

TITLE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE IN-SERVICE, PRACTICAL TRAINING COMPONENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL SCHOOL AND THE BLUE MOUNTAINS HOTEL SCHOOL.

AUTHOR: MRS. THIGAMBARI NATHOO

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ABSTRACT:

The White Paper on education states that students should be employable after graduation from a tertiary institution and more and more employers are placing an emphasis on the development of skills, individual initiative, readiness to accept responsibility, self-confidence and problem solving skills as well as students' qualifications. These statements proved relevant when, as a result of student dissatisfaction with the experiential learning component of the International Hotel School as well as complaints from the Heads of Department at some of our partner training hotels, I investigated the higher education programme offerings of The International Hotel School in Durban, South Africa as well as those of The Blue Mountains International Hotel in Leura, Australia.

Given the very vocationally focused nature of the programmes offered by these institutions, both incorporate experiential learning in their curricula but differed in the execution of these components. I obtained permission from the Directors of both institutions to carry out this research, and was invited by The Blue Mountains Hotel School to carry out the research at the school in Australia. I decided that the best approach for obtaining the required information would be through questionnaires, interviews and observation of the students in the workplace. With this in mind, I drew up questionnaires, set up interview appointments and obtained permission from the hotel managers to carry out the required observations.

The Nature of Activity, Experiential Learning, and Constructivism form the basis of my investigation and dissertation.

Factors of importance

- Learners are involved in an active exploration of experience. Practice can be very important but it is greatly enhanced by reflection.
- Learners must selectively reflect on their experience in a critical way, rather than take experience for granted and assume that the experience on its own is sufficient.
- The experience must matter to the learner. Learners must be committed to the process of exploring and learning.
- Learning by doing is not simply a matter of letting learners loose and hoping that they discover things for themselves in a haphazard way through sudden bursts of inspiration.

Issues/approaches raised and or explored in this investigation are as follows:

- The theory taught in the classroom and found in the texts and the students' subsequent application of this. Can they apply this knowledge? How do we know this?
- What is the best way to ensure that students obtain the experiential learning that can facilitate this process?
- Who are the main stakeholders and what are their roles and responsibilities in this regard?
- What problems led to the investigation?
- What were my observations, conclusions and recommendations associated with the investigation?

As stated by Gibbs (1988), "The nature of the activity may be carefully designed by the teacher and the experience may need to be carefully reviewed and analyzed afterwards for learning to take place. A crucial feature of experiential learning is the structure devised by the teacher within which learning takes place. This statement seems to clarify experiential learning and the curriculum, or does it? It is obvious that further research and investigation are required in order to reach a better understanding of the issues that have emerged as a result of the implementation of experiential learning at The International Hotel School.

Some of the key findings of my research emphasized the need for a well-structured model whereby experience can be turned into experiential learning. This was evident when I compared the information obtained from the questionnaires, interviews and observations of both schools and the various hotel managers. The benefits of this research project are twofold, providing me with the required information for the dissertation as well as resulting in the amendments to the experiential learning components of the curriculum of the higher education programme offerings of The International Hotel School.

Declaration

I, Thigambari Nathoo, declare that the contents of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary is my original work.

Thigambari Nathoo

1. CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Tourism is the number two Industry in South Africa and according to 'the experts' will overtake Mining in the near future. The Hospitality Industry is a major role player and goes a long way to making tourism in South Africa the success that it is. It is largely a service industry, which is totally dependant on a variety of skills in Food and Beverage production, presentation, and service, as well as the different aspects of Guest Relations and Financial Management. If we are to match international standards the South African Hospitality Industry must ensure that all their staff receive training on an ongoing basis and work by the credo of service excellence. Both Government and the Private sector realized that they needed to teach these skills so that a workforce with the relevant skills and knowledge could be employed in the various sectors of the hospitality industry. The Hospitality Industry has for many years relied on training new staff by means of apprenticeship programmes, whereby prospective employees would join the hotel as Hotel Management apprentices and they would learn everything they could from the Department head or staff member that they had to shadow. This was unstructured and dependent on the knowledge and skills and enthusiasm of the staff member. The Three Cities Hotel Group manages many hotels and lodges in South Africa and over the years have determined that there was a serious lack of skilled staff in the various properties.

With this in mind, the Three Cities Hotel Group started their traineeship programme where trainees were employed by the group within their various hotels, and attend lectures on a block release system at the regional hotel school. This proved a challenge in that they had no control over the curriculum, method of instruction, time of year, etc. This led to the establishment of the first campus of The International Hotel School at the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg in 1994. The Durban campus followed suit in 1999 and the Cape Town Campus in 2001. This school offered the prospective student the option of studying towards The Higher Diploma in Hospitality Management, as well as The Higher Diploma in Professional Cookery and Kitchen Management, on a full time basis over three years or the three-year Traineeship programme. The full time programmes were duly registered with the Department of Education on the higher education band and were provisionally accredited by the Council on Higher Education in 2003. Students studying the full time course spend fifty percent of their time studying theory and fifty

percent at the hotels where they are placed in order to obtain experiential learning thereby enabling them to have sufficient experience in the industry when they graduate.

This is in line with the White Paper on Higher Education (1997), and the Education White Paper 4 (1998), which state that educational institutions must provide the labour market with high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy. As a private higher education institution, we at The International Hotel School provide our students with national and international academic qualifications and as a result, of the experiential learning that the students receive during their three years, most of them obtain employment immediately after their last examination paper has been written.

Traditionally, hospitality teaching and teaching in general may be thought of as lecturing to a passive class of students by using prescribed texts, notes and personal experiences of the lecturer as a guide, but according to Gibbs (1988), "The nature of the activity may be carefully designed by the teacher and the experience may need to be carefully reviewed and analyzed afterwards for learning to take place. A crucial feature of experiential learning is the structure devised by the teacher within which learning takes place." When I analyzed the above statement in relation to The International Hotel School, I found that although our students were obtaining a sound theoretical grounding, we did not seem to have much control over the learning that was taking place in the hotel departments. This problem resulted in me examining the structure of the theory and practical components of the hotel school programmes.

1.1. The International Hotel School

After the Induction period, students are divided into two groups, A and B. When group A attend lectures, group B are placed in participating hotels for their experiential learning component. This is carried out on a fortnightly rotational basis. The theory that is taught at the school follows the curriculum of the 12-course hospitality diploma as per Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, to which we are affiliated. This is integrated with local subjects and the assessment methods are both summative and formative, including individual and group assignments, application type tests and examinations, multiple choice examinations, annual projects and practical training reports.

The practical training component takes place at various hotels in the region in the Food and Beverage departments for first year students and in the Rooms Division departments for second year students. The third year students attend six months of lectures as one group and then seek in-service training positions at hotels, conference centres, and cruise liners. They are meant to find these positions on their own but we do help to place them if they do not succeed.

In implementing the practical components at The International Hotel School, practical training contracts are usually signed by hotel general managers and the hotel school principals. This gives guidance to both the hotel and hotel school on what is actually expected of them. This should actually lead to good learning but that is not always the case, as our unhappy students will attest to. These different experiences raise questions as to how to most effectively structure the in-service practical training, viz. "what are the expectations of the students, hotel managers and the hotel school?" "What do the hotel managers understand by the term 'practical work experience'?" "what are the roles of the school, the hotel managers and the students with regards teaching and learning?" In answering these questions, should we implement the educational objectives of 'Bloom's Taxonomy', viz. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation? Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning would be a valuable model for the school to implement, as it seems to be an answer to some of these questions as well.

It was as a result of a number of problems encountered by our students and staff alike that I saw the need to research this issue. The students of The International Hotel School were seen as a 'headache' or 'encumbrance', by the Heads of Department in the hotels and as a result, were given little or no training, but were put into departments that were short-staffed and used as 'fill-in-labour', where they had to extract whatever learning they could. There is usually no formal training even though the practical workbook specifies what should be covered in each department. The Students were also made to work double shifts and split shifts, especially on Sundays, despite the fact that they had to report for lectures the following morning. Some students worked in excess of 52 hours per week and some 60 per week. These practical training issues impinged on learning, as students experienced the pressures and realities of the workplace. We need to reflect on how these issues affect the students.

We also discovered through the students that the links between the theory that we were teaching in the lecture room and the practical training in the hotels were not facilitated. In some cases, if a student asked to be shown what to do when in a new department, the answer was usually that they were at the hotel to work and that the students had to complete the tasks that they were told to do. The students were also told that the managers were not lecturers, but were there to run their departments not to 'baby sit' students. Most of the students felt that they were exploited and not trained. The evaluation of each student should ideally be based on what the student has learnt while in the different departments and should be signed off by each department head. Instead they are signed off by a manager who may not have witnessed the student at work or, by third year unqualified hotel trainees who may not yet be trained to evaluate students. The Blue Mountain Hotel School presents a different situation, which I will discuss later.

The International Hotel School has three campuses; these are situated in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town. In order for students to be eligible to write their examinations, they have to achieve 80% attendance per subject and in order to graduate from The International Hotel School, students have to obtain a minimum aggregate of 70%.

Those students that are carrying out experiential learning in the hotels are visited on a weekly basis by the Practical Co-ordinator who checks that they are in the correct departments, and carrying out learning according to the schedule that we send to the hotels in the beginning of the year. The student's hand in a weekly report, where they describe the duties that they have carried out, and problems they have experienced, and they also include any documentation that can substantiate their report. These reports are also signed off by the Heads of Department. Students need to pass both the Practical as well as the Academic component in order to pass the year, and have to work six shifts per week during their experiential learning component. If they miss a shift they will have to make it up by working an extra shift, these are usually arranged between the students and the Heads of Department.

The curriculum at the hotel school has been structured to suit the various players involved and has taken into account the requirements of the Education Department. According to the article, "Higher Education in Coastal Sciences and Management: Establishing a Partnership between

Education and Industry" by Ducrotoy Jean-Paul (1996), academic staff was empowered to disseminate and develop the curriculum in such a way so as to increase the employability of the graduates. Is it possible to grant the lecturers at The International Hotel School the same freedom? The Department of Education and Employment in England and Wales reworked "The Discipline Network" for the benefit of their faculty and an outcome of this was that it contributed to circulating information on existing programmes of study and received advice from potential employers on the validity of the curricula. Would we at The International Hotel School achieve a similar outcome should we be given the opportunity?

Here, in South Africa we are in a similar situation whereby the White Paper on Education (2000) states that all students should be employable on completion of tertiary education. As was seen in England and Wales, this can only become a reality when the government bodies, academic institutions, and the relevant industry communicate their needs to each other as well as co-operate in sending out graduates that are competent in knowledge and skills. Similarly, we could involve the managers of the training hotels when drawing up our curricula, by obtaining their input on skills and underlying theory needed by the students before they begin their experiential learning.

In their publication "Core Competence and Education" Holmes G. and Hooper N. (2000) further emphasize this need for interaction amongst the academic institutions, governmental bodies, and industry. They believe that students should obtain competence through training. Students, industry and educational institutions should be empowered to solve problems through the application of knowledge. How best can we empower these parties? Jarvis (1994) states that "one becomes an expert not simply by absorbing explicit knowledge from textbooks, but through experience, i.e. through failing, succeeding, wasting time and effort...getting to feel the problem, learning to go by the book and when to break the rules." We can only accomplish this when we have industry and the educational establishments working toward similar goals and outcomes thereby complementing one another.

It seems that we have the ideal situation where students benefit from a well-balanced curriculum encompassing both the knowledge in the classroom as well as excellent experiential learning in the hotels, but this is not the case. Instead we have disgruntled, unhappy students,

unhelpful hotel managers, lecturers who complain that the students returning from their experiential components in the hotels are difficult to teach because they feel that the school doesn't care about their welfare, etc. As I was the Deputy Principal at the time and interacted with the students on a one-on-one basis in the form of Objective Setting sessions I was privy to these views expressed by the students. On investigation I found that although we sent out a roster for the year to the hotels, explaining the duration that the students needed to spend in each department, as well as the specific areas that needed to be covered, the reality was far from ideal.

The investigation resulted in the following leading questions:

- 1. Does the curriculum per programme meet the objectives set out by the hotel school, the education department as well as the students?**
- 2. Is experiential learning imperative to the students' success?**
- 3. Who are the various stakeholders in this scenario?**
- 4. What are the expectations of these stakeholders?**
- 5. What role do we expect the hotel to play in the education of the hotel school students?**
- 6. What is the role of the student?**
- 7. What is the responsibility of the school?**

These questions led to the realization that if I investigated an institution that has successfully implemented such a programme, I would be able to find solutions to our problems. The International Hotel School is affiliated with The Blue Mountains Hotel School in Australia and through our constant interaction with them I have found that they seemed to present the ideal hotel school situation. That's when I came to the conclusion that I should use their school as a case study for my dissertation.

1.2. The Blue Mountains Hotel School

In order to best see The Blue Mountains Hotel School as the ideal case study, one would need to have as much information as possible about the school. It is situated in Leura, New South Whales in Australia and opened its doors in 1992. It was the first school of its type and is now renowned for the high calibre of education and training. The school is a converted resort, so they have a fully-operational laundry, linen room, two kitchens, a bar, two restaurants, one buffet and one a la carte, stores department, front desk, two student lounges, a resource centre, tennis court, swimming pool, computer laboratory, lecture theatres and student accommodation.

Upon graduating from the Blue Mountains Hotel School, the students receive a fully accredited BMHS Australian Advanced Diploma of Hospitality (Management) and the International Hotel and Tourism Training Institute of Switzerland (with whom they are affiliated) Diploma of Hospitality Management. They also offer a Bachelor of Commerce, (Hospitality and Tourism Management) degree through the University of New England, Australia where the students may enroll for after their two-year diploma.

Before completing the course, the students are required to complete two practical blocks in the Hospitality Industry, both six months in duration. The first of these placements is in the Food and Beverage Department and the second in Rooms Division. Overseas students are permitted to work on a full-time basis whilst on a student visa. The students are remunerated during these placements.

During the first semester, students attend an Orientation week where they are given 'Blue Mountain Money', (fake currency) to simulate a hotel environment where students 'pay' for their meals and other services when they 'check out' of the hotel. The students are divided into two groups, 'guests' and 'staff'.

Level One Students

Those students, who have been rostered to work in the kitchens, receive two shifts, 05h00 till 08h30, and then again commencing at 10h30 till 13h30. During these shifts these students prepare the meals that are served to everyone at the school. Their task

is made a little more challenging due to the fact that students are from China, Singapore, India, Fiji, Sweden, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, and South Africa. They are under supervision of two chefs per shift. In between these two kitchen shifts, the students attend lectures that support the practical training they have just received. After the lunch shift they again attend lectures, but this time in another subject. Those students working in the evening shift report to the kitchen where they begin preparations for the evening meal. Again, they will be under supervision of two chefs who will instruct and supervise these students.

Those students working in the two restaurants are rostered to work two shifts, morning and evening. The morning shift students arrive at the restaurant at 05h30 and set up for breakfast. They ensure that the restaurant is clean, that there is sufficient cutlery, crockery, serviettes, jams, butter, etc. The restaurant is opened for breakfast from 06h30 until 09h30. All 'guests' have to wait at the door to be shown to their tables. Their room numbers are noted down and they are seated. Everyone helps himself or herself to breakfast from the buffet and those students that are working there clear tables, refill the buffet, and pour tea and coffee for the diners. When the breakfast is over, the students who worked that shift eat their meal then clean the kitchen and restaurant respectively. Those who worked in the kitchen, attend Food Production lectures, whilst the students working in Food and Beverage attend their lectures in Food and Beverage Service.

During lunch the same routine as breakfast is followed, except this time the a la carte restaurant is opened. Here, the students are serving a meal ordered off the three-course menu. The 'guests' reserve their tables in advance, when they arrive they are shown to their tables by the 'waitrons', where their food and drink orders are taken. The Restaurant Manager supervises the students that work this shift. Those who have bar duty, practice the art of cocktail making, but with non-alcoholic drinks called 'mocktails'. These are served as if they are the, 'real thing.' Each course is served at the table under the watchful eye of the Restaurant Manager. At the end of the meal, the 'guests' are presented with a bill, which they sign to their rooms or settle with the Blue Mountains money. At the end of the shift the 'waitrons, bar and kitchen staff' eat their meal and

then clear the restaurant, kitchen and bar areas. They attend the supporting lectures. The same procedure is carried out in the evening at dinnertime.

The students also receive training in Room Service, where only 15 orders per lunch and dinnertime time are taken. The 'guests' order from the a la carte menu, phone the order through and the meal is delivered to their rooms. This gives the students invaluable realistic training in order taking, setting up a tray, delivering the meal, presenting the bill and collecting the empty tray. This can be quite a task, given that the rooms are in a separate building to the kitchens and the students have to sometimes deliver dinner during a cold (1°) winter's night.

At the completion of their first semester on campus the students have spent in excess of 400 hours on the important areas of food production, service and beverage operation. They are assessed practically and theoretically in the form of practical and written examinations, which take place towards the end of the semester. Students who fail the theory portion of the course are allowed to rewrite their subjects and those who failed the practical component are allowed a second opportunity to take the practical examination.

They will then seek entry-level positions in Food and Beverage including: waiting, bar work, kitchen hands, room service or banqueting in the various hotels and restaurants in and around Australia.

Level Two Students

During level two, in their first semester students are divided into groups. The students acting as guests will 'check-in' and 'check-out' on a weekly basis so that the other group has the opportunity of working at the Front Desk, where they are supervised by the Front Office facilitator. The 'guest's' bill is called up on the fully functioning Fidelio system (Front Office software), and is then printed and presented for payment. Payment is made by BMHS money, unless it is the phone bill, which requires real money. The students 'work' at the Front desk from 09h00 till 14h00. The students work on a rota system during the lunch hour. While in this department, they process 'guest' accounts,

deal with all inquiries and man the switchboard, where all incoming calls to the school are answered. This gives them valuable contact time with real queries and dealing with real situations.

After their stint at the front desk the students attend lectures with the Front Office lecturer. Here they learn the theory of Front Office procedures. This supports the practical training they have just undergone.

While in Housekeeping, the students work in split shifts. The early morning shift cleans the student rooms in teams of two; the Housekeeper or her Supervisor supervises these shifts. The students are first taught the correct manner in which to clean a room, a bathroom, 'box' a bed, vacuum the carpet and dust the furniture. They are also taught how to check the showerheads, washers, light bulbs, etc, for repairs or replacement. Window washing is usually carried out on a monthly basis with the students working on a rota system whereby each student gets a chance to clean the windows of the school. After students have been taken through the room cleaning process, they then take the soiled linen from the rooms to the on-the-premises laundry. Here, they are taught how to check, sort and load the linen into the industrial washing machines, (similar to those found in hotels). They are shown which cleaning agents to use along with the required quantities. The students are then taught how to load the dryers, what settings to use, and later they go through the ironing process. Thereafter they work in the linen room where they replace the clean linen and attend a lesson on stocktaking. Throughout this process, they take notes or are given notes by the facilitators.

Thereafter they attend the theory lessons supporting what they have learnt practically. They watch videos, participate in discussions and read the recommended texts to prepare for any assignments and tests that have been set for them. Again, there are tests, assignments and examinations that they have to sit. At the end of semester one, the students are placed in Rooms Division positions including; housekeeping, switchboard, porters, front office, guest services, public relations, or sales and marketing.

Placement

During Placement the student is visited by a representative of the School who appraises, with the assistance of the supervisor, the student's level of skills and performance. If a visit were not possible, the School would liaise closely with the property to assess the student's performance. This provides the opportunity for students to receive direction to enhance their experience during the remainder of their placement. At the end of their placement the employer has to measure the student's performance in an Employer Appraisal form supplied by the School.

Throughout the year there are two placement periods late December to late June and early July to late January. The students in both levels seek paid positions and must complete a minimum of 800 hours. On return from their placements, the students can be replaced in industry by the next intake of students. The advantage of this system is that each co-operating establishment receives the satisfaction of having within their employ for six months, a keen, motivated student with a genuine interest in the future of the Hospitality Industry.

Level Three

This is an optional level open to students wanting to pursue a Bachelor of Commerce in Tourism or Hospitality degree. During the first semester all students attend lectures and tutorials. During this time they have to hand in various assignments or 'papers' before they write their examinations. They then work for a period of six weeks in the Hospitality Industry, before attending the second semester of theory. If they pass their examinations at the end of the second semester, they are eligible to graduate. The placement officer usually helps to find them permanent positions within the Hospitality Industry.

When I undertook to carry out this research, I obtained permission from my superiors to extend my research to the hotels in the Three Cities Group in South Africa as well as all three campuses of The International Hotel School. I also obtained permission from The Blue Mountain Hotel School in Australia to interview their staff and students as well to observe them during lectures and practical training.

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

My initial questions based on the curriculum and whether it meets the objectives of The International Hotel School, the education department and the students would be a good place to start. The curriculum is based on equal experiential learning and theoretical components, is this experiential learning imperative to the students' success? During my research, I should be able to identify the various stakeholders as well as their expectations, and roles. Yes, The International Hotel School is a major stakeholder in this scenario, but what is its responsibility, and do the students and hotel management share in this responsibility?

In investigating the curriculum of The International Hotel School, I would obviously have to research the various ideas on teaching and learning and focus my literature review on the following:

2.1. Teaching and Learning

2.2. Reflection in Learning and Professional Development

2.3. Work-Based Learning - Knowledge at Work:

2.4. Reconceptualising Theory and Practice

2.1. Teaching and Learning

2.1.1. Constructivism

Whilst analyzing the problems that our students were experiencing during their experiential learning component, I came across the information that lecturers generally enact their teaching decisions in line with some kind of explicit or, more usually, implicit theory of teaching and learning (Argyris 1976, Ramsden 1992). Argyris (1976) distinguishes between espoused theories that are held to be those underlying professional practice, and theories-in-use, that guide practice in the event.

Espoused theories as they apply to higher education are broad, encompassing not only theories of teaching and learning, but also theories of the nature of knowledge. This is quite evident in The International Hotel School where we wish students to learn the

theory that is in use in the Hospitality Industry. Two broad theoretical traditions can be distinguished. The first, objectivist, which states that tradition, is based on dualism between the knower and the known; knowledge exists independently of the knower, and understanding is coming to know that which already exists (Duffy & Marton 1992). Knowledge is seen as decontextualised, so that it can be learned, tested, and applied more or less independently of particular contexts (Brown, Collins and Duguid 1989). At the hotel school we want the students to take the knowledge and apply it during their practical training component in the hotels. The lecturers should transmit this knowledge in such a way, that the students receive it accurately store it and using it appropriately.

The second tradition rejects dualism, claiming rather that meaning is created by the learner, not imposed by reality or transmitted by direct instruction. There are two streams to this tradition: constructivism (Duffy & Jonassen 1992, Steffe & Gale 1995), and phenomenography (Marton & Booth 1981). Although constructivism and phenomenography are different in many respects they are similar in that both see the learner as central in the creation of meaning, not the lecturer, as the transmitter of knowledge, thus apportioning responsibility to the student.

During the experiential learning component of the programme the students have many opportunities where they can construct meaning out of situations. When they are interacting with guests and perform an action, like checking in a guest, they make use of the underlying theoretical knowledge that they studied in the classroom as well as the learning acquired from the actual experience. They can compare their newly acquired knowledge with the action that they have just performed and reflect on this experience.

Constructivism has a long history in cognitive psychology, according to Nuthall (1999); cognitive constructivism refers to what goes on in individual minds, with socio-cultural and linguistic versions of constructivism referring more to the contexts and ways in which minds construct knowledge. Students arrive at meaning by actively selecting, and cumulatively constructing, their own knowledge, through both individual and social activity. I agree with this theory as it gives the student the responsibility of making meaning with the knowledge and the experiential learning. In this way students bring an

accumulation of assumptions and previous knowledge that envelopes every teaching and learning situation and determines the course and quality of the learning that may take place.

At The International Hotel School we have students from diverse backgrounds, from the private school education with annual overseas holidays and trust funds, to those that attended the government schools where books have to be shared, student loans have to be obtained and they have never before seen the inside of a hotel. These students could elicit responses or actions coloured by this diversity during their experiential learning.

Shuell (1986) states that if students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher's fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes. (Shuell 1986: 429) Instead of lecturers presenting the lesson in the usual auditorium style they could state the desired outcomes to the students and through methods like role-play or demonstration, get them to achieve the learning outcomes. This proves very effective when teaching subjects like Food and Beverage Service, Food Production and Bar and Beverage.

Teaching forms a complex system embracing, at the classroom level, teacher, students, the teaching context, student learning activities, and the outcome; that classroom system is then nested within the larger institutional system (Biggs 1993). When designing an instructional system that supports the sort of outcomes that the curriculum nominates, Cohen's (1987) idea of "instructional alignment" should be taken into account. When curriculum and assessment methods are aligned, the results of instruction are hugely improved. This could very well be the solution to the problems we have experienced at our school.

Many studies point to the hierarchical nature of understanding. According to Bloom's taxonomy adult learners in higher education are supposed to grow in competence as they learn. Accruing declarative knowledge isn't sufficient; there should be focus on performative aspect of understanding knowledge. This is best illustrated by the students'

performance in the first assessments in their 1st year at the school. They come from a background of 'rote' learning and expect to get by in the same way, unfortunately they realize very quickly that they will have to understand and apply the knowledge that they have learnt. A student's performance also grows in complexity when mastering academic tasks. Gardner (1993), Perkins & Blythe (1993) and Unger (1993) focus on this aspect of understanding; where if the students understand something properly they will act differently in contexts involving the content understood. This "performances of understanding", require students to interact thoughtfully with a novel task, to reflect on appropriate feedback, to search to see how they can improve. Biggs and Collis (1982) describe the growth of competence in terms of, first a quantitative accrual of the components of a task, which then become qualitatively restructured. This has proven quite successful in our French lessons, where students' outcome may be, "to be able to converse with a guest in the French language." The lecturer would have taught the students the basic rules of the language as well as correct pronunciation, etc. The students would have to then learn this information and build on it by applying it to a specific situation, e.g. a guest wanting directions. Students can further build on this by writing and enacting a typical hotel situation in French.

In theory, it should be possible to select teaching and learning activities that specifically address a desired performance of understanding, and this proves quite true when teaching a lesson about the Front Office Cycle. The lecturer can set a worksheet depicting various activities that take place in Front Office and the students will have to place each activity in the correct sequence of the Guest Cycle. The students will have to show their understanding of the theory of Front Office when attempting this exercise. Selecting appropriate teaching and learning activities becomes a matter of experience and judgment as well as the cohesion of the function and purpose with the total teaching system of the educational institution. The learner's spontaneous activities are just as crucial in a constructivist instructional framework as those activities that are in reaction to teaching.

These activities can occur during the experiential learning component as well as during the practical aspect in the classroom, e.g. after the theory lesson on the nutritional value

of menu items students are instructed to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge by planning and compiling a balanced three course menu.

2.1.2. Transformative learning

Students should not see their experiential learning component in isolation. Mezirow (1994), states clearly that Transformative learning is constructivist where learners interpret and reinterpret experiences, making meaning and thus learning (Mezirow, 1994:222). The learner construes a new or revised interpretation of meaning of his or her experience. This is the situation that I would like to see our students in; as they work and learn they should make meaning and meaning is an interpretation of experiences. Adult learners strive towards understanding the meaning of their experiences. In the process of learning we use our ability to make explicit, to schematize, to justify, to validate, etc. This process is dialectical in nature in that we reinterpret experiences from a new set of expectations thus giving new meaning and perspective. This is where the student's portfolio of evidence could prove useful as he/she can write down their understanding of their experiences in relation to their learning.

According to transformative learning the learning process is shaped by what is known as meaning perspectives and meaning schemes (Mezirow, 1996:163). These meaning perspectives are also known in scientific literature as frames of reference, paradigms or horizons of expectation. We seem to forget that the student is an individual quite capable of relating their experiences in the hotels to some frame of reference or concept, thus giving it meaning. Meaning perspectives generate meaning schemes which refer to a constellation of knowledge, concepts, beliefs, judgments, values and feelings which shape a particular interpretation. Mezirow (1991:93-94) distinguishes four ways of learning. They are:

- refining or elaborate meaning schemes,
- transform meaning schemes,
- learn new meaning schemes,
- transform meaning perspectives or paradigm.

He states that we learn through reflection, which should be critical since it implies re-assessment of beliefs and old ways of thinking which are no longer functional. Learning however should be authentic. At the hotel school, students move from one meaning scheme to another by taking the underlying theory that is taught in the classroom, applying it during experiential learning, adding to it meaning derived from his/her interpretation and social interaction. In this way they create their own meaning thus leading to their own understanding of the theory, which according to (Bruner, 1966) is, 'the thinking of a discipline'.

It seems that Wittrock (1977), understood the situation we are in where he states '...methods of teaching should be designed to stimulate students actively to construct meaning from their own experience rather than stimulating them to produce the knowledge of others.' The portfolio of evidence that the students at our school use in the classroom and in the hotels display very effectively students' meaning derived from learning activities in relation to the knowledge taught in the classroom. They are required to question, challenge and analyze this knowledge.

The cognitive process plays a major role in understanding, learning and attributing meaning to learning situations. This usually occurs where the students' grasp grows the more they read. References that were out of context suddenly make sense and are assimilated. As students learn they build onto previous facts 'make meaning of learning'. When the students at The International Hotel School are introduced to a subject called 'Facilities Management', they usually cannot understand the need to study a subject about waste disposal, electricity, roofing, walls, etc. but once the lessons commence, and they learn new concepts that they can tie in with what they already know from their experiential learning and from knowledge in other related subjects, they are aware that learning has taken place and they are positive about the experience as they can relate this to the context of the hotels.

2.2. Reflection in Learning and Professional Development

2.2.1. Reflection in experiential learning

Van Manen (1977) is concerned with reflection as a tool that could be applied to a task and suggests that there is a development of understanding through interpretation, gained by reflection on personal experiences and that of others. During the experiential learning phase, when the student is in the Stores department, he may be going through the ordering procedure and will need to obtain at least three quotations before placing an order. He will need to reflect on the reasons for this action, the criteria that will be used to eventually choose the supplier, and the different steps in the process.

Experiential Learning impinges on formal education in its application to placements, fieldwork and accredited work-based learning. Experiential Learning refers to the organizing and construction of learning from observations that have been made in some practical situation, with the implication that the learning can then lead to action or improved action. According to Erant (1994) "Experiential Learning occurs where experience is innately apprehended at the level of impressions, thus requiring a further period of reflective thinking before it is either assimilated into existing schemes of experiences or induces those schemes to change in order to accommodate to it." The student wanting to learn about the Hospitality Industry has the best possible opportunity to learn the existing practices by observation, demonstration, and by actually attempting the task themselves and later to reflect on this. Sometimes this reflection can lead to the student finding new and better ways to carry out the tasks, e.g. Laundry stock take, which has been done manually in one of our training hotels. After a student spent three weeks in the department, he made a suggestion to the Head of Department and was successful in implementing a computerized stock control system in the Housekeeping Department.

Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning boosted the development of this field, which designates a clear role to reflection in the process of learning. By its very nature, Kolb's cycle of experiential learning is applicable to the vocational programmes such as ours, since it is the process of bringing the 'concrete experiencing' of events or experiences to

the state of 'abstract conceptualization'. Abstract concepts, thus formed, guide a further stage of 'active experimentation' and more 'concrete experiencing'. He states that reflection is also presumed to have a key role either in experiential learning or in enabling experiential learning, which is illustrated each time a student enters a different department in the hotel and engages in a new task and later reflects on it when writing his report and is the model on which I would like to base both the theoretical as well as the practical components of the curriculum.

An important feature of Kolb's idea is that the process of learning perpetuates itself so that the learner changes 'from actor to observer', from 'specific involvement to general analytical detachment', creating a new form of experience on which to reflect and conceptualize at each cycle. After the students have been carrying out experiential learning in the Front Office department for a few weeks they are able to carry out the task of checking in a guest with the aid of the software programme used by that particular hotel. They can also at this stage observe themselves carrying out the task and even analyze their performance to see whether they could improve on the time taken to complete the task, the level of efficiency that they reached as well as check their progress on the utilization of the software. In the rhythm between involvement and reflective detachment, Kolb relates the cycle to Piaget's sequence of developmental stages (Piaget, 1971) which culminates in the flexible interaction between different forms of knowing that are linked by appropriate forms of learning.

Educators play a significant role as can be seen by Boyd and Fales' (1983) suggestion that the stage of 'openness to new information' 'acquiring a broad perspective', 'gathering more information' could be combined with the next phase of processing knowledge and ideas. It has particular significance in the formal educational setting as it is in the stage where educators can intervene. Learners can 'lose much of the information available at this stage because of inadequate means of capturing or fixing the new information.' Of course the method of instruction is integral in the capturing and fixing of this new information. We should offer the students training in reflective strategies, examining the curriculum at the hotel school and amending it accordingly could be a solution.

The next phase is one in which there is a 'processing of knowledge' and ideas. This could be seen as central to the whole process of reflection and its relationship to learning. Boud, et al, (1985) feel that it is 're-evaluating experience'. They suggest that there is a series of processes one has to experience in learning. These are relating new data to that which is already known; seeking relationships among the data; validation to determine the authenticity of the ideas and feelings, which has resulted; appropriation of knowledge by making it one's own. The students will build on the theory that they have learnt in the classroom by writing down their experiences in the hotel in the form of a weekly report and showing the subsequent learning that has been added to the theory. The processing of knowledge can also lead to questioning existing ideas and practices, thus displaying the student's growing ability to analyze and apply knowledge.

2.2.2. Experiential Learning and Reflection

Is reflection on raw experience the same as reflection on already learnt material? Physical involvement in a situation (raw experience) or conceptual material that has been learnt can both be interpreted as experience. At the hotel school, the students who go out on their experiential learning in the first three months of the year, do not have any theoretical knowledge with which to draw from when in the hotel departments, whereas the students who attend the academic component first, have the supporting theory in each subject. It can also be argued that the students who attend the experiential learning component first have the advantage of relating to their experiences during the academic component.

This question will have to be put to students in each group. According to the Kolb cycle, the learner may at first be reflecting on the real-life events of a situation, but in a subsequent cycle, might be reflecting on the images and thoughts they have developed about the events. In the 1st situation the learner may be 'making sense' of the raw experience in order to learn from it. In the 2nd situation the process of reflection is applied to what has already been learnt. In the case of the students from the hotel school, it would be interesting to note their responses to this question.

Their responses to this question could be surprising should it mirror Boud and Walker's (1993) review of the model of reflection that they developed in 1985 (Boud, et al. 1985) where the role of the learner was emphasized in a new diagram. In this the learner determines the experiences that they choose to notice and further process, thus implying a shift towards a learner-based constructivist view of experiential learning. This is very relevant in higher education and in the hospitality industry today where the students decide what aspects of the experiential learning they wish to concentrate and reflect on. They can tie these experiences to the supporting knowledge obtained in the lecture room and as a result of research-based assignments; the lecturer can facilitate this learning process by careful questioning about the learning experience.

2.2.3. Reflection and Experiencing – how does a learner know what to reflect on?

Are we then expecting too much from the students, do they have the ability to know what they have to reflect on and how this reflection should take place? Eisner (1991) proposes the notion that the learner constructs their own experience and we need to be concerned about the guidance needed by the learners. In order for learners to make sense of experience we have a responsibility to put into place guidelines on how the reflection should take place, what they should reflect on and how they can learn from both the experience and their perception of experience. They need to be helped to focus on the appropriate elements of the experience from which to learn in order to reach the required outcomes of the learning. How do we, at the hotel school guide the students? What will be the best way for them to focus on appropriate elements of the experience? How can we help them determine which elements of learning are the ones that they must focus on?

Usher (1985) may have the solution where he questions how the educator should guide the selection of the perceptions of the experience so that the learning may match that anticipated by the educator, since The Kolb cycle does not account for this. Usher argues, and I agree, that learners need to learn how to reflect – how to select from current external experiences and draw on their own internal experiences in order to learn. Suggestions to this effect are made in my recommendations.

2.2.4. Is the process of learning from the representation of learning appropriately depicted by the cycle of experiential learning?

When students write a report resulting from reflection on experience in the various hotel departments, do they develop meaning or is this simply an outcome of reflection? The student could represent their learning in the form of an assessment task. In completing this task they would need to draw on the underlying theoretical knowledge, show how it complements the knowledge gained from the experiential learning activity and in this way illustrate that the process of assessment in formal education has strong effects on the nature of learning as stated by Ramsden (1992).

2.2.5. Reflection in experiential learning and action research

Although the Kolb cycle mirrors processes of problem solving creativity and research and the sequence has become closely associated with the process of action research, I do not think that students in the early weeks of the first year of study will be able reflect in this manner, rather this could be a reality in their second or third year depending on their levels of understanding. Further clarity is provided by the following ideas on reflection in experiential learning by Car and Kemmis (1986) where they state that cycle of action research is closely associated with experiential learning but includes reflection and refers to the actions of the individuals. It also provides a bridge between experiential learning and reflection and they go on further by describing the basic forms of action research as a 'self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting, then re-planning, further actions, further observations and further reflections'.

My earlier question as to whether the student who attends the experiential learning component before attending lectures would be at an advantage in the classroom seems to be justified by Jaworski (1993), who believes that this cycle of action research should be applied to classroom teaching. A classroom discussion triggers a process of reflection 'accounting for' the event. There is then a critical analysis of the event, a change and subsequent reflection to observe that change and so on. The lecturer could introduce and discuss a concept and follow this up by means of a case study to ascertain the students' understanding of a subject. If Jaworski (1993) were correct, then the students

would be able to pose many adequate solutions gleaned from their experiences in the 'real' situations in the hotels to the case studies.

2.2.6. To facilitate learning from experience

Wolf (1980) designed a journal so that the sequence of recording takes account of the cycles of experiential learning, with the initial recording of an event, then reflection, an account of the subjective inner experience and further reflection and generalization. This should provide a method of developing meaning of experiences so that the students can relate their unique experience to established theory or develop their own theory. The structure of the hotel school curriculum more than adequately facilitates this form of learning, but it begs the question of whether the students are emotionally mature enough to manage this. Another good example of this type of learning is Walker's (1985) suggestion of the use of a portfolio to support learning. Should the use of the weekly report be replaced by a portfolio, which the students can update during the three years of study? These could also be used as a form of assessment whose use could be enhanced in terms of learning when appropriate assessment criteria can be identified in advance between staff and students. Since this is in keeping with outcomes based educational practices, it could be the ideal vehicle to facilitate the experiential learning process.

2.2.7. Different stages of Epistemological Understanding

The reflective capacity of the students depends on the stage of epistemological understanding that they have reached. The research of Perry (1970), Belenky, et al (1986) and King and Kitchener (1994) has indicated that the process of reflection differs in its levels of sophistication. Individuals may vary in the way in which they deal with the same task or structure. Earlier on I referred to Usher's (1985) belief that educators should plan the guidance for reflection into the different stages of the student's understanding, when doing so they should keep in mind the findings of the abovementioned researchers and introduce reflective tasks gradually. In the early stages of working with reflection, learners will often ask if they 'are doing it right'. It may be a good idea for a tutor, mentor or even their peers to not only give feedback, (Knights,

1985) but they should be helped to see the advantages of reflection at an early stage (Strange, 1992).

2.3. Work-Based Learning - Knowledge at Work

2.3.1. Issues of Learning: Learning and Working

Something we have come to realize is that learning tasks are influenced by the nature of work and, in turn, work is influenced by the nature of the learning that occurs. The educational institutions and the workplace need to collaborate to ensure that they are not sending contradictory messages. The challenges for the work-based learning curriculum are to ensure that the mutually reinforcing nature of work-based learning is effectively utilized and that conflicts between the exigencies of work and learning are minimized. All the parties involved, i.e. students, workers, workplace supervisors and the academic advisors should be mindful of the potentials as well as the traps, and should also be appropriately resourced in the terms of the material and expertise needed. Who should take responsibility for facilitating this process?

In order to best answer this question we would need to study the work based scenario and heed the suggestion of Harden et al (1996) where they state that **task-based learning** recognises the importance of not only how to do something, but also the need to know and understand the principles and concepts underlying the required action by using real life circumstances which would stimulate the students into further learning. If phased into the curriculum correctly, task-base learning should be integrated with the supporting theory, which the student would have studied in the classroom. According to Harden et al (1996), students should be encouraged to understand why they should perform any task, what they should learn from it and its relation to the underlying theory. The flow chart below clearly shows the progression from the time the student learns about the task to the time that he develops in-depth understanding of not only the task but also the underlying concepts and principles.

**LEARNING ABOUT THE TASK → THE TASK → CAPABILITY TO DO THE TASK
→ TRANSFERABLE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS → IN-DEPTH
UNDERSTANDING.**

Enterprise in Higher Education (Training Agency, 1990) states that the way to successfully integrate task-based learning into the curriculum would be by means of setting up partnerships with industry. The work situation becomes the centre of the students' learning experience during the experiential learning component. Harden et al (1996) agree that true integration of theory and practice is thus illustrated.

Schön (1987) suggests that knowledge emerges from the dynamic interface between the subject and its actions in practice situations, best illustrated when students are in the hotel department during their experiential learning component and need to carry out a task by using a skill based on principles they learnt in class. Once they have completed this skill, they would need to reflect on this and note this reflection in their portfolios of evidence. Since experiential learning has been regarded as an important learning tool in the development of a graduate, Boud et al, (1993) agree that allowing students to contextualize their learning gives it some significance. Since one of the objectives of experiential learning is for the students to link theory and practice, this is the ideal vehicle for the integration of theory and practice.

The **Education for Capability** (Yorke, 1995) movement criticises traditional approaches to learning in Higher Education for not preparing students well enough for life in the 'outside world'. In heeding the call for outcomes based education, most institutions are now adapting their curricula to incorporate experiential learning, and we at The International Hotel School are no different, thus preparing students for the working world as practising hotel staff. If we are to undertake this task in the correct manner, we should pay particular attention to the development of skills and knowledge from the first year of study through to the third, and this should be incorporated into the curriculum as well as the partnership agreements with the industry so that everyone concerned is aware of their responsibilities, etc. In doing so we can be guided by Barnett et al (1987) who suggest that professional education needs to address three

main issues, viz. that the programme of study should prepare the student for **lifelong learning**, secondly that **transferable skills** should be developed and thirdly that **professional courses** should be directly related to and underpin the practice undertaken by the professional.

We know that work is directed towards producing what the organization is in the business of offering and learning is directed towards the acquisition of knowledge or the capacity to gain further knowledge, so how then can we combine the two effectively and inculcate a culture of lifelong learning amongst our students? I believe that the use of **Portfolios of Evidence** would be an excellent way as it is a progressive method, which the student would begin, in his/her first year of study through to the third year. It would also:

- ◆ aid in identifying any problems that the students may experience in the hotels;
- ◆ serve as a means of reflection to enable problem solving
- ◆ be the link between professional knowledge and current practice.

Whilst the student is in the work situation and has to complete exercises for the Portfolio of Evidence, the skills that he has engaged with and the underpinning knowledge that he would have learnt in the classroom prove beneficial. By the same token, when he is back in the classroom and has to complete an assignment he can utilize the information from the Portfolio of Evidence, which would be combination of the learning from work, the classroom and the deeper understanding of the student's knowledge.

As we can see learning and working often take place at the same location, and work-based learning emphasizes learning beyond the immediate and necessary requirements of work completion. Traditionally educational institutions provide recommended texts per subject from which the learner draws problems and completes exercises and assignments. In the completion of such assignments, the reading for and writing of a report or assignment may be of benefit to work outcomes as well as the formalized learning outcomes of the educational institutions, but we can see that it relates to work based learning, or is theory too simplistic?

2.3.2. Knowledge of the work-based learning curriculum

What perspectives on knowledge need to be considered in developing the work-based curriculum? Since a basic assumption of work-based learning is that knowledge is generated through work, all workplaces are potentially sites of knowledge production. The kinds of knowledge generated in workplaces may differ greatly from those generated and sustained by academic institutions. One way of contrasting the distinction between the kinds of knowledge valued in universities and that of other settings has been elaborated by Gibbons et al (1994). They describe two modes of knowledge production: in mode 1, problems are set and solved in a context governed by the largely academic interests of a specific community; mode 2 knowledge is carried out in a context of application. Each employs a different type of quality control. Mode 2 is more socially accountable and reflexive and seems more suited to the vocational type programmes such as those offered by the hotel school. It includes a wider, more temporary and heterogeneous set of practitioners, collaborating on a problem defined in a specific and localized content, especially relevant to the hotel departments where work-based learning takes place.

The focus of work-based learning is on the knowledge of practice on what is needed to understand and develop the activities of particular work sites and as such may not be applicable to first year students. The knowledge requirements and the knowledge outcomes of work-based courses will not necessarily coincide with those of disciplinary courses unless planned in such a manner. Some work-based learning curricula may incorporate elements of existing university courses, an example of this is the collaborative agreement that The International Hotel School has with The Blue Mountains Hotel School and University of New South Wales, where graduates of The International Hotel School can study for a fourth year and obtain a degree in B.Comm. Hospitality/Tourism. Along with the 'university' courses that they study, these students undertake work-based learning placements in the Hospitality Industry in Australia.

One of the major challenges of the work-based learning curriculum is how to reconcile the Mode 1 knowledge of the university and the Mode 2 knowledge of the workplace in ways that do not place an unrealistic burden on the individual learner. Since academic

advisors should typically be drawing on their background of Mode 1 knowledge as well as their understanding of Mode 2 knowledge when drawing up such programmes, I see the potential for workshops where the academic staff of the hotel school can examine both modes of knowledge and how best to incorporate this into the curriculum of the school.

2.3.3. Work-based learning: beyond the present and the particular

When students are engaged in work based learning, what are they actually learning? Are they learning existing knowledge from a standard curriculum, or are they only learning how to do an existing job? For the most part they are equipping themselves to be continuing learners and productive workers through engagement with tasks that extend and challenge them, taking them beyond their existing knowledge and expertise.

Recently Marton and his collaborators have moved on from phenomenography to that of what it takes to learn (Marton and Booth 1997; Bowden and Marton 1988). They confront the fundamental problem of how we learn in a way that enables us to deal with unknown situations. We may be able to explore curriculum and teaching issues in the classroom as well as during the experiential learning phase by utilizing the two features of Bowden and Marton's (1988) solution to the problem of learning for unknown situations when designing the curriculum. The first feature is to focus on discerning aspects of situations that vary from others; and second, to integrate disciplinary and professional frameworks of knowledge. They argue that one of the problems with the existing curricula and approaches to teaching is that students are expected to focus on a particular issue or problem and practice solving it until they become expert. They then move on to another issue or problem type and repeat the process. When they are faced with a new issue or problem they try and solve it using one of the approaches that they have studied only to find that they have no experience in diagnosing what the problem is. In order for them to gain such experience, they must be exposed to novel situations with different kinds of problems. It is the understanding of what the problem is that is the key to learning for the unknown. This is evident when the students carry out experiential learning in the Rooms Division department of the hotel and experience many challenges and problems brought on by guest requests, or lack of fresh produce

due to a strike, or inability to carry out a task due to lack of training, etc. The students, especially if there is no Head of Department present, usually have to analyze the situation, identify the problem and work at finding a suitable solution.

Students should be able to notice the variation between one situation and another where they compare and contrast these, and come to focus on salient features that will enable them to address the new problem. I believe that just solving the problem does not indicate learning, but that the development of an appreciation of what was actually learned during this process is important. We need to advise the students that when they are exposed to novel challenges and problem situations in the hotels and they manage to solve them, they should take note of what they have learnt, and why they chose the solution that they did. The second of Bowden and Marton's (1988) solutions to learning for unknown situations is the integration of Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge. They argue that this is potentially more problematic as work-related frameworks of knowledge are generally underdeveloped or not well documented. They feel that the ways in which disciplinary knowledge is represented in the conventional curriculum may not be accessible to those who have not progressed through a conventional disciplinary education.

A particular challenge for the work-based curriculum is the danger of trapping learners' understanding within their own work setting. Is this the case with the hotel school students during experiential learning? Bowden and Marton's (1998) suggestions can also be used to address the problematic issue of the transfer of learning. How can we ensure that students can apply their learning in situations other than the ones in which they developed it? According to (Bowden and Marton 1998:25) " Every 'learning situation' includes the potential for application (of something learned previously) and every situation of application' implies the potential for learning (something new)" which I feel is what experiential learning is all about.

It is only through experiencing variation in learning, discerning different sorts of variation and being able to draw upon this variation in new settings, that learners can successfully approach new problems or issues. This implies a greater emphasis on

students' appreciating what they are learning and what they have learned at the time of their learning. "They need to disembed their knowledge from the particularities of context in which it is learned so that it is available for use elsewhere" (Donaldson 1978). Developing an awareness of their learning is a necessary step that must be incorporated explicitly into the work-based curriculum. As mentioned before this is relevant to the experiential programme at The International Hotel School, but the students will have to be able to take what they have learnt from solving problems in the hotel, and coupled with the knowledge learnt in the classroom, apply this to other situations.

2.3.4. Creating a work-based curriculum: educational implications of work as the curriculum

Unlike conventional study in which the curriculum can be set de facto by academics and teachers, in work-based learning there are more influences over the content and process of study. There is always tension between workplace requirements and educational institution requirements. This should not be the case if, when creating this work-based curriculum one takes this into account as well as the fact that the White Paper on Education states that all graduates of higher education should be employable. What implications do these characteristics have for the construction of work-based programme?

A programme must accept and take into account the different types of knowledge represented when work is part of the curriculum. Hence Mode 1 knowledge must not be systematically privileged at the expense of Mode 2 knowledge. Work-based learning programmes must be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of the learner and of the work setting. There should be a focus on an educational approach to the curriculum not just an operational competency-based approach suitable for pre-defined learning outcomes. This operational competency-based approach is suited to the Further Education and Training Learnership type programmes, where the learner merely has to display competency in a task. The more holistic approaches to competency (Gonzi 1994; Hager et al 1994) are more suitable to a Higher Education curriculum such as ours.

2.3.5. Key learning themes

Work-based learning provides an excellent example of a learner-centered approach to the curriculum where the focus is on what students wish to learn and not just what is provided for them to learn. The features of the curriculum should then be set in the context of the student's relationship to learning.

There are 4 key learning themes that we need to focus on, they are learning identified, learning added, learning recognized and learning equivalence. With learning identified the student can bring knowledge to the programme and he can state what he wants from the programme. Students should review what they have learned from their experience and identify how this relates to what they desire to learn. The learning added component is regarded as the core of any programme, and is the new learning undertaken for the purposes of the programme by building from existing knowledge to a new level of accomplishment. It comprises study, which equips students for work-based learning, a planning task resulting in a learning agreement, work-related projects and self-monitoring of all these tasks. The learning added is not only with respect to particular work knowledge, but a contribution towards the lifelong learning skills of planning and evaluating one's own learning, something that the students would need to acquire.

Learning recognized is knowledge that the student is able to recognize as having been acquired from study, which he/she can relate to situations at work. In this way, will the student be able to identify the learning outcomes needed? Once this skill is developed, surely then learning equivalence will have been achieved, whereby he/she would relate to the academic equivalent in terms of credit points and level of achievement of the documented learning outcomes? This is not just the 'content' or new knowledge required by work per se on the intrinsic knowledge gained by the learner but as is vital in work-based learning is the consideration of what else is required to transform it into learning accepted for academic purposes. These key learning themes lend themselves to experiential learning, but the curriculum will have to be drawn up accordingly.

2.3.6. Elements of a Work-based Curriculum

While the central feature of a work-based curriculum will always be learning tasks undertaken in conjunction with work, in order that these learning tasks meet broader educational goals, it has been found necessary to include a number of other elements. These include the fact that while work-based learning is commonly undertaken in the workplace, it is not identical to work; the diverse range of knowledge and skills possessed by students at the commencement of work-based learning should be addressed; the outcomes of work-based learning must be located in a framework of levels and standards of achievement; support of ongoing learning of students in situ, and the encouragement of critical reflection throughout the programme. These elements play a vital role in the answering of my critical questions, viz. how should the in-service component of hospitality training be structured to facilitate a learning experience for the students? What are the expectations, responsibilities and relationships of the various participants?

Careful thought needs to be given to the structure which will support the development of a programme, the ways in which it is carried out and how it is assessed and evaluated. What is needed to assist the learner at this stage? Work-based learning programmes add value to what is needed to get the job done. They involve making learning explicit, appreciating existing achievements, acknowledging one's knowledge base, exploring desired outcomes, planning for knowledge acquisition, critically reflecting on understanding, learning co-operatively with others and documenting achievements. These valuable outcomes contribute to the development of lifelong learning in their own right. How then can these be incorporated in a work-based learning programme?

Why should critical reflection be encouraged in work-based learning? What might it consist of? I believe that this is important because it is only through deeper critique that work situations can be improved, workplaces transformed and productivity significantly enhanced. Our students must go beyond what is given and engage deeply with the ideas, concepts and practices that are central to their negotiated learning tasks. They need to identify the structures of the knowledge they are working with so that they

develop an awareness about what is actually being learned and the ability to articulate this convincingly are vital. It is profoundly misleading to regard work-based learning as an entirely pragmatic and operational endeavour. It is as theoretically complex and intellectually demanding as any form of education, which is why I feel that we should not place students in these situations unless we have prepared them adequately.

2.3.7. Implementing Work-based Learning for the First Time

"A problem-centred approach brings theory and practice together. The organizational context in which the learner works generates real problems. In grappling with those problems, the learner searches for information. She seeks to develop personal skills or practical competencies that will help her deal with the problem. But the problem must also be theorized. It must be analyzed and identified, and related to a wider class of similar problems at hand. The learner draws on a range of resources to do this: peer discussion, facilitator guidance, objective knowledge sources in the form of readings and expert resource people, in order to develop a broader theoretical understanding and to develop insights into the likely causes and effects of the problem in question. Those theoretical insights are brought to bear on the generation of practical strategies or solutions to the problems at hand. The learners then apply and extend this knowledge through their individual assignments wherein they address practical problems within the organization, analyze it and develop practical solutions for implementation." (Onyx 1992:104) It would seem that if we base our curriculum on these ideas, we would be providing our students with the ideal work-based learning situation.

2.3.8. A challenge to learning

In the search for solutions to the problems faced by our students, a common thread seems to be Kolb's (1984:38) definition of learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.' He argues that while experience is an essential component of learning, it is not the experience itself that is crucial, but the transformation of that experience by the learners' reflection of that experience within a socio-cultural context (Kolb 1984; Miller and Boud 1996). This is evidenced in the content of students' reports after their weeks of experiential learning.

A simplified model of intended outcomes of learning includes content learning, application of knowledge gained from practice, and critical reflection and theoretical understanding. Generally the workplace emphasizes embedded knowledge in practice application and the universities prefer critical reflection and theoretical understanding. Both the workplace and the universities acknowledge the validity of knowledge embedded in practice as well as the validity and importance of critical reflection and content learning. "Universities are faced with new challenges as they attempt to develop workplace-based courses that retain a critical dimension" Garrick and Kirkpatrick (1998:177). As a hotel school, we have developed workplace-based courses but may need to work on how we can retain the critical dimension, as can be seen when examining the three criteria that have proven useful in relation to critical reflection and theoretical learning. It requires that part of the assessment must be written, participants must engage with literature on which the module is based, with evidence of readings and application to practice and that participants must be able to reflect critically on their own learning. If one looks at the curriculum of The International Hotel School, one can see that they meet some, though not all of the criteria; can the curriculum be changed in order to do so?

2.4. Reconceptualising theory and practice

2.4.1. Theorists and Practitioners

Theory signifies rigour, supposedly achieved through application or reflection. It appears to warrant practice through its relationship to a scientifically validated body of knowledge. But it is this "rigour" that often makes theory seem remote, irrelevant and unworldly.

The theorist, on the other hand, tends to regard the practitioner as someone too ready to be influenced by 'common sense' and custom and practice or anecdotal or trial and error knowledge. Yes, according to the theorists, practitioners possess expertise, but unsystematic and of questionable validity. Theorists claim to have a different kind of knowledge and expertise about practice. They may not be field practitioners but feel they have an advantage and can stand back or distance themselves from day-to-day action imperatives of practice. They are better able to investigate or uncover a 'real'

world of practice, which is hidden to the practitioner. Theorists see their expertise as based on systematic and scientifically tested knowledge and therefore as naturally superior. They feel that the practitioner knowledge is 'superficial' and inferior thus claiming power to define the limits of knowledge and using that power to define the practitioner's knowledge as outside the limit.

In many cases practitioners are unsure which theory or which aspect of theory is relevant to the circumstances of their practice. In some cases practitioners integrate theory into their work and are often unsure what it means to 'apply' theory in any concrete sense or to use theory to reflect on practice. This is the case with the Blue Mountain Hotel School where the Practical Component of the Course seems to carry more weight than the theory and the instructors of subjects, like Food and Beverage Service, and Front Office are Managers in these fields who can teach the how to and to some extent the why, but purely from a practical perspective

Elliott (1991) illustrates this with the example of teachers and the notion of the hidden curriculum, which I found relevant to the practical training of the students of The International Hotel School and the Heads of Department or Managers who are required to "train" them. He argues that the problem they face is that educational theory appears irrelevant to their practice but, at the same time, the theory of the hidden curriculum makes them feel that they are responsible for things over which they have no control.

The positivist/empiricist view of knowledge cast the only legitimate form that theory could take as logically connected, context-independent generalizations. The practitioners' knowledge, on the other hand, is narratively connected, context-specific and particularised. Context-specific practitioner knowledge is construed as a limited and inferior form of knowledge and defined as not 'real knowledge' at all. There is a gap between how theorists understand theoretical knowledge and how theoretical knowledge works in relation to practice. According to theorists, they describe or explain the world and generate an ideal of practice. Practitioners feel that they do not have sufficient control over situations to be able to implement theory evident when a student is carrying out experiential learning in a hotel; in theory he should take three minutes to

check a guest into the hotel, with the aid of a computer programme at Front Desk. This is the ideal which cannot always become reality, e.g. if the computer was 'off-line', or if two groups of guests arrive at the same time, or if there is a staff strike, it is usually practitioners who can call on their years of experience and knowledge obtained 'on the job' that can find a solution to the situation.

It is this, which Schon (1983) highlights when he refers to the problem of rigour versus relevance which all practitioners face and which they all have to resolve in some way. This is a very relevant problem in with the experiential learning of the students of The International Hotel School. If theory is agreed to be remote from practice and divorced from its realities, then this really does let practitioners off the hook, making their lives a lot easier. Feeling threatened by theory and dismissing it as remote and 'airy-fairy' allows practitioners to cocoon themselves in 'experience', their craft knowledge and customary way of doing things. Hence, a private world that is safe but unchallenged can be created. Practitioners may therefore have an investment in their subordinate positioning through the division of labour between theorist and practitioners especially when faced with the very real problem of presenting guests with clean rooms and hot meals during a crippling strike. Keeping the world of theory 'out' is a means by which practitioners keep their own world of practice 'in' i.e. immune to questioning and change, until theory is forced upon them and they have to question or justify their practice when students ask questions or challenge their way of doing things according to what they were taught in the lecture room or read in their prescribed text books.

It was Schon, in his book "The Reflective Practitioner (1983), who introduced the idea of 'reflection –action' as a means of overcoming the dilemma of rigour versus relevance. He argued that practitioner knowledge was more than customary craft knowledge, and that it was a realm of legitimate knowledge in its own right. He pointed out the difference between theoretical knowledge about practice and the practical knowledge, which is inherent in practice.

2.4.2. Theoretical Knowledge as a foundation for Practice

One assumes that theoretical knowledge must be the foundation of practice because it is research guaranteed, systematic, and 'scientific' knowledge. Theory is thus conceived as knowledge about what is, and is normally considered worthwhile and secure. The 'worthwhileness' of theoretical knowledge is reinforced because of the apparent power of this kind of knowledge to make predictions about events in the world and hence to be able to control these events. It is this power of prediction and control that enables theory to be the means by which practice is justified or warranted. If one looks at the prescribed books that the students of the hotel school read as part of their theory, one sees the theories of management or the supporting theory behind the practice that will take place in the hotel departments. The major part of this theory is written by people who were practitioners in the Hospitality Industry and have incorporated their years of practical experience and knowledge with the theory that they may have been taught over the years.

The discovery of the universal laws that order the world, leads to the accumulation of knowledge in the form of theory, which enables the prediction of events. Seen in this context, practice becomes the solving of operational problems through rational decision-making procedures based on predictive knowledge. Schon (1983) argued that practitioner knowledge is performative rather than propositional where practice is centred on action, i.e. appropriate or right action depending on the context or situation. Every context of practice has its own distinctive features, which provide possibilities and impose constraints on what can be done. This is especially true when studying the Hospitality Industry, where because guests are different with varied ideas of their rights, etc. the practitioner usually has to 'think on his feet' depending on the guest and the context. Here, then, action is conceived as being inseparably linked with contextual knowledge.

2.4.3. Theory and Practice in Teaching

In postmodern discourse, there is an emphasis on diversity, on different forms of knowledge and the significance of contextualized knowledge and on the possibility of multiple rationalities. Elliot (1991) talks about teachers' 'practical wisdom', by which he

means their capacity to discern the right course of action when confronted with particular, complex and problematic states of affairs. This practitioner knowledge is not stored in the mind as sets of theoretical propositions but as a reflectively processed repertoire of cases. Within this there is theoretical knowledge, but understanding and acting in practice situations does not depend exclusively on this knowledge. The possession of practical wisdom or knowledge, therefore is, knowing how to act appropriately in relation to the circumstances of a particular situation or context. The theoretical knowledge is contextually mediated and becomes particularized. Practical knowledge cannot be universal because it cannot, 'look away from its context'.

Furthermore, practical knowledge is not knowledge of what is right 'in principle' or 'in theory', since it is not contemplative but performative knowledge. It cannot, therefore be knowledge which is external or 'objective' to the knower, rather it is knowledge 'with prejudice', where the knower is constituted through a set of pre-understandings through which to know the world and act within it. By studying these characteristics of practical knowledge, we see why it is inappropriate to look at it as a matter of skills. Whilst it is 'know-how', it is not the know-how of techniques since a technique can be learnt and become 'rusty' with disuse. Practical knowledge, because it is a knowledge embodied in acting-in-the-world, is not subject to this possibility. Practical knowledge is always present and is ongoing because we find ourselves in situation where we have to make choices about how to act and then put these choices into effect. The Practitioner needs to choose the most effective way of achieving the given end and this is decided by predictive theoretical knowledge.

For practice to be relevant, there is a need for it to be addressed as it 'really is'. The privilege of theoretical studies in professional education and training appears to inculcate rigour yet so often leaves practitioners feeling that they have not learnt anything relevant to their world of everyday practice. This begs the following questions...should one then communicate theory more effectively or should one abandon theory altogether and concentrate instead on improving techniques? Although an attractive and powerful resolution, this would likely deprive practitioners the means by which they can confront their practice critically.

In the case of The International Hotel School, it would seem sensible to have a curriculum based on practice rather than theoretical knowledge organized in disciplines, but I feel that will also not benefit the students in any way. The dilemmatic nature of practice, the co-implication of means/ends and the constitution of ends as values would need to be properly reflected in the curriculum that would also contain the right combination of theory and practical knowledge.

2.4.4. Reconsidering the Nature of Practice

In attempting this combination, we need to understand Usher and Bryant (1989) argument that there is a more productive way of understanding theory, which relates it to the actions and intentionality of practitioners. They believe that since action always involves intentionality, the intentions of the practitioner are a crucial feature of practice. Intentions are embedded in conceptual frameworks, which are referred to as 'informal theory' while practice presupposes that the practitioner has an informal theory. The relationship between theory and practice is not contingent but conceptual, i.e. necessary and informal theory becomes a condition of practice. If practice always involves theory then it follows that theory-generation is itself a practice. There is 'theorising-in-practice' which practitioners do, 'theorizing-for-practice' which theorists do, and 'theorizing-of-practice', which practitioners can, but often do not do. This last category highlights the fact that every practitioner is involved in both theory and practice in some form and is the ideal situation for the hotel school student. If Usher and Bryant (1989) are to be believed then theorizing is a practice as theorists are also involved in practice just as practitioners are involved in theory.

We are now afforded an understanding of theory as interwoven with and inseparable from practice. It can be seen as the means by which practice is made meaningful. Theory is seen to be always already in practice and practice is always imbued with the practical knowledge of informal theory. Informal theory enables practitioners to work within the contexts of practice, which they find themselves in. This informal theory can be seen as part of the experiential world of practitioners. It is knowledge that is not abstract and decontextualised and is not merely intuitive and unsystematic. It is the

inseparability rather than the separability of theory and practice, which is emphasized. Practitioners are not confined simply to applying theory developed elsewhere by theorists but are themselves engaged in theoretical and practical resolution of the dilemmas presented by their day-to-day practice.

Usher and Bryant (1989) conclude that practice needs to be conceived as action informed by theory. They reject the notion of practice founded on the bedrock of formal theory or technical control; instead they argue the notion of practitioner expertise and judgment, with the practitioner as a sense-maker and action-taker where action, situational knowledge and judgment are mutually interactive. I do not fully agree with this theory as I am of the opinion that both practice and the theory underlying such practice is the road we must follow. If a student obtains theory in the lecture room and internalizes it, when he is performing a practical task in the hotel, he should be aware of the underpinning theory of the task, what is the objective of the task, what would be the most effective way to accomplish this task, what would be the ideal result, etc.

The practitioner knowledge of informal theory is not just a product of personal experience but also of professional socialization. In the same way that practice is more than the application of theory, so is practice more than the use of informal theory, which can go beyond the routine and habitual and become the ground of creativity without becoming detached from its situational roots. Schon (1983) admits that practitioners do not always engage in reflection-in-action. It is the very characteristics which give reflection-in-action its own particular rigour which may lead to unpredictability, uncertainty, and loss of control on the part of the practitioners. They may remain enclosed in 'knowing-in-practice' and even when they do engage in reflection-in-action; they may not be able to articulate what they are doing.

The 'gap' that exists between theory and practice may be the situations where informal theory and practice are not 'meshing'. Practitioners need to be aware of the place of theory in their work. Becoming aware of informal theory can make practitioners more conscious of routine and habitual modes of working. Usher and Bryant (1989) referred to the need for practice to be both reflective and reflexive. Reflexivity requires that

theory and practice are mutually interactive and recognized as such. By being brought to consciousness, informal theory becomes open to change in the light of practice, which changes with changes in informal theory. Whilst formal theory seeks to represent and explain the world, informal theory is concerned with judgment, interpretation and understanding. Practice needs to be represented and it is here that formal theory can be a useful tool for 'reviewing' practice in a different way. Formal theory is not applied to practice in this case, but is one means by which practice is re-viewed and reviewed. This involves recognizing and valuing practice as a realm of knowledge in its own right but also confronting and questioning it. Rorty (1989) reveals his idea, where the role of formal theory as a sounding board is a resource for critiquing informal theory and exposing its limitations.

2.4.5. Metapractice

Then again, Kemmis (1989) has suggested that we should understand the relationship of theory and practice as embedded in social processes. He argues that the theory-practice relationship is not simply a matter of philosophical analysis but is itself a discursive and material social practice whose purpose is to secure agreements about the nature and conduct of a practice. He refers to this as a *metapractice*, ie. a practice about a practice. Thus there is educational practice and a metapractice about educational practice, the metapractice being about what education is, its aims and purposes, how it relates to the economy and society, the nature of the curriculum and of its transmissions through teaching. It is within this metapractice of education that the meaning of theory-practice relationship in educational practice is forged.

In the case of The International Hotel School, the metapractice of education involves not only the educational practitioners but also the Education Department, hoteliers, heads of department in the hotels, and the students of the hotel school. Here, the 'resolution' of the theory-practice problem, for example, by emphasizing either a return to a curriculum based on disciplinary knowledge or a vocationalist curriculum based on the needs of the Country's economic standing is a stake in the conflict over how education is to be defined and who is to do the defining. This was a dilemma faced by The International Hotel School when the South African Government brought out the White Paper on

Education (2000), where they stated that all graduates should be employable. In order to make this a reality, our curriculum would have to be revised accordingly.

In doing so, we must be mindful of the fact that learning should not just be the responsibility of the lecturer, as is evidenced in this quotation, " Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives." Chickering, A.W. and Gamson, Z.F. (1987)

3. CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Methodology

When I embarked on this project, I decided to carry out research that is qualitative, by obtaining original data from the lecturers and students of both The International Hotel School and The Blue Mountains Hotel School as well as the managers of the participating hotels. Since The Blue Mountains Hotel School is in Australia, I planned to email the questionnaires to a representative there and do my interviews electronically. I was then invited by the Principal of The Blue Mountains Hotel School to spend six weeks at the school, where I could carry out my research in exchange for presenting lectures on Tourism, etc. Thankfully the Management of The International Hotel School agreed.

At this stage I wasn't quite sure whether my research method of gathering data would be phenomenology, ethnography or case study or a combination of all three. I wished to obtain information from students, managers, and lecturers from The International Hotel School in Durban as well as The Blue Mountains Hotel School in Australia by means of interviews, questionnaires and observation. Creswell (1998) regards a **phenomenological** study as a study that describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, topic or concept for various individuals and the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experience being studied. In order for me to accomplish this I would have to enter the "life setting" of the participants in the research. A strategy of interpretive enquiry, utilizing participant observation and interviews would be the method of data collection. The data would be systematically collected and meanings, themes and general descriptions of the experience would be analyzed within a specific context, thus utilizing the methodology of phenomenology.

Should I wish to observe the participants, describe and interpret their behaviour, and carry out interviews then I should choose **ethnography** as a method of data collection. If Punch (1994), is to be believed, the process of gathering data in this manner requires an extended period of time with the participants, personal involvement and commitment. A day-to-day report in the form of field notes should be done throughout the observation period. These should ideally contain a comprehensive account of the respondents, the events taking place, discussions, as well as the observer's attitudes,

perceptions and feelings. Keeping all of this in mind, I set about making the arrangements in for my data gathering in Durban as well as in Australia.

Essentially my research involved ethnographic and phemenological investigation of two cases, the cases being the International Hotel School in Durban as compared to the Blue Mountain School. A **case study** according to Stake (1995) should be used as an opportunity to learn, as the detailed, in depth data collection methods, which involve multiple sources of information, are used. These may include interviews, documents, observations or archival records. Mark (1996), refers to three types of case study that researchers could use, each with a different purpose, they are:

- ◆ the intrinsic case study, based solely on the aim of obtaining a better understanding of the individual case by description, not to understand any broad social issue.
- ◆ the instrumental case study, which is used to elaborate on a theory or to gain a better understanding of a social issue.
- ◆ the collective case study, where cases are chosen as comparisons between the cases and concepts so that theories can be extended and validated.

Since participant observation involves actual observation and the taking of notes, various data collection techniques can be used, some examples that are relevant to my research are open-ended narrative, checklists, field notes and interviewing Denzin & Lincoln, (2000). They go on to emphasize the importance of in-depth interviewing, and the use of standardized procedures as these would maximize observational efficacy, minimize bias and allow for verification of data. It seems then the intrinsic case study coupled with phenomenology would be the best methods to obtain my research data. The phenomenological approach is important in participation observation, as I would be able to gain an in-depth insight into the manifestations of reality.

I drew up **questionnaires** pertaining to my critical questions for the 1st year students; these included a combination of open and closed-ended questions. I made appointments for interviews with departmental managers and general managers of three hotels in

Durban. I had previously explained to the students what my research was about and almost all the students wanted to be a part of this process. I posted a notice on the notice board explaining my research topic and the fact that I needed students to participate in the process. Time was allocated for the students of The International Hotel School to answer the questionnaires. I then set up interviews with five 2nd and five 3rd year students. They would be asked the same questions as those in the questionnaires.

Appointments were made with five lecturers (both full and part time) from the Durban campus and the hotel department managers. I would be asking them questions and note the responses, and I expected each **interview** to last approximately forty minutes. This process would enable me to receive the viewpoints and perceptions of all respondents.

I felt that if I **observed** the students during their experiential learning process at the hotels, this would assist in my understanding of their responses to my questionnaires. So with this in mind I obtained the permission of the general managers of the partner hotels as well as the students who would be carrying out their practical components at the time and after setting up the observation sessions with the department heads, I would carry out these observation exercises. As I observed the students carrying out their various duties, I would note my observations.

I made appointments via email with the relevant students, lecturers and support staff at The Blue Mountains Hotel School before I left South Africa for Australia. I liaised with Diane Philips, Head of Academics at The Blue Mountains Hotel School, with regards the research arrangements.

Ethics

When I obtained permission from the Directors of both these institutions to use them as case studies for my research, this permission included interviews with the staff and students, the use of questionnaires and my presence in the partner training hotels for observation purposes. It was given to me with understanding that I would use all relevant data for this research project and the for the benefit of the students of The

International Hotel School. I also explained to the students and hotel managers that they did not have to divulge their names when answering the questions. I mentioned the names of the staff of the schools as I was given permission to do so, but I did assure all staff that none of the information that they provided would be used against them in any way.

3.2. Research Tools

The research tools that I used were:

3.2.1. Structured **questionnaires** that were filled in by the respondents in a structured setting

Questions that I asked the students:

1. Why did you choose this course of study?
2. How did you hear about the course?
3. Do you have any experience in this field? If yes, please explain.
4. What made you choose the full time option?
5. Did you prepare for this course in any way? If yes, please explain.
6. Were your parents/sponsors involved with your final decision to attend IHS in any way? If yes, please explain?
7. Is the course fulfilling your expectations? If not, why not?
8. What do you expect to gain from the course?
9. What do you hope to gain from the practical training?
10. Has the practical training met your expectations thus far? Please substantiate your answer.
11. What role do you, the school and the lecturers to play during your time at the school?
12. What role do you feel that you should play in your training?
13. What do you hope to accomplish once you have completed your course of study?
14. How would you describe this course to your peers?
15. Is the school living up to your expectations? If not, why not?
16. If you had to change any thing in the course what would it be?
17. Bearing in mind that the course is 50% theory and 50% practical, do you think

that your practical training is adequate, or do you think that the course should offer more practical training? Please explain.

18. Do you enjoy the guest interaction? Please substantiate your answer.
19. What are your feelings about guest interaction so early in your training?
20. Please note any comments or suggestions that you may have concerning your Course.

Questions that I asked the Support Staff:

1. What role does your department play in the educational development of the students?
2. Are you involved in any way with the academic/practical components of the courses offered here, if so, how?
3. If no, would you like your department to form part of the curriculum? How?
4. Is your department structured according to existing hotel departments?
5. Are you using similar software packages to those of the hotels?
6. Is your department open on weekdays only or do you follow a shift system?

3.2.2. Physical interviews using the same questions in the questionnaire with the addition of questions based on the experiences of the students, lecturers and hotel managers.

3.2.3. Physical, rostered, observations of students during their experiential learning sessions in the hotel departments as well as in the classroom in Durban.

3.2.4. Observations of students during their practical training sessions as well as in the classroom at The Blue Mountains Hotel School in Australia.

When I wrote up my proposal, I had not planned to include lecturer evaluations as part of my research, but during the interview process it became apparent that I should include lecture and formative assessment methods as I felt that the analysis of my findings could play an important role in the dissertation.

I anticipated a few problems:

- ◆ Incomplete questionnaires due to misunderstanding of questions in case students found the questions vague or ambiguous

- ◆ Rushed completion of questionnaires, 'just to get it done!'
- ◆ Discussion of questions by students who had completed the questionnaires or interviews with those who still had to be interviewed.
- ◆ Stilted or abnormal behaviour of students during my observation of their experiential learning.

I planned to solve these problems if/as and when they occurred.

Data Analysis

I plan to collate and analyze the data from the questionnaires, interviews and observations according to my critical questions. Instead of recording the interviews and typing them verbatim, I decided to present the summaries of the responses to the questionnaires and interviews as per The Blue Mountains Hotel School and The International Hotel School. Once analyzed, this data would form the basis for my conclusions and recommendations.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: INVESTIGATIONS

4.1. INVESTIGATION AT THE BLUE MOUNTAINS HOTEL SCHOOL: AUSTRALIA

4.1.1. Questionnaires

On arrival at the School, I immediately confirmed appointments with students, lecturers, support staff, and the Principal. I carried out a survey with 60 1st year students, where I handed out the questionnaires (Annexure 1) that I had prepared. I explained to the students why I was carrying out the research and what information I needed from them. I also explained that they did not need to give me their names if they did not wish to do so. The majority of the class comprised Chinese, Singaporeans, Fijians, Indians, and Swedish nationalities, which proved to be a big surprise, as I had not realized that I would encounter so many students who did not understand English. These students were in their third week at the School and most were only just learning the English language. This posed a challenge as all my questions were written in English. I then enlisted the help of two senior students who acted as interpreters to the Chinese and Swedish students. The other 'foreign' students understood most of the questions and did not need interpreters. I was kept quite busy, as I was asked to explain quite a few of the questions. *The interpreters obviously helped, as I was able to obtain valuable viewpoints on the link between the theory in the classroom and the practical training that the students received.*

4.1.2. Student Interviews

I allocated forty minutes for each of the ten student interviews. Students were interviewed on a one-on-one basis, with me asking the questions and noting their responses. I asked the same questions that appeared on the questionnaires. Since I was staying on the property, I was able to carry out interviews well into the late afternoons. In this manner I was able to interview five students per day over two days. This also proved an advantage in that students were attending lessons in between the interviews and did not really have the time to discuss the questions and their responses with the rest. *I found that the responses of The Blue Mountains Hotel School students were more positive than those of The International Hotel School. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.*

4.1.3. Lecturer Interviews

I was given the use of an office, which I used for my interviews. Forty minutes were allocated for each lecturer interview, and these took place on a one-on-one basis, although some interviews lasted longer. I noted the response to all questions as the interviews progressed, in some instances the responses led to questions that I had not anticipated or planned. These were duly noted along with the responses. *I observed that the lecturers were given more freedom than the lecturers of The International Hotel School in regard to making curriculum changes.*

4.1.4. Hotel Department Managers

Since the hotel school is situated in a village in the Blue Mountains, there were not many hotels that I could approach with regards interviewing managers. The Placement Officer at the school proved very helpful and helped me by introducing me to three department heads and two general managers in the area. The interviews lasted approximately an hour each and in the case of one of the general managers, lasted two hours, which I found quite surprising. *I found that the managers responded very enthusiastically and did not seem too eager to end the interviews. They also made viable suggestions.*

4.1.5. Observation of Students in Practical Training

I obtained the students' schedules off the intranet and arranged with the instructors that I would be observing the students during their practical training in the restaurants, kitchen, housekeeping, front office and stores. The students' schedules were structured in such a way that the academic session usually preceded the practical training session or vice versa. *This proved quite an advantage, as the students seemed to have a better understanding of the practical training and the underlying theory behind specific actions.* They were given worksheets that they had to complete at the end of each training session. These consisted of either case studies or exercises based on the lesson.

4.1.6. Observation of Students in the Classroom

I made arrangements with the lecturers to sit in on classes as per the students' schedules. An announcement was made to the students conveying my intent to them. A student posed the question as to the reason of my research and I was given the opportunity to address them. When I first sat in on a class, the students were quite conscious of my presence, but after a while got used to seeing me in and out the classrooms. *I noticed that the classes were quite interactive, with a lot of participation from the students. They offered anecdotes about their training sessions and at times argued that these were different to the theory. I will discuss this further in the next chapter.*

4.2. INVESTIGATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL HOTEL SCHOOL: DURBAN

4.2.1. Questionnaires

When I posted the notice on the notice board, I did not anticipate the positive response that I received. Almost all the first year students wanted to take part in the questionnaire process. I selected the first twenty students that had responded and at the appointed time, called the twenty students into the allocated lecture room. I explained what was required of them, handed out the questionnaires and once I ascertained that the students understood what was required of them, I asked them to commence with the answering of the questionnaires. They completed the process within thirty-five minutes. I expected to receive a few incomplete questionnaires due to vague or ambiguous questions, but did not experience this problem. There were no questionnaires completed in a hurry as all students completed theirs at about the same time and all questions were answered in detail.

4.2.2. Second and Third Year Student Interviews

I allocated forty minutes for each of the ten student interviews. Students were interviewed on a one-on-one basis, with me asking the questions and noting their responses. I asked the same questions that appeared on the questionnaires. Since this was a time consuming process, I interviewed two students per day over five days. As anticipated, some of the students who had already been interviewed, discussed the questions with those had yet to be interviewed but this did not seem to affect their

responses negatively. In fact, their responses showed evidence of careful thought, especially when they discussed their experiences in the hotel departments.

4.2.3. Lecturer Interviews

I booked the use of the boardroom for my interviews with the five lecturers. Forty minutes were allocated for each lecturer interview, and these took place on a one-on-one basis as well. I noted the response to all questions as the interviews progressed. I also asked them for their expectations of the students.

4.2.4. Hotel Department Managers

This portion of the research proved to quite a challenge as department managers were not always available and when I did make appointments these were, more often than not, broken. They were extremely busy, and had to "prioritize their time," the reason for my appointment with them seemed to be of little or no consequence. I eventually managed to interview five department managers and two general managers. I amended the questions that were drawn up for the lecturers and these questions concentrated on the students' experiential learning component. I also asked the managers what their expectations of the students and the hotel school was.

4.2.5. Observation of Students in Experiential Learning Situations

In order to observe the students at work during their experiential learning component in the various hotel departments the Practical Coordinator and I looked through the students' practical rosters to ascertain the departments that they would be in when I carried out my observation.

I made arrangements with the Executive Housekeeper, Executive Chef, Front Office Manager, the Training Manager and the Human Resources Manager at The Royal Hotel, The Hilton Hotel and The Riverside Hotel. I first observed students in the Housekeeping department of The Royal Hotel. I arranged to observe second year students working as Floor Supervisors, and first year students in the cold kitchen and the main kitchen of the Royal Hotel.

At the Riverside Hotel, I arranged to observe second year students in the Front Office Department. The students that I would be observing at the Hilton Hotel would be in the Human Resources department and shadowing managers at the time.

4.2.6. Observation of Students in the Classroom

I obtained the students' class schedules and chose to sit in on those subjects that 'matched' the hotel departments where I would observe the students. I had previously obtained permission from the Principal, lecturers and students to do so.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1. Results of Survey: The Blue Mountains Hotel School

5.1.2. Findings as per Completed Questionnaires

- ◆ 12 Students did not complete all questions, so I will report on the results of 48 questionnaires.
- ◆ 80% felt that the school would adequately prepare them for the Hospitality Industry, while the other 20% were worried that they were training in a simulated environment and that when it came to the “real thing”, they would not be able to cope adequately.
- ◆ 90% felt that the course was quite difficult and involved hard work, but agreed that they needed this in order to obtain good positions in the Industry on graduation.
- ◆ 80% wanted the school to play a very active role in their academic and practical development in the sense that wanted the school to prepare them with the theory and practical training they would need when they entered the Industry.
- ◆ 5% felt that they would like the school to use their connections to ensure good placements in the Industry as well as for future employment.
- ◆ All students agreed that the Hospitality Industry should be involved in their training as they felt that it would provide the, “real-live,” situations that they needed.
- ◆ I achieved what I set out to accomplish with this survey, as I wanted to find out:
 - whether the Blue Mountains Hotel School prepared the students adequately for the reality of the Hospitality Industry;
 - to ascertain the students’ knowledge of both the theory and practical components of the course;
 - and the role that it played in their preparation for the Hospitality Industry.

5.1.3. Interviews with Support Staff

- ◆ The Support staff that I interviewed included the Librarian, Student Counsellor, Stores Manager, Housekeeper, Student Placement Officer, Restaurant Manager, Duty Manager, IT Manager and the Grounds-man.
- ◆ The Librarian, Student Counsellor, Housekeeper, Student Placement Officer and Restaurant Manager answered that their departments played significant roles in the educational development of the students.

- ◆ **Petra, the Librarian** felt that as she was in possession of the curriculum details, and is constantly updated on the recommended texts by the lecturers she could and does play an important role with regards to student development.
- ◆ The library, though small in size, has a good quantity of texts, trade journals, videos and includes Internet access.
- ◆ The Computer lab also has internet access so the students usually make good use of this facility.
- ◆ She takes part in the Orientation of the students by informing them of her role and that of the library.
- ◆ She also explains the book borrowing procedure to them and also explains the importance of self directed learning.
- ◆ She is constantly in touch with suppliers so that new editions and relevant texts are ordered, as they are made available.
- ◆ She stated that the 2nd year students are encouraged to carry out more research and she guides them through this process.
- ◆ The 3rd year students spend more time in the library as they are usually busy with assignments that encourage them towards critical thinking.
- ◆ The 3rd year degree programme is offered through the University of New England, so those students get to make use of the link with the university's library.
- ◆ The library is open during "normal working hours" and is not open on weekends.

- ◆ **Roberta, the Student Counsellor**, answered that her department played a vital role in the educational development of all students.
- ◆ It is her department that has put together the language bridging course for the level one students, whose second language is English,
- ◆ Most of these students arrive at the School with the most basic understanding of the language.
- ◆ During the Orientation week, they are tested and those that need the Language-bridging course are invited to attend. This course runs over the earlier part of the semester.
- ◆ Roberta also offers an "assignment reading" service to these students. They hand in their completed assignments to Roberta, who reads through them and advises the students thereafter. They may then have to redo the assignment before handing it to the relevant lecturer.
- ◆ She also tries to link the School with the local community as much as possible, since the school is situated in Leura, a Natural History Site.
- ◆ The tourism students' assignments are usually linked to the Blue Mountains or the Villages of Katumba or Leura.
- ◆ She also arranges for guest lecturers to address the students. She sits on the panel when the curriculum is discussed or has to be assessed.

- ◆ **The Stores Manager, Andrew Keys**, did not actually play a role in the educational development of the students. He receives his instructions from the Chefs, Housekeeper and Vice Principal with regards orders and stocktaking, etc.
- ◆ The Chefs plan the menus ahead and usually give the requisitions for kitchen supplies accordingly. This is usually done as a costing exercise with the students in level one as part of their training in kitchen.
- ◆ He said that he would like his department to become part of the curriculum, whereby students should spend at least a week in the department. They would get to observe, take part in the ordering and receiving process, distribute supplies to the departments as per their requisitions and take part in stocktaking.
- ◆ His department was structured as an ordering/receiving department in a hotel

and was using a software package that was found in hotels.

- ◆ The stores department is open during business hours and not on weekends. The kitchen and laundry would have to order enough supplies needed to cover the weekend.

- ◆ **The Housekeeping Supervisor, Cecilia**, worked with closely with Val Cook, Vice Principal, Operations and Ray McColl, Diploma Course Co-ordinator and Housekeeping Lecturer, so she feels very much a part of the students' educational development.
- ◆ She structures the daily Housekeeping routine according to the Housekeeping theory lessons as well as a hotel's housekeeping department so that the students receive training that is as realistic as possible.
- ◆ She does not contribute to the curriculum as such but does get asked for her opinion by Ray when he is working on Curriculum development.
- ◆ She is linked to the Fidelio software system, as are the restaurants and Front Office. Her department is only operational from Monday to Friday and the students tidy their own rooms over the weekend.
- ◆ The laundry is open from 08h00 till 16h00 on weekdays only. Spring Cleaning, stocktaking and maintenance reports are done on a regular basis as a hotel would do.
- ◆ Cecilia and Ray or Val carry out practical assessments of students.

- ◆ The **Student Placement Officer, Peter** feels that he plays a pivotal role in the development of the students since he places them in the Hospitality Industry and monitors this process, thus ensuring his involvement with the practical component of the course.
- ◆ His department is not structured according to any hotel, rather he follows regular business hours and usually works "odd" hours when he is visiting students in the various hotels.
- ◆ He assesses the students according to a mark sheet that he has drawn up. He is in constant contact with the hotels that employ the School's students and is always on the lookout for more hotels.

- ◆ **Breffaney, the Restaurant Manager,** plays a significant role in the educational development of the students as he carries out the practical training in Food and Beverage Service.
- ◆ He is definitely involved in the academic component of the course as he has to structure the practical training to the theory.
- ◆ The hours that the two restaurants are open mimics that of a hotel to a large extent as they are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner every day.
- ◆ The a la carte restaurant does not open for breakfast and is not usually open on the weekends as the school is literally operated by the students, the duty managers and chef during this time.

- ◆ **The Duty Manager, Shane** does play a role in the educational development of the students as he is in charge of the school during the evenings and weekends.
- ◆ During this time, he supervises the running of the restaurants and the Front Desk. There are usually students (2nd level) who are on weekend duty that train under Shane.
- ◆ The students on Food and Beverage duty in the restaurant and bar are also supervised by Shane.
- ◆ While I was there, I was fortunate to witness the arrival of a new software package which linked the restaurant with the students' room numbers, so that when a student ate at the restaurant, and the amount for the meal rung up on the system it immediately billed his/her room and shows up in Front Office. All the students were then given training on this system.

- ◆ **Ray Green, the IT Support Manager,** is in charge of all the computer systems within the school, as well as delivering the IT lectures to the students.
- ◆ He felt that he played a major role in the students' development as they call on him for support while doing their assignments, and studying for their examinations.
- ◆ He puts together the syllabus for the Computer lessons and feels that the

students are receiving adequate training in the hotel computer systems with their use of the systems in the school.

- ◆ He follows the usual business hours but is on standby should there be an IT emergency during evenings and weekends.

- ◆ **Jamie Bell, the person in charge of Maintenance** at the School did not in any way play a role in the educational development of the students, except when the students come across a fault or repair that needs doing and they log it in the Housekeeping log book.
- ◆ He did not really have an opinion on whether the maintenance of the school should be in the curriculum. He works normal business hours and does not really follow any hotel shift.

5.1.4. Interviews with Lecturers

- ◆ On interviewing **Kerry**, I realized that there seemed to be quite a bit of flexibility with regards the syllabus. Kerry teaches Communications and Business Economics to Level One students.
- ◆ Although she does not have much say in curriculum development, Kerry says that they can give their points of view with regards their subjects at meetings, etc. She expects the students to participate fully, although at level One, they do experience a bit of difficulty with the students still new to the school.
- ◆ The second and third level students do not experience any problems at all and tend to participate freely.
- ◆ She believes that the students are responsible for their learning even though they need 'hand holding' in their first year.
- ◆ As a lecturer she feels that she owes the students the best possible start in their chosen industry.
- ◆ In Level One the main inhibiting factor is the language barrier and there is a bit of difficulty with the students overcoming their cultural barriers. She does not see these as inhibiting student learning though.
- ◆ The students have access to the intranet, which keeps them updated on the

latest assignments due, what to prepare for with regard to tutorials, etc.

- ◆ According to her, the level one students are not quite able to reflect critically on their practical experience, they seem to only display this maturity during their second level.
 - ◆ She does not plan her lessons to support the practical component as she feels that her subjects do not lend themselves to this.
 - ◆ She agrees that the curriculum meets the learning standards and these are updated constantly. She does not think that there is anything in the curriculum that she will want to change.
 - ◆ She definitely thinks that the students are ready for the Industry when they graduate.
-
- ◆ The next lecturer that I interviewed was **Douglas**. He teaches a subject called Managing People and the Organization in the form of two lectures and one tutorial per week.
 - ◆ Student attendance is not compulsory.
 - ◆ When he is going to do group work with the students, Douglas gives them the problem, or case study along with time lines for completion.
 - ◆ With the second level students, he teaches Organizational Behaviour. He strongly believes in student participation and this is evident in his approach to his lesson preparation.
 - ◆ Douglas feels that the student should take control of his/her own learning and that he is responsible as a guide.
 - ◆ He also saw the language as a possible inhibitor in first level student learning.
 - ◆ He plans his lessons according to the syllabus and makes a point of bringing in the practical training that the students receive.
 - ◆ He believes in peer assessment and introduces this into his classes.
 - ◆ Douglas says that he has seen students overcome the cultural divide when undertaking group work as they wish to be part of the team.
 - ◆ He feels that they as lecturers are free to comment on the curriculum if they feel that there is something that they would like to change.

- ◆ **Karen** teaches Tourism to the level one students and Marketing to the level two students.
- ◆ She lectures for one hour per week per class and gives a tutorial for one hour per week per class.
- ◆ She prefers the students to participate and her tutorials are interactive.
- ◆ She believes that the students should be responsible for their own learning.
- ◆ Karen also feels that the students learning is inhibited by the non comprehension of all that is taught to the students whose second language is English, especially in the first few weeks of the semester.
- ◆ She sets her own examination papers and feels that the syllabus could do with a bit of 'tweaking along the way'.
- ◆ She has introduced a Tourism practical assignment, which involves the local community.
- ◆ There are no rules or policies for the lecturers to keep in touch with the industry but she updates her knowledge through the use of the Internet and trade journals as well as her contacts in the Industry.
- ◆ Her lessons are planned along these lines.
- ◆ She feels that the students who have returned from practical training seem more capable of critical thinking.
- ◆ Karen admits that when students graduate, they still have a lot to learn and need to keep an open mind when they enter the Industry.

- ◆ **Peter**, although a lecturer also acts as Restaurant manager in the a lá Carte restaurant during the lunch hours.
- ◆ He spends from 09h00 till 10h00 Tuesday to Friday doing demonstrations to the level one students, then from 10h00 till 11h00 the students are put through their paces, practicing what they have seen in the demonstrations.
- ◆ From 11h00 till 12h00 he manages the restaurant, supervising the lunch hour service.
- ◆ By the eighth week of the semester he feels that the students are competent enough to take the practical examination.
- ◆ If a student fails, he/she is allowed to retake the practical examination.

- ◆ He does not believe that the students who come to him are at the level where they can think critically, until they have completed a semester of practical training in a hotel.
- ◆ He does however mention that the students catch on exceptionally quickly when it comes to the service in the restaurant and he attributes that to the theory and practical linking and supporting each other.
- ◆ He does not really have much say in the curriculum development, but does put together his own syllabus and does sit in on Curriculum assessment workshops.

- ◆ **Ray McColl, is the Front Office and Housekeeping lecturer as well as the Diploma-Course Coordinator.**
- ◆ He believes in giving the students the outcomes of the programme right at the beginning of the course so that they buy into it and see the value in their course of study.
- ◆ He teaches the students for four hours per week. This is done in the form of two hours of lectures and a two- hour long tutorial. He believes that this is where cognitive development is rife.
- ◆ His responsibility to the student is as a facilitator, or guide and he expects them to 'get on with it' when it comes to the case studies, or worksheets, or assignments that they need to complete.
- ◆ His theory supports the practical training that they receive at the front Desk of the school with Susanti, the Front Office Supervisor and Cecilia, the Housekeeping Supervisor.
- ◆ He believes in assessing the curriculum on an ongoing basis in the workshop format with input from all the lecturing staff.

- ◆ **Andrew Batey, the Senior Chef Instructor** sees four groups of 15 to 20 students, per semester.
- ◆ His task is to instruct them in the various cooking methods, costing of menus and the ordering of supplies for the kitchen.
- ◆ He expects the students to take more responsibility for their learning at the school and he feels that they should not just sit back and wait for the knowledge

to come to them.

- ◆ He would like them to ask more questions and interact more during his demonstrations.
- ◆ Andrew says that he would like the students to attend more practical sessions and he would like them to get the experience of cooking for more functions.
- ◆ Since there is no prescribed text for the subject he supplies the students with a manual, recipes and worksheets, with they study from.
- ◆ Due to the fact that they have to cater for different culinary tastes, Andrew feels that the students are learning a wide variety of cuisines as well as the classic cooking styles that he is covering in his classes.
- ◆ He does not have much say in curriculum development but he is asked for his input during curriculum development workshops or meetings.

- ◆ The lecturer in **Events Management, Willem**, felt that although his subject is theory based, the students can apply their theoretical knowledge when carrying out their practical training.
- ◆ He works closely with other lecturers and tries to set assignments that are in line with a theme they may be studying in Food and Beverage Service or Food Production.
- ◆ He is quite definite about the fact that the students must take responsibility for their own learning.
- ◆ He provides the students with clear outcomes and objectives at the beginning of the course, along with unit outcomes in a study guide.
- ◆ At the end of each section, he evaluates the students' understanding of the section.
- ◆ Willem felt that the Asian way of studying is quite different to the Western style and actually prevents learning taking place in some cases.
- ◆ He felt that students tend to reflect critically on their return from practical training.
- ◆ He makes good use of the intranet by posting relevant information with regard tutorial preparation, assignment guidelines, etc. and the students make use of this facility, although the responsibility to actually make use of the intranet lies

solely with the students.

- ◆ All lecturers are free to make suggestions with regard to the curriculum during meetings and workshops.
- ◆ Willem remarked that he is not totally satisfied with the curriculum as it stands and would like to see it amended to reflect a more global picture of the hospitality industry.
- ◆ The students, he felt were not really ready for the challenges of the Industry when they graduate and feels that they need to work on their attitudes, knowledge and skills before attempting junior management positions.

5.2. Results of Survey: The International Hotel School

I posed the same questions to the students of The International Hotel School as I did at The Blue Mountains Hotel School.

5.2.1. Questionnaires:

- ◆ The first year students completed all of the questions, and indicated that although they were well prepared academically, when they were placed in the hotels for their experiential learning component they were ill prepared and did not have adequate training before being, "thrown in the deep end".
- ◆ 60% of the students felt that the course was quite difficult and involved "a lot of reading" and that the 70% pass mark was unrealistic.
- ◆ All agreed that working with "real live guests" prepared them for future employment.
- ◆ All the students indicated that the school should play an active role in their academic development and felt that the one-on-one objective setting sessions contributed to this.
- ◆ 80% felt that they would prefer the school to place them in the hotels during experiential learning and in their third year when they would be seeking employment.
- ◆ All students agreed that the Hospitality Industry should be involved in their training, mainly because this was going to be their employers and would be aware of what training they would need.

5.2.2. Interviews with Students:

Before I interviewed the second and third year students, I explained the purpose of the survey, and how I would use the information. They were visibly nervous as they felt that they might be victimized if it became known that they had shared this information with me. After I assured them that they would not have to divulge their names and that only I would be using the information, they were more relaxed and the one-on-one interviews proved time consuming but informative and revealing.

- ◆ By the second day of the interviews some of the students who had already been interviewed, had discussed the questions with those had yet to be interviewed, I had anticipated this but it did not seem to affect their responses negatively.
- ◆ In fact, their responses showed evidence of careful thought, especially when they discussed their experiences in the hotel departments.
- ◆ Almost all of them felt that the hotel school placed too much emphasis on the academic aspect of the course and although they were placed in hotels for the experiential learning, not much actual training was given to them both by the school as well as the hotels.
- ◆ The third year students who at this stage had completed 40 weeks of experiential learning felt that the school had prepared them more than adequately from an academic perspective and those that were fortunate enough to be placed in the "student friendly" hotels in their first two years expressed that they were ready for the industry although they did agree that they had so much more to learn.
- ◆ Those students who had been placed in busy hotels, where the Heads of departments did not have the time or inclination to train them felt at a disadvantage.
- ◆ Two students suggested that we get advice from past students who had been in the Industry for a while and would give a more informed answer in regard to their level of readiness for the industry.
- ◆ I made a note of this and followed up, the findings of which I will discuss later.
- ◆ Two students explained that had they learnt some of the concepts by

demonstration and role-play, they would have been better prepared in those instances where the hotel managers did not wish to train them.

5.2.3. Interviews with Hotel Managers

I experienced quite a few problems during this portion of my survey as some of the managers experienced difficulty in keeping to the appointed times, due to their schedules and the very nature of the industry. Eventually I managed to meet with five Department Heads one was from the Hilton Hotel, one from the Riverside and the rest were from the Royal Hotel.

- ◆ All the Royal Hotel managers saw our students as “spoiled brats” or “rich kids” that took the course to pass the time.
- ◆ They felt that they wanted the students to learn “the hard way”, which is how they learnt about the industry.
- ◆ They also remarked that they did not have the time to train the students and that the students should come to the hotel equipped with the skills.
- ◆ They also agreed that they rostered the students as they would employees and expect them to follow these rosters and shifts just as their employees would, although the employees were receiving remuneration for their hours, as well as days off.
- ◆ The students were not entitled to these benefits but the managers felt justified in treating them as employees in all other respects as they felt that that was the best way to learn.
- ◆ The fact that the hotel always seemed to be busy contributed to their reluctance to take the time to train the students as well.
- ◆ Their expectations of the school were that we should “send them students that were already trained and who knew all the concepts of the skills required before going into the hotel”.
- ◆ With regards their expectations of the students, they wanted the students to be prepared to learn, ask questions, volunteer for extra shifts, not grumble when they were suddenly asked to work an extra shift and not to complain as this was the “best way to learn”.

- ◆ The manager from the Riverside hotel agreed with the last statement, but stated that during the quiet periods, viz. after lunch service and prior to dinner service, they would carry out on the job training in such areas as wine service, serviette folds, guest meal experience, upselling, etc.
- ◆ Those students who worked in the kitchen received training in the form of a briefing at the beginning of each shift as well as demonstrations and instructions from the chef, depending on the mood of the chef and the busyness of the kitchen at the time.
- ◆ Here also, training was dependant on the inclination of the manager on duty.

5.2.4. Lecturer Interviews

As mentioned in the previous chapter I interviewed the five lecturers individually in the boardroom. My findings as per their responses are as follows:

- ◆ **Amanda**, stated that as the Food Production lecturer, she was unhappy with the number of lessons allocated to the practical aspects of the subject especially for the Chef students who needed more practice in the kitchen.
- ◆ As a relatively new member of staff, she enjoyed being part of the process of amending and developing the syllabus for her subjects.
- ◆ However, she felt that we were 'short-changing' the students by concentrating on mainly theory and most of these students wanted to be chefs, hence the need for more practical hours in the kitchen.

Since we did not have our own kitchen and had to rely on the hotels to provide these practical hours for our students, their practical kitchen hours depended on the availability of the hotel chefs as well as how busy the hotels were.

- ◆ She also pointed out that whatever they did in the kitchen during their practical component did not 'match' the theory that they were taught at the school.

Although we sent out a breakdown of the syllabus per year of study to the hotels, we found that these were not always adhered to.

- ◆ Only the Chef students attended the 'block release' period of training that we outsourced, where they were taught according to the syllabus, and this period was insufficient at two weeks in the whole year.

This was mainly a timetabling issue due to the availability of the training kitchen and Chef Instructors. We were also charged for this training and did not pass the cost to the students.

- ◆ Although dissatisfied with the practical component of the course, Amanda was extremely satisfied that the theory that we offered them was the best and that the students, once in workplace would benefit from this. She did however point out that they would be at a disadvantage if 'thrown in the deep end'.
- ◆ **Maureen**, who taught mainly 'management type' subjects as well as Sales and Marketing stated that she was more than satisfied that we were giving our students the best possible grounding for the hospitality industry.
- ◆ She appreciated the fact that she was included in decisions regarding the syllabus.
- ◆ She also pointed out that when she interacted with the students in the classroom, she could see the benefit of their previous two weeks of the practical component by their answers and comments.
- ◆ As a contract lecturer who taught at other institutions as well, she felt that our students benefited from the back-to-back practical/academic components as they related the theory to their experiences in the hotel departments.
- ◆ Maureen further stated that due to the students' interaction with 'real live guest' and 'real everyday situations' during their practical components in the hotels, the students seemed to develop a confidence and professionalism that she did not see in students of the other institutions where she taught.
- ◆ She also pointed out that since we amended our syllabi on a regular basis, in accordance with developments in the hospitality industry, we provided the students with a further advantage.

- ◆ **Seelan**, the Bookkeeping/Financial Controls lecturer, stated that our students were more than adequately prepared for their future careers in the hospitality industry as they were taught bookkeeping and finance appropriate to the industry.
- ◆ He liked the fact that we catered for students who had not studied bookkeeping at school, so that they were not disadvantaged.
- ◆ Seelan liked the fact that even though he was a contract lecturer, he was invited to the annual conference and was allowed to give his views on the syllabus, recommended texts, etc.
- ◆ He did however feel that the number of lessons per week that were allocated to the subject was inadequate and he struggled to complete the syllabus before the end of the semester.
- ◆ He suggested that more periods be allocated to the subject and in that way the students could attempt to complete as many exercises as possible.
- ◆ He went on to say that the students weren't spending sufficient time in the accounts departments of the hotels and we should allocate this time in their first year of study and not the second as they would be able to better relate to this during lectures.

This suggestion has been noted in regard to the curriculum of the Hospitality Management qualification.

- ◆ **Lisa** taught French and Business Communication, and felt that the syllabi of both these subjects were excellent as they concentrated on role play, student initiative and resourcefulness as well as theory.
- ◆ She did however point out that since French is the language of hospitality it should not be an optional subject. Also, she felt that students did not view it as being important because of that.
- ◆ Lisa did feel that she had input in the curriculum, but that the decision making Process was rather slow.
- ◆ She had adapted the French syllabus so as to make it as hospitality based as

possible and since she did not have a hospitality background herself, spent some time in the relevant hotel departments to make the role-play situations and case studies as real as possible.

- ◆ She also suggested that we add French menu terminology to the 1st year syllabus as this will assist the students during their time in the Food and Beverage departments of the hotels.

We had been debating this issue as well as the option to make French a compulsory subject for some time now, and Lisa's suggestions brought home the fact that we needed to address this sooner rather than later.

- ◆ **Tanya**, taught Food and Beverage and Housekeeping to 1st and 2nd year students respectively.
- ◆ She stated that in her opinion the students benefited from their time in the hotel departments, this was evident by their interaction in the classroom as well as their answers in tests, quizzes, role-plays and assignments.
- ◆ Tanya, as a contract lecturer taught at another institution that offered a hotel management qualification. She explained that she had no input in choosing the recommended texts, compilation of examination papers, or the syllabus, whereas she was involved in all those aspects at The International Hotel School.
- ◆ She felt that our students were more than prepared to enter the working world after graduation due to the combination of the 'strong' theory and the practical weeks spent in the hotel departments.
- ◆ Although the Durban campus was situated in a building where we were not allowed to cook, she was able to carry out Food and Beverage demonstrations and usually made arrangements with the Housekeeper of the nearby Royal Hotel to take the students on 'field trips' there.
- ◆ She felt that another plus was the 'smaller classes' as she could give students individual attention. This was evidenced by their results as well as confidence in the subject.

The fact that we weren't allowed to cook in the building that housed the campus was proving to be a disadvantage in more ways than one. We were at the mercy of a landlord with regards our lease, etc. as well as the hotel with regard to the practical cooking lessons that they offered our students. These issues would definitely have to be investigated.

As I studied the data in this chapter I have seen sufficient evidence that many changes would have to be made to the curriculum of The International Hotel School if effective experiential learning were to take place. We seem to be 'getting it right' in some areas and making mistakes in others.

6. CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

In undertaking this research, I mentioned the core questions that needed answering. These questions originally applied only to The International Hotel School, but I soon discovered that these seven questions applied to The Blue Mountains Hotel School as well and are as follows.

- 1. Does the curriculum per programme meet the objectives set out by the hotel school, the education department as well as the students?**
- 2. Is experiential learning imperative to the students' success?**
- 3. Who are the various stakeholders in this scenario?**
- 4. What are the expectations of these stakeholders?**
- 5. What role do we expect the hotel to play in the education of the hotel school students?**
- 6. What is the role of the student?**
- 7. What is the responsibility of the school?**

When I initially discovered that The Blue Mountains Hotel School seemed to offer the ideal curriculum, and decided to use them as my case study, I hoped that the data resulting from my research would reveal:

- whether the Blue Mountains Hotel School prepared the students adequately for the reality of the Hospitality Industry;
- the students' knowledge of both the theory and practical components of the course;
- the role that it played in their preparation for the Hospitality Industry.

I felt that these revelations as well as the data obtained from The International Hotel School's lecturers and students as well as the hotel managers would contribute in the drawing of my conclusions and subsequent recommendations.

6.1. Does the curriculum per programme meet the objectives set out by the hotel school, the education department as well as the students?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ The data from the questionnaires and interviews revealed that curriculum of The Blue Mountains Hotel School did indeed meet the objectives of the school, the education department as well as the students.
- ◆ Although the lecturers did not seem to be very involved in the drawing up of the curriculum, they were advised of its role in meeting the school's objectives, viz. 'that the students obtain a strong practical grounding and academic support to ensure competence in the workplace,' and they contributed to this by producing graduates that met this objective.
- ◆ Although I did not have the opportunity to interview any representatives from the Education Department, I was made aware of their policies and objectives with regard to higher education by the Principal of The Blue Mountains Hotel School, Professor Jones. He pointed out that their curriculum was drawn up with these objectives in mind.
- ◆ Since the Directors, Principal and Vice Principals met on an ongoing basis to discuss all aspects of the school and its programme offerings, the relevant curricula is under constant scrutiny. I noticed that all programme offerings at the school included current information and skills.
- ◆ I found that most of the students had no knowledge of the objectives of the school nor the Education Department and some of them did not have any objectives of their own. Those that did basically wanted to achieve a good pass, travel the world and earn 'lots of money and did not seem too interested in the objectives of the school or the Education Department.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ One of the objectives of The International Hotel School is that their students be competent in the skills pertaining to the hospitality industry and employable on completion of their studies, in keeping with the objectives of the Education Department of South Africa.
- ◆ Not all the lecturers are aware of the objectives of the school and the Department of

Education and some of them do not see the need for this knowledge. According to them, "As long as the students understand their work and can apply this knowledge in the workplace, we have succeeded in our job." It seems that some of the students and lecturers view the academic rules, requirements, etc. as those of the school's management rather than those set down by the Education Department or SAQA.

- ◆ Those students that experienced difficulties with the academic component of the course, Stated that the course was too 'heavy on theory and they wouldn't really need this in the workplace.' I realized that these students did not see the necessary link between the theory in the classroom and the practical experience that they obtained in the hotels.
- ◆ On the other hand some students indicated that they were well armed theoretically, but should receive more training before commencing their work experience component in the hotels. If we were to give the practical component the same emphasis that we do to the academic component, would the students be better prepared for the workplace? The Blue Mountains Hotel School's curriculum gives equal emphasis to academic and practice and according to both their students as well as staff this works very well.
- ◆ The International Hotel School's final result is also made up of 50% academic and 50% Practicals, although there seems to be more structure allocated to the academic component. The school does mirror the objectives of the Education Department whereby its students are 'snapped up' on completion of their studies.

6.1.2. Is experiential learning imperative to the students' success?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ The results of the questionnaires revealed that most of the students were satisfied with their preparation for the workplace. This was confirmed in my interviews with the 2nd level and post graduate students, who explained that the practical training they received during their academic semester, prepared them with regard to the classic food preparation and service styles as well as the requirements of the rooms division components.
- ◆ Although some of the students struggled with the English language on their arrival at the school, the extra lessons as well as the assignment readings that were offered by the school proved a great help in them communicating

effectively in English within three weeks of the start date of the semester. It was evident that a similar academic support plan or a bridging course should be offered to the students of The International Hotel School whose second language is English.

- ◆ During my interviews with the students, it emerged that these students were in demand amongst the international hotels that the school has arrangements with. They explained that one of the reasons for this is that the students were not 'green' to the hospitality industry due to their academic and strong practical grounding they received at the school.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ The placement of students in hotels to complete their experiential learning, is a definite plus according to the students and hotel management. Both stated that this prepared students for future employment, which is in keeping with the White Paper on Education's (1997), statement that all students be employable after graduating from tertiary institutions.
- ◆ Those students who had completed the experiential learning component prior to the academic component, seemed to show a better understanding of the subject content and were able to relate concepts to the skills, duties, etc. of the workplace, although the hotel managers complained that they did not like the 'two-week on – two week off' programme. They felt that by the time the students had settled into the department according to the roster, the two weeks was up and they had to return to school and make way for the next group. Their recommendation was that we allocate a longer period to the practical component, e.g. two months.
- ◆ Although it is quite evident that we would need to restructure the curriculum per programme offering, we must ensure that experiential learning remain a major component.

6.1.3. Who are the various stakeholders in this scenario?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ The success of the students at this school is attributed to the efforts of the staff of the

School, the students as well as the staff at the various hotels that provide the work experience. When the directors and staff of the school meet with regards the curriculum, they include the members of the Advisory Board so that they may contribute to any discussion regarding the experiential learning components. This is something that the International Hotel School should also think about.

- ◆ The School does not see the Education Department as an integral part of the decision making process with regards the curriculum, rather they would prefer to be aware of the all round requirements and to comply with them.
- ◆ The learning offered here is very student centered and the students are responsible for submitting assignments on time, and preparing for both practical as well as theory examinations and keeping abreast of school happenings by means of the Intranet. They are not 'spoon fed' in the way that the students of The International Hotel School are.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ As a result of my survey, I discovered that the hotel school management, senior faculty, Heads of Department in the hotels and some students felt that they had a stake in the students' learning.
- ◆ The parents and sponsors of the students play an important role in the progress of the students.

6.1.4. What are the expectations of these Stakeholders?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ The Directors of the Hotel School require that as many students as possible pass from one level to another.
- ◆ They expect the faculty to 'get on with the business of teaching' the students and they expect the students to learn the skills and knowledge as soon as possible since they 'work' in the various departments from day one.
- ◆ I observed that the students were very enthusiastic whether they were in a lecture, working in the kitchen, or working on an assignment.
- ◆ I especially noticed that the Chinese and Indian students were almost greedy in the way they 'lapped up' every lecture, practical or assignment. During my interviews with some

of them I came to the realization that they had to learn as much as they could and obtain the best job they could since they needed to earn as much money as they could to send home and in some cases so that they could go back to the big international hotels in their hometown and obtain jobs there.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ A situation that I found unique to The International Hotel School is the role of the parents/sponsors in their children/wards' learning. The school holds two Parents' Days per year, after the mid term examination in each semester. The faculty meet with the parents/sponsors and students to discuss their academic progress as well as their attendance and experiential learning. We have found that these meetings are extremely beneficial in preventing students from 'falling back', and if there are any problems, these are addressed timeously. This usually results in a positive throughput rate and the relationship between the parents/sponsors, students and faculty is vastly improved.
- ◆ Sadly, there are students who do not really seem to feel that they should be responsible for their learning as they see this as the sole responsibility of the school. When questioned they remarked that they 'had to get something in return for the high fees that they were paying the school. I realized that due to the fact that some lecturers were 'spoon feeding' students, they were contributing to the students' lack of responsibility.
- ◆ There is a definite case of 'wanting value for money' by the parents and students of the school. Since they feel that they are paying a much higher fee than they would had they attended a public institution.
- ◆ The expectations of the senior faculty and management of the school is obviously to see that as many students as possible progress through each level and that the students, parents, and the CHE as well as the Education department are satisfied with the level of teaching and learning at the school.

6.1.5. What role do we expect the hotel to play in the education of the hotel school students?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ Since the students spend the whole semester at the school and have no contact with the

hotels until the following semester when they are placed in hotels, the role of the hotel in this instance is very different to that of the hotels that are involved in the training of the students of the International Hotel School.

- ◆ The Blue Mountains Hotel School students are trained the various skills that they would need for their work placements at the school therefore the hotels would not need to provide training other than that pertaining to their establishment.
- ◆ The hotel management are asked to complete a report on the students' progress at the end of the semester and to supply a reference for the students' future employment.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ The hotels are expected to provide experiential learning in the various departments within the hotels.
- ◆ The hotel school provides the classroom learning with demonstrations and role play in a few areas and has arranged the curriculum in such a way that the experiential learning component takes place at the hotels but is monitored by the Practical Coordinator of the school. It seems as though the role of the Practical Coordinator needs to be reviewed.
- ◆ The remarks of the managers that I interviewed go a long way to pointing out the some of the problems. According to them we were 'expecting the hotel to train the students when they should be trained at the school.'
- ◆ There should be more interaction between the hotels and the school in this regard and the instruction as to the role of the hotels should be more structured.

6.1.6. What is the role of the student?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ On the students' arrival at The Blue Mountains Hotel School, they attend a two week orientation programme which goes a long way to preparing the students for the year ahead. It also clearly separates the roles of the school, faculty, students as well as the support staff.
- ◆ Every student is allocated a computer and introduced to the school's Intranet which is their link to the school, other than their lecturers and the SRC. It is through this Intranet that they receive their assignments, the syllabus per subject, test and examination

schedules, notification of any school function, field trips, etc. This seems to be a more student centered approach giving the student the responsibility for their learning as opposed to the lecturers 'doing all the work'. I observed that this resulted in more mature, independent students who seemed well aware of their role.

- ◆ However, when it came to their placements, they did not play a large role in sourcing the position or the hotel as this was done by the Placement Officer. Since these Placements were international, the students did have a choice as to the location of the position.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ Although the students are informed at length about the school and the different roles and responsibilities during their initial two hour interview and the two week induction programme, most of this information seems to be 'lost' by the time the first Academic day arrives.
- ◆ I also discovered that the induction programme at each campus was quite different in content, duration and emphasis, a factor which I believe played an important role in the confusion experienced by students especially since the students at the three campuses communicate on a regular basis.
- ◆ In some instances, although the students have been advised of the fact that the pass mark per external subject is 70% (60% for internal subjects) that they would need to prepare before each lecture and that they are responsible for passing or failing, some lecturers proceed to 'teach to the exam' or give structured 'guidelines' to students so much so that students study according to this.
- ◆ Since the students' final mark is made up of 4 progress tests, assignment and external examination mark, they may have passed some or all of the progress tests and the assignment but could fail the external examination thereby bringing down the final mark. If they took full responsibility for what and how they studied, instead of relying on the lecturers their results would be vastly improved.
- ◆ In their first and second year of study students express a preference as to the locations they would like to be placed, although the final decision does rest with the school and to some extent the hotels. In their third year of study however students seek their placements by sourcing the positions, hotels, etc, applying for the positions, and

attending interviews. The rationale for this is so that students get to display their initiative and resourcefulness. Should the student not find any position, the school steps in and places the student.

6.1.7. What is the responsibility of the school?

The Blue Mountains Hotel School

- ◆ According to the staff of the school, it seems that the responsibility of the school is mainly to the student and the Directors of the school. With regards the students, the staff ensures that the students receive the best possible learning, be it theory or practice and the extras that they provide go towards the all round development of the student.
- ◆ The appointment of Roberta as the Student Counselor demonstrates how seriously the school view their responsibility to the student, since it due largely to her efforts with the foreign language students that they are able to communicate in English quite adequately by the end of their 2nd week at the school.
- ◆ They comply with the relevant educational bodies as well as the request of the hotels that they have agreements with to provide work experience to their students.

The International Hotel School

- ◆ The school takes its responsibility to the students very seriously, as can be attested to by the lecturers who are required to provide explanations should the failure rate for a particular assignment or examination be unusually high. I have discovered that there indeed seems to be a greater emphasis on the academic component compared to the experiential learning component.
- ◆ The teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom is in isolation to that of the workplace. *The curriculum should show an integrated approach to teaching and learning.*
- ◆ Compliance with the relevant educational bodies is very important to the school as private higher educational institutions are usually viewed with suspicion due to the abundance of 'fly by night' type institutions. The relevant registrations and

accreditations go a long way to ensuring that not only is The International Hotel School a legitimate educational institution, but in the act of complying it is constantly monitoring and upgrading, if necessary its curricula.

- ◆ Although the students' final mark is made up equally of academic and practical marks, and great store is placed on the practical component, the academic component has been better structured with clearer objectives and guidelines.

All my observations and conclusions point to three main issues:

- *The curriculum needs to be restructured so that integrated teaching and learning takes place.*
- *We need to seriously examine the use of the words "practical training" in our curriculum and maybe open our minds to the fact that what we need to include is "experiential learning".*
- *Students need to be given more responsibility for their learning.*

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the research undertaken at The Blue Mountains Hotel School in Australia and The International Hotel School in Durban, South Africa, where I studied both the academic and practical components of their courses, I came to the conclusion that in order for The International Hotel School to achieve its objectives of providing international standard hospitality education and training and employable graduates it would have to restructure its curriculum.

The main areas that need attention are:

- 7.1. We need to seriously examine the use of the words "practical training" in our curriculum and maybe open our minds to the fact that what we need to include is "experiential learning".
- 7.2. The 'two week on (hotel practical) - two week off (academic component)' was a problem for the hotels from a continuity perspective.
- 7.3. The curriculum needs to be restructured so that integrated teaching and learning takes place.
- 7.4. Students need to be given more responsibility for their learning.
- 7.5. The hotel school, students and the hotels' roles and responsibilities should be clearly spelt out and communication needs to be improved.

Coincidentally, we were at this point busy with the registration of the Durban and Cape Town campuses as separate sites to our main campus in Johannesburg and were required to put together a Portfolio of Evidence of information pertaining to the campuses. I was responsible for compiling the Durban campus portfolio and an aspect of that was the curriculum. On discussing this with the Principal (I was at that stage the Deputy Principal of The Durban Campus), and the Executive Management Team we agreed that we would amend the curriculum accordingly.

7.1. Experiential learning

- ◆ It seems that we have been using the term "practical training" in our curriculum when we should have been using the term experiential learning, as

we expect the hotels to train the students during their time there.

- ◆ As can be noted from my interviews with the hotel managers they do not have the time and some do not have the inclination to do so. They would prefer that the school trains the students before sending them to the hotels.
- ◆ While I was at The Blue Mountains Hotel School, I observed that students were trained in skills before they were sent out to the hotels and if possible that should be something that we would need to consider.
- ◆ So, taking this into consideration, I recommend that we remove the term "practical training" from the curriculum and replace it with the term "experiential learning" as this is more in keeping with what actually occurs when the students complete this component of the course in the hotels. In doing so we should heed the words of Wittrock (1977) and Kolb (1984) who advocated experiential learning whereby the students could construct meaning from their own experiences.

7.2. Duration of experiential learning and academic components

- ◆ When we met to discuss the curriculum, I described the hotel managers views on the 'two week on – two week off' system. Since we were going to amend the curriculum anyway, I pointed out that we should amend this as well. I suggested a 'three month on- three month off' period. The Executive Committee was concerned that if the students were out of the school for three months there was a possibility that we could lose these students if we did not have any contact with them. This was a very real possibility and we needed to maintain contact with the students while they were in their experiential learning component. We eventually agreed that the best possible solution would be to adopt the three month on- three month off system but with the proviso that those students in the experiential learning component meet with the Practical Coordinator at the school every Monday to discuss their experiences at the hotels as well as to hand in their weekly reports.
- ◆ After the two week Induction period students would be split into two groups, with one attending the academic component and the other the experiential learning component for three months. During this time, the students in the

academic component would complete their assignments and sit their examinations so that when they are in the experiential learning component, they could concentrate on learning and practicing the various skills and complete their portfolios of evidence.

- ◆ Students that would be attending the experiential learning component would receive their hotel placements, the year planner, as well as the experiential learning schedule, which would depict the different departments as well as the duration per department. They would receive their rosters from the hotels.

7.3. Restructuring of the curriculum to incorporate integrated teaching and learning

- ◆ As a result of my research one of the conclusions I reached was that teaching and learning did not only take place in the classroom but in the workplace as well. So, how best to incorporate this into the curriculum? We know that the 'old style' lecture methods do not suit vocational courses such as ours, rather what is needed is a blend of the lecture type methods complemented by the more outcomes based teaching methods, viz. group work, demonstrations, role play, etc.
- ◆ This curriculum model should be structured in such a way that principles and concepts taught in the classroom should be followed up by the relevant demonstration of skills before the student enters the hotel for the experiential learning component.
- ◆ When the lecturers are busy with their schemes of work for each subject, they should state the skills that students should perform in the relevant hotel departments and ensure that this is communicated to the Heads of Department at the beginning of the year so that they can plan accordingly and when the students begin the experiential learning component in the hotel, they will follow a more structured programme.
- ◆ The other factor that lecturers should take into account when planning their schemes of work, is the number of periods that should be spent on lecturing and on demonstration, etc. per subject so that adequate time is spent on teaching the principles of the subject and then demonstrating the skills based

on them. By the time the students enter the hotel for the experiential learning component, they will be able to perform these skills with some degree of expertise.

- ◆ Since one of the unique selling points of The International Hotel School is that the students obtain experiential learning in hotels with 'real live guests' we should not lose this, rather we should give it more structure and incorporate it into the curriculum

7.4. Responsibility for learning

- ◆ We have to ensure that we give the students as much responsibility as possible for their learning and the best place to start would be during the two weeks of Induction.
- ◆ These have always been compulsory, but as I mentioned earlier each campus followed a separate programme. A standardized programme should be compiled and followed. During this programme we should advise the students of their role and our expectations of them, the lecturers and the hotels for effective teaching and learning to take place.
- ◆ The Practical Coordinator should explain the objectives of the experiential learning component to the students as well as her role during this period.
- ◆ All subject lecturers should also address the students with regards the academic component. They should present the students with the schemes of work, explaining the objectives of the subject as well as their expectations of the students, etc.
- ◆ The attendance policy and procedure should also be explained in detail to them as well as the responsibilities of the students in this regard.
- ◆ All of these actions should emphasize to the students that the onus is on them to take responsibility for their learning.

7.5. Better communication between the hotel school and the hotels

- ◆ When the hotel school approaches hotels with regard to placements of students, they should also follow a structured formal approach. A formal agreement should be signed by the Principal of each campus as well as the

general managers of the relevant hotels. This agreement should detail the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the school, the hotel and the students with regard the experiential learning component.

- ◆ Towards the end of the year the Principal should call a meeting with all hotel department heads and if possible the general managers as well. The Practical Coordinators should also be present. The year planner for the following year should be handed out as well as the experiential learning rosters per group.
- ◆ The Practical Coordinator should at this stage explain the format of the experiential learning component as well as his/her role in this process. Requirements regarding the rosters, departmental evaluation, etc. should be explained to the Department Heads, as they will have to complete these.
- ◆ The procedure in the event of absenteeism, sick days, days off, etc. should be explained and the relevant paperwork should be discussed.

If we were to take all of the above recommendations into account and develop a curriculum similar to that of The Blue Mountains Hotel School, we would have the ideal situation for experiential learning to take place. The Blue Mountains Hotel School was an old resort hotel which was converted to a school, and since we aren't that fortunate here, the next best thing would be for each campus to have their own kitchen, front desk, laundry, and restaurant and bar. The lecturers can teach the concepts or principles of a subject in the classroom and then arrange for the students to practice the relevant skills in these departments, e.g. Front Office, the lecturer may teach the students the principles of the guest cycle and then arrange a demonstration at the hotel school's front desk... the students then practice the various skills required in this process. The lecturer could have prepared an assignment or worksheet based on the lesson for the students to complete, this will eventually form part of the Portfolio of Evidence.

Change in action

Since the commencement of this research I have been promoted to the position of Managing Principal of the Durban campus and later the Academic Development Manager for the School. I have been fortunate in that my conclusions and recommendations have been, not only accepted but also supported by the executive management of the school.

The changes that have been made are:

1. The Higher Diploma in Hospitality Management and The Higher Diploma in Professional Cookery and Kitchen Management are now structured so that students spend 20 weeks in academics and 20 weeks in the experiential learning component at hotels for the first two years.
2. Immediately after the two-week induction programme, students are divided into two groups and they alternate every 10 weeks accordingly. After every 10 week period they have a week's vacation until December when they have a longer vacation.
3. The first year's subjects and experiential learning concentrates on Food and Beverage for students of both programmes.
4. The rationale behind this is that some students decide towards the end of their first year that they wish to change from either the hospitality management course to the professional cookery course or vice versa they submit their written request to us in November of their first year.
5. The second year of the hospitality management course concentrates on Rooms Division and the management aspects thereof and the professional cookery course concentrates on cookery specialization and kitchen management.
6. The third year of study comprises of the students attending lecturers as one group from January to June and attending the experiential learning component from July to December. In third year students have the opportunity to specialize in the area of their choice within the hospitality industry and they are allowed to do this anywhere in the world.
7. Both the hotel managers and the students are more than satisfied with this structure although there were two drawbacks, which we have since addressed. They are:

- 2.1. Those students who are placed in the experiential learning component immediately after the induction programme seem to be at a disadvantage as they feel they are 'thrown in the deep end'. Although we have since changed the structure of the course whereby the student spends 10 weeks (450 hours) at a time in experiential learning at the hotels, the managers are still not totally satisfied as they would prefer the school to send them 'fully trained' students.
- 2.2. We found that students who completed the experiential learning before the academic component sometimes enjoyed it so much that they did not wish to attend lectures and study for examinations, although we found that when the lecturers discussed a specific subject, e.g. food production theory, these students displayed a better understanding of the concepts and principles underlying the skills that they had learnt and practiced in the hotel.

Recommended Solutions that have since been implemented

2.1.

- ◆ As mentioned earlier, we have experienced this problem from the very beginning of implementing both our courses. After investigating The Blue Mountains Hotel School's curricula, I found that the demonstration and practice method of instruction that they use is very effective in ensuring that the students master the necessary skills before they are placed in hotels.
- ◆ Whilst carrying out lecturer evaluations at the International Hotel School, I realized that most of the lecturers were planning and presenting their lessons in the 'old' lecturer centered style rather than the 'ideal' student centered style. Vocational styled programmes such as ours should be presented along the lines of that of The Blue Mountains Hotel School in order to comply with OBE practices as well as those of our Education Department.
- ◆ With this in mind, I have researched, planned and presented workshops to the lecturers at each of our campuses on effective lesson planning, effective lecturing and effective selection of media in lesson planning. I compiled a

template for the lesson planning which all lecturers now use to ensure that they structure their lessons according to OBE dictates.

- ◆ After teaching students the basic underlying concepts and principles for each subject, the lecturers then utilize the demonstration, role-play, or simulation methods to enforce these.
- ◆ The structured, standardized, two week Induction programme that the students follow goes a long way to preparing the students for both the academic as well as the experiential learning components of the programme.
- ◆ At each regional meeting between the hotel managers and the Managing Principals and Practical Coordinators, the latter explain the course structure and experiential requirements, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the students, hotel managers and The International Hotel School. The Year Planner, Experiential Learning Schedules, as well as the mark allocation are discussed as well. This improved, clear communication although in its infancy has already shown positive results as is evidenced by happier students, managers and hotel school faculty. Most of the hotels have bought into the importance of the Departmental Induction prior to students' placements. In this way the students are not only aware of the skills and tasks they are required to perform, but are able to perform them before coming into contact with the guest.

2.2.

- ◆ We had to ensure that while our students were busy with their experiential learning component, they were mindful of the fact that they were students of The International Hotel School. The best way to accomplish this was by means of constant contact and communication between the school and the students. With the implementation of standardization in all aspects of the programme offerings, all students are now required to complete weekly reports, shift schedules and the Heads of Department at each hotel would have to complete weekly as well as Departmental evaluations per student per department.
- ◆ The Practical Coordinator has to meet with each student and where possible the Heads of Department once a week at the hotel. The students' progress or lack thereof is discussed and where necessary, the Practical Coordinator meets with

the student in an objective setting session to discuss problems, or challenges and the possible solutions or actions.

- ◆ I have also recommended that students that are busy with the experiential learning component should be represented at each Students Representative Council meeting. This should ensure that they feel part of the school and its activities.

I am sure that I have in no way found solutions to all the problems and challenges that I posed, but by observing the students and staff of The Blue Mountains Hotel School, I was able to clearly identify the problems and challenges of the International Hotel School and compare their situation with that of The Blue Mountains Hotel School. I was also able to identify the reasons behind these problems, and to use The Blue Mountains Hotel School as a model for **experiential learning** that could be adapted here in South Africa.

So, when the students of the International Hotel School are placed in hotels during their experiential learning component, is true learning taking place? Will this learning complement that of the classroom? If the **constructivist paradigm** is to be believed and if we implement it correctly then the answers to the above questions would be a resounding **yes!** The learning will be informed by constructivism, supported by an activity- based, problem-centered, experiential approach where students will make meaning and construct knowledge whilst facilitated by well-informed lecturers and trainers. We can then truly say that graduates of The International Hotel School can make the transition from educational institution to the workplace with confidence and ease. Since all graduates of higher education establishments are required to carry out the skills, tasks and duties of their chosen careers with some measure of proficiency, the time has come for all such institutions to include experiential learning in their curricula. I am quite positive that the model of experiential learning discussed here can be easily adapted to other disciplines thus enabling other graduates to benefit.

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UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

7 MARCH 2007

MRS. T NATHOO (201510558)
EDUCATION

Dear Mrs. Nathoo

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0071/07M

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

“A comparative study of the in-service, practical training component of the International Hotel School and the blue Mountains Hotel School”

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

cc. Faculty Research Office (Derek Buchler)
cc. Supervisor (Prof. C Mbali)

2007-03-09