

The liberation of hospitality management education

Alison Morrison

The Scottish Hotel School, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

G. Barry O'Mahony

School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing, Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract

Hospitality management higher education's historic origins have resulted in a strong vocational ethos permeating the curriculum. Knowledge about hospitality has been drawn from the industry and the world of work rather than from the many disciplines or other fields of enquiry, which can help to explain it. By the late 1990s there was a strengthening international movement, driven by higher education hospitality academics towards the liberation of hospitality management higher education from its vocational base and to explore the inclusion in the curriculum of a broader and more reflective orientation. This paper investigates the historical evolution of hospitality management education, concepts associated with liberal education, and provides an illustrative case study that evaluates how a more liberal base was introduced into the curriculum at two universities located in Australia and Scotland respectively.

Introduction and background

Internationally there has been a strengthening movement supporting the liberation of hospitality higher education from its vocational base. The associated literature spans two decades (for example, Nailon, 1982; Pizam *et al.*, 1982; Wood, 1992; Barrow and Bosselman, 1999; Airey and Tribe, 2000; Tribe, 2000) and serves to reveal some of the educational and intellectual dilemmas confronting contemporary hospitality management educationists. In the main, they embrace support for the inclusion of the wider social sciences within the curriculum, balancing the vocational and action orientation with that of the liberal and reflective. One record of the emergent theoretical perspectives and debates is captured in an edited text (Lashley and Morrison, 2000) that emerged from a general hospitality higher education discourse in the UK, and reflects the views of the academic community at that point in time. The overriding theme within this publication refers to the potential educational benefits associated with broadening the definition of "hospitality" to include the private and social alongside the commercial provision as a means to inform and stimulate best management practice. In addition, Airey and Tribe (2000) propose that students of hospitality in higher education could learn much from an increased exposure to the social sciences and the opportunity to reflect on connections between their life experiences and varied theoretical ways of understanding and knowing what constitutes the concept of hospitality as broadly conceived.

Thus, the aim of this paper is critically to analyse the literature associated with the historical evolution of hospitality

management and liberal education over a 20-year period, engage in the emergent debates, and to consider implications for the higher education curriculum. The findings of this meta-analysis are employed to provide the educational architecture supporting the design and development of an introductory class to hospitality as a specialist higher education field of study. The paper presents an illustrative case study that evaluates the processes that were used to integrate a liberal and reflective approach and to provide an overview of the class that has been piloted in Australia and Scotland respectively. Extracts from students' work are used to demonstrate some of the results achieved. Conclusions are presented relative to the liberation of hospitality management education from its traditional vocational origins.

Hospitality management education

According to Nailon (1982, p. 137) the development of hospitality management education has been evolutionary. Moreover, he advises that the curriculum originated from a vocational foundation and maintains that the traditional approach to hospitality education was based on an amalgam of craft, ritual and inherited practices. He concludes that, whilst hospitality is considered to be a business activity, hospitality education can in fact include the liberal arts, which contrasts with a traditional vocational and action orientation. Pizam *et al.* (1982) suggest curriculum parameters in that a number of objective, quantitative elements comprise part of hospitality management and therefore should be included in the curriculum. They do suggest, however, that an opportunity exists to explore additional subject-matter drawn primarily from the social sciences.



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By the 1990s more academics enter the debate. Wood's (1992) comprehensive review of the hospitality industry argues that, although specific hospitality management courses have been available in the UK for over 20 years, this has not led to any great improvement in industry practices or conditions for hospitality employees. Implicit in this observation is the notion that university graduates may be deficient in the ability to reflect on, and ameliorate industry and management practices. Hegarty (1992) suggests that a new paradigm for hospitality needs to be established and advocates the inclusion of philosophy and ethics in the development of a framework for higher education, while Jones (1996) argues for a curriculum that combines the natural and social sciences in order to educate students better as to the physiological and social needs of customers. Furthermore, the debate is not geographically confined to hospitality higher education in Europe. Internationally, the curriculum dilemma as to what should constitute the academic scope of hospitality higher education is enduringly problematic. For example, this is evidenced from a North American perspective (Bloomquist and Moreo, 1997; Lefever and Withiam, 1998; Barrow and Bosselman, 1999) and an Australian (Sparks, 1991; Hobson, 1995). This lack of any clear consensus as regards curriculum content and scope leads some academics to puzzle over how the subject can be taught in any coherent manner if the broad parameters remain ill defined (Keiser, 1998; Taylor and Edgar, 1999).

At the commencement of the twenty-first century the debate rages on (for example, Airey and Tribe, 2000; Lam and Ziao, 2000; Tribe, 2000; Brotherton and Wood, 2000; Lashley, 2000; O'Mahony *et al.*, 2001; Morrison and O'Mahony, 2002). Encouragingly, there does appear to be a weight of agreement as regards the educational benefits of incorporating a more liberal approach within the broader social sphere of culture, anthropology, philosophy and sociology, albeit to the neglect of the natural sciences. This affirms that hospitality management education has been undergoing a paradigmatic shift over the previous two decades, recognizing the contemporary need to challenge inherited rituals and practices, and is inextricably linked to arguments that managers need to be more reflective in their approach (Lashley, 2000).

Justification for the incorporation of an explicit social sciences perspective of hospitality into the mainstream specialist curriculum is that hospitality has

consistently represented an important part of world culture throughout history (Evans, 1988). An integrated approach has the potential to generate new ways of thinking and a wider appreciation of world views on the concept of hospitality as broadly conceived. For example, academic exploration of the sociology, psychology and philosophy of food and consumption illustrates social sciences' fascination with the hospitality experience (see Heal, 1990; Mennel *et al.*, 1985; Finkelstein, 1989; Visser, 1993; Telfer, 1996; Bell and Valentine, 1997; Beardsworth and Keil, 1997; Ritzer, 1998; Ward and Martens, 2000). These academics have found it profitable to explore the wealth of meanings and symbolism embodied in the concept of hospitality, as have researchers in the field of hospitality through exploration of the illuminatory capacity of sociological perspectives (for example, Wood, 1995; Lynch, 1999, 2000; Andrews, 2000; Randall, 2000). Airey and Tribe (2000) assert that a social science-enriched and reflective curriculum directly relates to what is known as liberal education, and provides for an alternative vision of traditional hospitality education (Evans, 1988). This has the potential to liberate hospitality "from the constraints of a particular historical cultural knowledge paradigm to a new view of other possible paradigms" (Barnett, 1990, cited in Tribe, 2000, p. 13).

Liberal education

Liberal education's idea has a long history, lies in thought rather than in practice, and is characterized as being concerned with learning rather than teaching (Tribe, 2000). It encourages contemplation, the seeking of truth, appreciating the best that is known and thought in the world and central is the idea of nourishment and liberation of the mind (Pearce, 1991). Liberal education requires participation in conversations about human self-knowledge and understanding (Tribe, 2000). Peters' (1966) seminal work *Ethics and Education* proposes that it can add value to the specialist curriculum by opening up the mind to alternative streams of consciousness. For example, he suggests that liberal education allows learners to: "Go deeper into the discipline, to begin to grasp from the inside what this form of scientific thought entails, and to be attracted and absorbed by the values immanent in this form of enquiry" (Peters, 1966, p. 44). Peters also reports that such reflection and the inquiry embody the types of activities for which a curriculum of a

university is largely constructed. This involves embarking on those forms of inquiry such as science, history, literature and philosophy, which are concerned with the description, explanation, and assessment of different forms of human activity. Advice is provided that liberal education can co-exist with and enhance other educational processes including those that are vocational in nature, asserting that:

an educated man [or woman] could be trained in one sphere, e.g. science [or hospitality management], and yet be sufficiently cognizant of other ways of looking at the world, so that he [or she] can grasp the historical perspective, social significance or aesthetic merit of his [or her] work and much besides (Peters, 1966, p. 44).

Airey and Tribe (2000) support this, in questioning the extent to which traditional hospitality management higher education prepares students to be able to think outside existing practices and paradigms, providing personal and professional development, which promotes the general powers of the mind. The notion that liberal education can form an integral component of hospitality management courses is further supported by Pizam *et al.* (1982, p. xiii) asserting that: "A successful hospitality manager must be versed in conceptual and technical tools drawn from disciplines such as psychology, engineering, operations research and mathematics". Thus, a liberal base should represent an important component of higher education programmes, and students are expected to evaluate conceptual frameworks, as well as reflecting upon and synthesising material. Furthermore, while these represent long-established features associated with higher education, Katz (1996, p. 82) argues for the contemporary relevance of the liberal arts, asserting that:

Our society needs citizens who can rapidly adapt to the changing needs of the growth and technological development of the economy, who also have an unprecedented degree of specialized knowledge, yet those young people will be best served by an education sufficiently liberal and unspecialised that they are primarily trained to be broadly knowledgeable and to think clearly and creatively.

Barrow and Bosselman (1999) concur with Katz's assertion, arguing that, as the international hospitality industry and business environment are so dynamic, it is unrealistic to assume that curriculum content can accurately reflect current industry practices. Students would be better served by a more balanced curriculum providing for the vocational knowable and liberal unknowable personal and professional

development. Variations of this form of curriculum have recently been incorporated into a number of hospitality management education programmes. For example, a Bachelor of Arts in Culinary Art is offered at Dublin Institute of Technology, representing a transition from a traditionally vocational area of professional cookery towards an analysis, and appreciation, of culinary customs and food habits. In addition, Griffin and Thompson (1997) document the inclusion of gastronomy within both undergraduate and postgraduate hospitality courses at a number of institutions in the USA. They assert that the educational value is due to: "the richness of thought derived from an increasingly well-educated culinary workforce" (Griffin and Thompson, 1997, p. 244). However, Tribe (2000) cautions as to limitations in this potentially liberating educational approach, as an education for liberal reflection and philosophising may be perceived to be a largely passive, individual and cerebral process. The challenge is to construct intellectual bridges, translating it into the vocational and action. Thus, Tribe (2000, p. 23) concludes that liberal education alone is insufficient and closes with the question: "How can liberal education move from reflection to practical action in the [tourism] world".

In the liberation of hospitality management education the challenge would appear to be how to embed a predominantly vocational and action-oriented curriculum with an appropriate balance of the liberal and reflective. Moreover, this requires an integration of the specialist and technical, alongside the world-views and conceptual, as separately each approach is insufficient within the dynamics of contemporary society and commerce. It represents a relationship of co-existence, and not a battle for supremacy. In capturing the illuminatory capacity of social science perspectives into hospitality curriculum there is the possibility of liberating the students/next generation managers from inherited and outmoded ways of thinking about the world in generating new world views. In this way, value is added to the specialist hospitality curriculum allowing students to delve deeper into the field of study, through contemplation, exposure to broad world-views embodied in the social sciences, and active intellectual participation in the evolution of human self-knowledge and understanding.

Case study

The educational challenge above was embraced in the design and development of a

level one, introductory class to hospitality at the universities of Victoria and Strathclyde, which was piloted in 2001. Coincidentally, two higher education institutes identified the need for the inclusion in the curriculum of a liberal and reflective introduction to hospitality, independently, and geographically half a world apart. Research conducted within the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing at Victoria University, Melbourne found that a subject, which introduced undergraduate students to, and engaged them in, the concept of hospitality, the industry sector and management constructs and practices represented vital educational architecture that supports the curriculum (O'Mahony *et al.*, 2001). At the same time, a Bachelor of Arts in Hotel and Hospitality Management major curriculum review at the Scottish Hotel School, University of Strathclyde arrived at the same conclusion. Consequently, both universities developed a level one, introductory class to hospitality, designed to develop an early sense of scope, context, meaning and self-understanding relative to the students' chosen specialization, and the management issues and challenges therein. A common and collaborative approach to class design and development was adopted between the two universities, which sought to integrate liberal and reflective processes, whilst broadening the existing hospitality management curriculum in a wider social sciences embrace.

The class was explicitly designed to heighten individual self-knowledge and understanding of hospitality, enhanced by learning activities that encouraged reflection, contemplation, participating, and relating to social others. To commence the learning, as opposed to teaching, process the class sets out to deliberately expose the students to the concept of hospitality as broadly conceived to include private, social and commercial domains, and world-views on how it manifests itself within society. From there, the class moves emphasis to how this self-knowledge and understanding translate into the specialist and technical arena of commercial hospitality enterprise, and the management constructs and practices therein. Table I provides an indicative schema of class content and activities. Thus, the objectives of the class are to:

- develop a social science-embedded conceptual framework that supports learning, stimulates reflective thinking and critical analysis of hospitality as a concept broadly defined;

- expose students to insights into the study of hospitality that encompasses the commercial provision of hospitality and the hospitality industry; and
- orientate the students to the hospitality industry and the management issues that confront it.

The facilitation of reflection, contemplation, participation and relating to social others was seen to be a vital element in the engagement of students in the learning process. Specifically, the learning asset value of individual students was recognised in terms of the perceptions, experiences, expectations, knowledge and cultural credentials that they can contribute. This is relative to the promotion of self- and shared knowledge and understanding of hospitality. Furthermore, while wide experience of commercial hospitality in its various guises may not be universal within a student population, it could be assumed that, irrespective of economic and cultural background, all students will have been consumers and producers of some form of hospitality, albeit within domestic and/or social environments.

Thus, the class was designed to explicitly connect a student's life experience and ways of seeing their world, to varied theoretical ways of understanding and knowing hospitality, in the learning process. Primarily, this took the form of short activities that built on a week-to-week basis to a portfolio of reflections. For example, activities included contemplation of what had contributed to making a meal their most memorable ever, reflection on how hospitality is depicted by TV celebrity chefs, critically evaluation of differences between cultures in the giving and sharing of hospitality, and consideration of family roles in the provision of hospitality within the home. These were integrated into reading, lecture and tutorial learning support that facilitated the exposure to world-views and concepts, explicitly translated into implications for commercial enterprise and management. The portfolio of activities comprises the class assessment and is completed with a short essay providing a synopsis of the material assembled to deepen critical analysis, reflection, self-understanding and knowledge.

Class evaluation was carried out at the universities of both Victoria and Strathclyde, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. It scored impressively quantitatively, however, it is considered that the individual student comments provide the more powerful insights. An indicative

Table I

Introduction to hospitality – an indicative schema

Session	Content and activities
1	Introduction to the class: hospitality as a field of study Activity 1: my most enjoyable meal – what contributed to this?
2	The concept of hospitality: the stranger and social exchange Activity 2: what is the essence of “hospitality”?
3	The concept of hospitality: the domestic and social worlds of hospitality Activity 3: how do aspects of hospitality enjoyed in the home compare (or not) with commercial hospitality experienced during a night out with friends?
4	Historical perspective: origins of modern, commercial hospitality Activity 4: research and outline the historical origins of one type of commercial hospitality
5	Sociology and hospitality: interpretations and presentations of commercial hospitality Activity 5: video: Ayers Rock Resort – what are they “selling”?
6	Sociology and hospitality: debates about commoditization Activity 6: what contributed to your best family holiday ever?
7	Cultural variations in hospitality: globalization or differentiation? Activity 7: is the concept of hospitality the same the world over?
8	The concept of hospitality: review and synthesis Activity 8: representations of hospitality in the popular media
9	The commercial domain: the forms of hospitality Activity 9: Internet search for different categories of commercial hospitality
10	Operationalising concepts of hospitality: industry case studies Activity 10: What the employment adverts say about hospitality managers
11	Hospitality management practices and challenges Activity 11: analysis of companies which clearly exhibit concepts of hospitality in their operations
12	Review and synthesis: hospitality as concept, commercial provision and management practices

sample of these qualitative statements is provided below:

When I arrived at my first lecture for Introduction to Hospitality I brought with me a rather skeptical and pessimistic view of, “what are they going to teach us?” Today I overlook that statement and what I didn’t realise is that there is a distinction between hospitality as a concept and commercial hospitality and that hospitality has originated from both private and social sectors.

A better understanding of various cultures would seem appropriate, given that Australia contains many different cultures and with that many different traditions and consumption habits, the commercial host would be catering not only for one band of persons but for a variety of individuals

Without this class I would never have known the real theories and all the angles that make up hospitality ... it makes you think really differently about it.

Hospitality isn’t just an industry, it is a quality that everyone working in the industry should possess. To be hospitable is to care.

The subject highlighted the past and how the past really does affect the present and our perception of current events.

Finally, and probably the most reassuring: I am left with a greater understanding of hospitality not as a word and a specific

definition but as an ongoing learning experience in the world of hospitality.

This preliminary evaluation is considered to be encouraging. It suggests that there is merit in this approach, towards the liberation of hospitality management education, and indicates an optimisation of the often contested curriculum space (Airey and Tribe, 2000). Moreover, an early sense of scope, context, meaning and self-understanding, through a reflective learning process, commences at a foundation stage in students’ studies, allowing them to bring this understanding and learning style into subsequent hospitality management studies, and into the hospitality industry on graduation. However, it is recognized that this represents only one class within a curriculum. As such it may be perceived as a maverick in relation to the range of classes to which students are exposed. Therefore, it is suggested that the curriculum-wide adoption of the underpinning philosophical stance advocated in this paper needs to be encouraged and applied as appropriate.

Conclusions

Contemporary hospitality management education faces a number of significant

tensions, contradictions and debates, which it would be presumptuous of the authors to pretend to have comprehensively addressed in this paper. What has been provided is an illustrative insight into a component of the educational process that was designed to inform and stimulate best practice management through the adoption of a broad conceptualisation of hospitality as central to world culture, private, social and commercial lives. It represents an alternative vision of hospitality management higher education that deliberately integrates the specialist vocational within a liberal base. The case study has demonstrated how the two theoretical strands can co-exist in a complementary manner, enhancing the educational process, equipping students with equally valued technical and conceptual tools. As yet the longitudinal effects for the students and industry are unknown. However, it is proposed that there is a potential that traditional hospitality paradigms and management practices may be challenged, inherited rituals questioned, and liberation from historically derived mindsets achieved, to revitalise and invent the future rather than simply replicating the past.

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