This reluctance does not allow the other person the opportunity to make themselves known nor does it allow us the opportunity to test the validity of our assumptions. Students and staff alike walk off comfortable in their own little worlds unwilling to take the risk of getting to know another person, however being dangerously prescriptive.

THE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION DILEMMA

The important question raised for me as a lecturer in the area of 'Human Resource Management/Development' is how can both students and teachers, this includes myself, be helped to face the subject matter of 'difference' in a way which is not immediately perceived as being personally threatening but which is conducive to personal growth, self-awareness and cross-cultural understanding. My response is, as shown in this paper, to introduce students to looking at the issue from the broader perspective of 'differences' in order to demonstrate that individually, we have it within us to be both oppressed and oppressor. This approach is as opposed to immediately focussing on 'big' issues such as race and gender, for example, which are frequently experienced as threatening with defence mechanisms being immediately erected. The basic premise of the argument being presented is that it is irresponsible for hospitality and tourism management education not to take on board in a serious fashion the issues of 'difference' in the educational process. It is also insufficient to simply tack it on at some appropriate juncture in the curriculum. The story is told (maybe true) that one teacher ran into a friend who was teaching at another establishment. "Have you integrated critical thinking into your curriculum yet?" "Oh, sure" the other respondent said "We have critical thinking from 1.00 to 1.40 every Tuesday afternoon." (van Allen, 1995).

OUR MULTICULTURAL INDUSTRY

The reality of today's global society means that many of our students will be confronted with discrimination and prejudice on the basis of their 'difference' somewhere in the workplace. Some may also find themselves in positions of power/authority where they could be guilty of discrimination for a variety of reasons. For example, countless studies have shown that even though females predominates in the hospitality industry in terms of status they are in the main relegated to minority status. The same is also true in terms of racial and ethnic minorities who predominate in the lower level positions in the hospitality industry. These are largely accepted positions within the current status quo.

In terms of the subject being presented here it could be argued that the borders of
society has extended to the extent that the global marketplace exists for all industries, not just hospitality and tourism. In fact, it could be argued that hospitality and tourism was the first global industry! It is also true that the classroom experiences outlined earlier could have been taken from any faculty within any university. It could also be claimed that what is being proposed here is surely just a matter of 'good practice' (which we all have anyway!?). Others still might feel that the topic being discussed here is irrelevant as their staff-student profiles are fairly homogeneous anyway.

To hold on to any of these views, I would maintain, is to be:

- limited in our vision of the future of the hospitality and tourism industry and the high-calibre transformational leaders it requires for success;
- limited in our recognition of our need for continual learning and passing that requirement on to our students;
- limited in our conceptualisation of what the term 'difference' includes;
- limited in our understanding of the qualities required in our international managers and managers of cosmopolitan environments.

Numerous research has been carried out on issues which come under the generic term of 'differences' in the Hospitality and Tourism industry, several of which I refer the reader to: chapter 7 Baum (1995); chapters 7 and 10 in Carmouche and Kelly (1995); chapter 10 in Lucas (1995).

MY SENSE-MAKING

In the above classroom examples there was no real challenge to, or confronting of these experiences as they occurred in the classroom. Day to day similar experiences occur whether between student-student, staff-staff, staff-student and student-staff, let alone in the wider environment. Students who may complain of being discriminated against are generally not taken seriously in higher education (Dicker, 1994) nor is it usually deemed necessary to proffer help to the students in enabling them to deal with personal feelings around perceived differences and to identify appropriate strategies for managing such situations. The question needs to be asked: how well equipped will these future managers be to effectively handle and defuse sensitive issues in the workplace?

It is evident to me that potentially valuable learning opportunities related to the life experiences of both staff and students are being passed over. On reflection I wonder what it would be like if across the curriculum and in the classroom the course team were to adopt another way of relating to students and the learning process. Suppose, for instance, Freire’s (1972) dual concepts of ‘student-teacher’ and ‘teacher-student’ were utilised so that students were to be recognised as ‘student-managers’ (i.e. managers in training) and lecturers were to see themselves as ‘manager-students’ (i.e. experienced academics/managers who have retained the capacity for learning – even from their students)? In this way it becomes possible for the educational setting to move beyond the traditional to become a learning community which is continually evolving and transforming itself as it seeks to
meet the needs of individuals, industry and society. In this context lecturers role-model their subject topic as well as the skills and reality of management making the essential link between theory and practice; taking up the mentoring and coaching roles which are integral to the management function today.

It is within this context that I recommend the following three conceptual frameworks as ways of moving forward. The adoption of this three-pronged approach provides both a foundation and a framework for building on and for further exploration. The models/tools properly facilitated encourages: self-awareness and self-knowledge, the development of critical thinking skills, raised levels of consciousness and the valuing of differences as the participants move from a narrow worldview to one which is much more expansive and inclusive.

ACHIEVING COMPETENCY IN MANAGING ‘DIFFERENCES’

In this section I briefly outline the central aspects of the three models demonstrating how they can be helpful to both ‘student-managers’ and ‘manager-students’ in the learning environment whilst promoting the valuing of ‘differences’ and personal growth. The models are:

1. Action Learning (critical thinking)
2. Awareness and Competence
3. Identity Development

They are deemed particularly important in the hospitality and tourism context where ‘differences’ are an intrinsic feature of the industry. There is, undoubtedly, a unique advantage to be gained in our students leaving our courses with the competencies necessary for living and working with ‘differences’ rather than having to cross their fingers and hope, or worse, not being aware any faux pas made. Instead they will have begun the process of developing the qualities necessary to enable them to become effective cross-cultural managers able to manage in any environment and with the potential to become transformational leaders. These skills can be facilitated in the educative process as they will enhance student’s self-concept, understanding of others and therefore the quality of leadership and service offered to both internal and external customers.

1. Action Learning

Newbold (1982) succinctly defines action learning as

In action learning real managers (‘student managers’ and ‘manager students’) share ideas and tackle real problems with their counterparts, which effect change in the real world by helping each other. (italics, my insert)

It becomes clear that the relevance of Action Learning (Revans, 1969) in this context is that it is especially geared towards developing and growing managers – ‘student-managers’. This is as opposed to merely teaching students about management which affords them the opportunity to separate themselves from the processes of management. ‘Student-managers’ are encouraged to ‘... tackle real problems’ with their peers and so classroom experiences of the type outlined can be explored in the classroom.
Action learning also makes the all-important linkage between the student-manager’s expectations, self-development perceptions and the needs of the sponsoring organisation/industry (Smith, 1993). Self-knowledge, therefore, underpinned by critical thinking skills, becomes a key construction in action learning. Action learning sets (groups of five to six) provides students with a support mechanism in that they experience each other as being ‘comrades in adversity’.

The use of action learning enables ‘student-managers’ to experience themselves as being a part of the ‘real world’ even when in the university setting. The paper qualification can be perceived as a bonus to the learning and changes which have taken place within themselves rather than the only criterion of success.

2. Awareness and Competence

Howell’s (1982) model for improving communication awareness and competence is recommended as being useful in helping the individual to locate their current state of awareness and competence, in this instance in relating to others and the valuing of ‘differences’. The model is outlined in Appendix 1. The model demonstrates how at the stage of ‘unconscious incompetence’ individuals are likely to be feeling that they are working effectively. Recently, in conversation, a female student (aspiring for a successful managerial career in the hospitality and tourism industry) said ‘I deliberately steer myself away from this type of issue (women managers in the industry) because I shouldn’t have to worry about it’. It was evident that she was unaware of the need to plan for her career development as a woman and her need to be informed of what the issues are in order to plan strategically.

The model is useful for the way in which it provides a framework for helping individuals to identify their level of competence and/or incompetence as well as ways of moving forward. In the classroom it is anticipated that raised awareness should act as a spur towards the individual seeking to achieve competence in the management of ‘differences’. This awareness should be the start of a process which ultimately affirms the individual’s own positive identity as well as enabling them to be inclusive in their relations with others.

3. Identity Development

Myers (1991) clearly identifies the identity development process as one of expansion with the concept of the self growing from a narrow definition to a broad inclusive one resulting in a broadening of their worldview. This is a quality which Torbert (1992) found to be critical to the success of leaders with the ability to transform their organisations.

Embedded in the curriculum, identity development, used as a tool for working with students to enable them to view ‘differences’ positively, becomes an alternative and deep-structure approach to learning. At the same time students develop an awareness of self while extending their worldview. An additional bonus is that in the process creativity and potential is likely to be unshackled.

Myers’ (1991) Optimal Theory Applied to Identity Development (OTAID) is a holistic way of allowing individuals to understand and explore their identities collaboratively and in the context of their reality. For example one student may be white and male and thus a member of the dominant/majority group in terms of skin colour and yet experience ‘difference’ as a gay person.
Alternatively another student could explore her identity as a disabled black woman thereby acknowledging her multiple 'differences' (i.e. black; woman; disability).

The diversity of students enrolled on our courses come to the university with a range of experiences which are not currently being tapped into in order to increase cross-cultural effectiveness. Formally introducing students to models of identity development affords them the opportunity of learning about themselves as well as about others.

Myers model is briefly outlined in Appendix 2 with key phases being identified. It is acknowledged that the briefness of this outline does not allow for the complexities and richness of the phases to be understood in depth and the reader is referred to Myers article.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: A WAY FORWARD**

The unavoidable way forward, based on the contents of this paper, is for course teams responsible for management education in the hospitality and tourism industry to take up the challenge of working with differences by becoming aware of and being willing to work with the issues themselves. The teaching and learning material for working with differences is contained in the participants (staff and students) own experiences and interpersonal relations in the classroom setting. It requires us as educators to be committed to working with differences for the benefit of ourselves, our students and our industry and to fully engage with our students and their learning in order to work with valuable pedagogical moments such as those described earlier in formal classroom settings.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this paper reflections have been shared on how issues to do with 'differences' could be more effectively utilised in the classroom in order to increase learning and develop key managerial skills. The classroom experiences detailed, however, are simplistic in that they have been taken out of context in order to demonstrate a point. They do not acknowledge many variables which impact on and are determining factors on classroom experiences such as student profiles; personal experiences, organisational culture and so on which are evident in the wider context. I have drawn on knowledge from other aspects of my practice to recommend three models which can be employed for successful facilitation of student learning and development leading to a co-ordinated and integrated approach across the whole curriculum. In the hospitality and tourism industry the aim is to provide a 'home from home' service. The pay-off for an organisation in terms of added value, service quality and effectiveness of managers who have the skills and expanded worldview to truly value and be curious about 'differences' in order to provide excellent service and advance positive relationships is awesome. It is not an issue to be considered in the future. It is an issue to take on board now.

The thesis outlined here is intended to inspire dialogue amongst educators whether in course teams, individually or as an area for further research. It is also intended to inspire dialogue amongst practitioners in the hospitality and tourism industrial setting as they assess future work and the requirements for future top managers. I have stopped short of being prescriptive in terms of how to move forward and instead invite responses on the implications of this paper for hospitality and tourism education and industry.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Burbidge, D J (1994) Student Perception of Preparation for Success: A View from Europe in Hospitality and Tourism Educator, 6(4) pp45-50


Holt, CC; Evans, M R and Clawson, B N (1994) Blending Multicultural Perspectives: Can we Shape Students’ Attitudes? In Hospitality and Tourism Educator, Volume 6 Number 4


Kanu Kogod, S (1991) A Workshop for Managing Diversity in the Workplace, Pfeiffer and Company

Kottler, J A (1992) Point of View: Confronting Our Own Hypocrisy: Being a Model for our Students and Clients in Journal of Counselling and Development, March/April, Volume 70


Newbold, D V (1982) Introduction in R Revans The Origin and Growth of Action Learning, Chartwell-Bratt, Bromley


Williams, A G (1994) Techniques for Teaching Diversity in Hospitality and Tourism Educator, 6(4)
Appendix 1

AWARENESS AND COMPETENCE

A four stage process
"Unconscious Incompetence"
Ineffective in working with 'differences' but unaware of it (multiculturally ineffective)

"Conscious Incompetence"
Aware of ineffectiveness in working with "differences' but does not do anything about it

"Conscious Competence"
Thinks about 'differences' and consciously works to improve effectiveness (Mindfulness)

"Un/conscious Competence"
The skills for the effective handling of 'differences' have been understood and practiced to the extent that they no longer have to be thought about before using them.
Appendix 2

OPTIMAL THEORY APPLIED TO IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Phase 0: Absence of Conscious Awareness – The individual lacks awareness of being.

Phase 1: Individuation - The individual experiences the world as given. Individuals lack awareness of any view of self other than the one to which they are initially introduced and rarely assign particular meaning or value to any aspect of their identity.

Phase 2: Dissonance - The individual begins to wonder about their identity and effectively explores those aspects of self that may be devalued by others. Catalysts could be a classroom discussion; personal trauma, media intervention, etc. This exploration triggers conflict between what individuals believe they are and the false image of self that is perceived as being inferior and/or not valued.

Phase 3: Immersion - The individual focuses energy on others sharing their likeness, fully embracing others like themselves who are devalued. This acceptance enables people to learn about and appreciate the devalued aspects of themselves.

Phase 4: Internalisation - Having received nourishment for the devalued self individuals have effectively incorporated feelings of worth associated with the salient aspects of self resulting in an increased sense of security.

Phase 5: Integration - With deeper understanding of the self the individual changes assumptions about the world. The individuals’ sense of self has developed to a stronger place of inner security so that relationships and perceptions of others reflect this degree of inner peace.

Phase 6: Transformation - The self is redefined towards a sense of personhood that takes on a worldview based on the realisation of inter-relatedness and interdependence.