

*Who
Should
Train our Chefs
in
Ireland?*

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Abstract

This paper explores the needs for education in culinary arts in Ireland. In the current climate industry analysts suggest recruiting and delivering of in-house training to off-set labour shortages. Training is important for everyday activity and can impact positively on employee's work. Culinary arts education on the other hand can positively contribute to one's career.

Literature that focuses on education and training is presented and this paper further discusses the importance of education and training to the individual and the economy.

This study found that education provides the scope to adapt to change, thus affording industry the opportunity to develop further and meet competitive challenges. Results from earlier studies on the nature of skills requirements illustrate that employers regard conceptual and attitudinal skills as essential. These two learning domains are of the higher order of conceptual and effective dimensions, and are best delivered through a programme that emphasises education into the future. The literature also shows that there is some disconnect between what education and industry deem to be the best ways of providing labour needs.

The literature recommends that employers should explore ways that make the industry more attractive to its workforce. Proactive businesses should collaborate with colleges to obtain recognition for quality on-the-job-training. The area of work placement needs further study. Placement establishments should have some form of recognised employer charter, and this charter should be a prerequisite to receiving students on work placement. Hospitality establishments need to encourage learners to stay in the industry by facilitating their career development, and provide opportunities for lifelong learning. Educational institutions, as the custodians of knowledge must respond on behalf of the learner, and balance the focus between training and education. This will require continued investment by college management in staff development. The development should focus on a greater appreciation by culinary arts lecturers of the advantages of understanding learning theories and learning styles in order that students maximise their educational experience.

Key words:

- Culinary
- Key skills
- Education
- Training
- Gastronomy

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The collapse of the Celtic Tiger left many surviving hospitality businesses in the position where they had to re-evaluate their human resource needs. Many hotels and restaurants succumbed to laying-off costly key personnel just to remain open. This exodus of operational expertise left many businesses weaker as they adapted to do more with less. Interestingly, while there are some green shoots of economic growth, the areas that are showing best performance are those in tourism, food and agriculture. Predictably the hospitality industry is now faced with a shortage of well-trained culinary professionals and entry-level craft workers, such as breakfast chefs, bar staff, porters and chamber assistants to meet the current demand (O'Brien, 2012). The incoming president of the Irish Hotels Federation is proposing the generation of a scheme that involves training 3,000 long-term unemployed to offset this shortfall. This paper examines the issue of who should do this training and appraises whether training is enough to bridge the long-term needs of these workers into the future.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The author is acutely aware that a significant body of literature exists that has been prepared by various individuals and organisations which deals with educational issues. In order to ensure that this research was grounded in the know-how of other learned people, this experience in the form of a literature review will be analysed. Specifically, the author will review books by scholarly authors (listed in the bibliography), and colleges where the culinary arts programmes are offered.

2.2 Culinary environment

In recent times, the economic climate has thrown up a new dichotomy (Amárach, 2011). On the one hand, restructuring of business needs in the sector has stretched human resources incredibly thin, while fierce competition has given rise to high staff turnover, skills shortages, lack of training and a growing demand for flexibility and creativity. In short, food service

providers are facing a crisis of competence. Competence is the outward expression of individuals' skills and knowledge (Kurz & Bartram, 2002). In gastronomical terms, knowledge of classical cooking is often the catalyst for new ideas in contemporary cooking. Traditional cookery styles and processes are remodelled and refined to come up with new ideas. Hence today's cuisine becomes tomorrow's traditions. Originality is implicit. For the culinary artist, originality is the achievement of years of study and understanding of food and the development of creativity skills. According to Boden (2001), it is possible to distinguish three different types of creative thinking: combinational, transformational and exploratory.

Combinational creativity constructs new ideas by combining (allying) old ideas in unfamiliar ways. This kind of creativity requires not only a rich source of old ideas, but the ability to make associations of many different kinds. Combining novel ideas from a broad and wide-ranging erudition can sooner or later lead the artist to create a culinary art '*sans frontière*'. In other words; the more diverse the type of knowledge a person acquires (in their constant striving for excellence), the richer their mental basis for creating more exciting combinations of ideas.

Transformational creativity entails a number of important alterations of one or more rules of current conceptual space. This allows certain ideas to develop that simply could not develop before the rule changed. The more original the rule that is changed, the more extreme or '*impracticable*' the new ideas will seem to be. To change one's frying technique from '*sauté*' to '*stir-fry*' may create a new style of cooking. '*Most of the creative ideas that get into the history books are cases of transformational creativity*' (Boden, 2001, p.97). Take for example the opportune discovery of puff pastry. In normal pastry production, fat is incorporated into the dough at the dry flour stage to give a crumble or crusty product when baked. Whereas with puff pastry it requires a lengthy procedure of layering fat and dough to generate a finished pastry that is light, leafy (*lamination*) and delicate when baked. Here, changing the rules of pastry making produced a valuable new idea, an idea that is now a multi-million Euro industry.

Exploratory creativity can take place once the learner has acquired the relevant rules. These rules could be as simple as following recipes. Once the measurements and amount of ingredients are learned or mastered, the recipes then can be used as guidelines and not as blueprints that need precise following. Both exploratory and transformational creativity

require knowledge of a rather different type. Recipes can be creatively altered in many different ways. *‘Both exploratory and transformational creativity can take place only from a firm bedrock of stylistic familiarity, grounded in practice. Even Mozart had to familiarise himself with the contemporary musical style for ten years before he came up with anything interestingly new, as opposed to merely competent - and in this he was like other leading composers’* (Boden, 2001, p. 102).

Creativity and knowledge are two sides of the same psychological coin, not opposing forces. This implies that one must have a body of knowledge, and some kind of conceptual scheme (Gagné, 1985; Kolb, 1994; Jabs & Devine, 2006). For the new learner of culinary arts, science underpins the craft. The psychology of inspiration is as significant as the psychology of cognition in understanding ingenuity. Understanding food science is a pre-requisite to becoming a master-craftsman; and becoming a master-craftsman is a pre-requisite to becoming an artist – an idea of self-actualisation.

2.3 The learning environment

Training is not education. Education is generally measured through multiple means of assessments that test knowledge, skills and competencies, while with training on the other hand, trainees can demonstrate their mastery of product development during learning sessions. Learners are active, therefore candidates learn by doing. The targeted unemployed learner may bring into the equation a foundation of experiences and knowledge from previous employment and these attributes should be recognised and acknowledged (Galbraith, 2004). This requires a systematic approach to learning, one that compares well with effectiveness of vocational education. Barriers to a system approach to training reflected in *‘greater differentiation based on field specialisation, programme orientation and mode of delivery’* (HEA, 2012). Industry on-the-job-training is far too focused on the current business requirements at an operational level to be responsive to change, while critics of the labour market vocational system suggest that it suffers from selection bias since less able students are more likely to enrol in these programmes (Malamud & Pop-Eleche, 2006). Nevertheless, a college educated student takes with them skills that are tremendously transferable and equally applicable at home or abroad (GMIT, 2009; CIA, 2012; LSBU, 2012). Culinary arts programmes are designed to be learner-led and offer students the theory,

techniques and hands-on experience to meet their career goals. The challenge for the industry is to create the conditions for learning to take place.

The challenge for educational institutions is to provide its' participants with the necessary tools to grow in an ever-changing society (Langford, 1999). Knowledge of science and technology is often the foundation for new ideas in contemporary cooking. Traditional cooking styles and processes are remodelled and refined to come up with new ideas (Lydon, 2010). Learning delivered in a purposely-designed setting provides the most effective tool in the delivery of knowledge, as knowledge underpins psychomotor skills. Psychomotor ability is crucial in the development of creative dexterous ability. Old learning experiences are the building blocks for new learning experiences. Each learner's experiences particularly in creative thinking within a learning setting must be cooperatively created with the support of educational professional. While the work placement allows the student to gain valuable experience and supports co-operative learning. It also, supports the development of such cognitive processes as problem solving, abstract conceptualising, and thinking and perception recognition and allows the learner to advance professionally (Elias & Merriam, 1980).

A study carried out in 2005 showed that respondents felt that industrial placement is crucial in building on the skills learned in college (Lydon, 2005). The need to carefully match the ability of the student to the establishment was apparent in all the interviews. *'Some students excel because they like the establishment they are in and get on very well. Sometimes I think the students may just flounder because perhaps on the first day they are not greeted or received. And for some reason they do not feel part of the team'*. In the same study, the question of whether students would benefit from more-time or less-time in college shows a polarisation of views. Educationalists felt that students would benefit from more time in college (82%), whereas those in industry (head chefs 91%, supervisors 88% and self-employed 100%) believed that students would benefit with more time in industry and less time in college (Lydon, 2005). The idea of further collaboration between student and industry was apparent in the qualitative responses. Many felt that industry had a responsibility to provide on-going training programmes for students and that students in turn needed to show initiative and flexibility.

It is sometimes fair to assert that some students are not prepared for the level of theory associated with the culinary programme. There is an enormous amount of knowledge related

to food – familiarity with ingredients; their use, the cooking processes, nutrition, customer focus and safety related knowledge. Learner-led education can easily accommodate different learning styles. Effective educationalists use their understanding of individual differences by varying instructional delivery methods, in order to bring along as many learners as possible. Having the base of a good culinary education may form a platform for those delivering the on-the-job-training, giving them the opportunity for the reinforcement of transferrable skills, particularly if their expertise in the area of learning includes an understanding of their own learning style. In the international literature, culinary arts education in Ireland is positively correlated with high quality and performance of other autonomous providers of education in America and Britain (CIA, 2012; LSBU, 2012).

Most culinary colleges in the different jurisdictions offer similar programmes and are of the technocratic educational tradition. This means that their curriculums are less value driven than the progressive traditional approach and more subject matter driven. The technocratic tradition is one of the earliest curriculum models developed (Bobbitt, 1918, 1924; Armitage *et al.*, 1999). It has become the dominant model in most curriculum designs. Fundamental to this tradition is that clear objectives are to be reached through the specification of learning outcomes. In the development of culinary arts curriculum, the learning outcome approach dominates. Learning outcomes measure learners' abilities at the end of the course or during the period of instruction. Each learning outcome is stated behaviourally. This means that stated objectives (learning outcomes) are not open to interpretation, being value-neutral (Golby, 1989). Success in the curriculum will be measured in terms of the learners' status in relation to these behavioural measures. Evaluation consists of checking the learner's achievement aligned with the objectives prescribed for them throughout the course documentation (Armitage *et al.*, 1999) and these provide a transparent and meaningful testimony of the skills, knowledge and understanding that students will acquire upon successful completion of their course. For example, the Culinary Institute of America offer academic courses such as food safety, nutrition, culinary math, and introduction to gastronomy, product knowledge, college writing, and introduction to management (CIA, 2012). In the London South Bank University (2012) the area of resource management and the impact of science, innovation and technology are similar to what Irish colleges offer, perhaps introduced at different levels within the programme offerings.

With respect to the modules, primary data would suggest that not enough time is allocated to areas like *'culinary skills and standards'* (Lydon, 2005). Sixty per cent of head chefs and almost fifty per cent of supervisors believed that graduates are less competent than previous generations with *'larder operations'*. The duration and delivery of key learning programmes should be appropriate to the learner's needs and the interests of stakeholders. The statistics would suggest that training requires more long-term delivery than is allowed for in these modules. Interestingly, a characteristic trend in Irish domestic food provision in the last number of years is the increase in the use of convenience food products (Intel, 2006), the same could be said of the hospitality food provision. The growth of purveyors of fine ready prepared convenience food products is commonplace. The skills needed to work in these establishments could be learned in a few weeks with the minimum of difficulty. However, learning of this nature is of little or no educational value outside the individual's existing employment.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusion

The food production environment is becoming a more complex area to work in. The knowledge and competencies required at both an operational and managerial level have increased, placing huge demands on the individual. The goal of industry in relation to its workforce skills requirements is to match human resource requirements to financial resources. In a growing industry the most successful establishments are those that adapt to change and this can only be done with a highly skilled and flexible workforce. Traditional methods of training as a means of coping with change are a short-term solution. What individual employees need is the broader perspective that education provides. Education provides the scope to adapt to change, thus affording industry the opportunity to develop further and meet competitive challenges. This paper confirms that there is a need for culinary arts programmes that meets the educational needs of its participants. In a climate of change, learners can no longer expect a job for life. Change is inevitable in terms of both individual organisation structures (due to technological advances) and future strategies of individual organisations. Graduates of culinary arts programmes are expected to be able to communicate effectively, be able to plan their own work and be able to compromise.

3.2 Recommendations

All stakeholders have a responsibility to promote lifelong learning. Colleges have a distinct *'responsibility to actively engage with and support industry and constantly identify ways of improving skills and knowledge for students, industry and lecturers'* (IHI, 2012). Industry lobby organisations may have the best intentions to train and employ the next generation of chefs, but the quality of training provided by a top class hotel or 3-star Michelin restaurant will be miles away from that available in average establishments which may boast membership of these industry organisations. Moreover, the majority of establishments may not have requisite learning culture that encourages holistic improvement. An essential ingredient in a learning culture is the creation of an environment where people are encouraged to develop. Where learning is encouraged through creativity, openness, and trustworthiness, then the establishments will grow and flourish. If not, then people soon get the message that the learning culture is not about self-development mirroring corporate development. Therefore, college based culinary educational providers need to require new and innovative responses to counter demand for such interventions from the industry. There is much that the individual can do to learn and develop through a focus on self-development through knowledge of learning styles.

3.2.1 Colleges should build closer links with industry

The advantage of collaboration would be the building of common curriculum goals for the future. However, these goals must be equally student-centred as industry focused. It takes time to develop core-skills. A partnership approach to culinary arts curriculum development would concentrate on the learner needs (to be educated) and recognise the time constraints in delivering core skills particularly within the modular units of study.

3.2.2 Explore ways that make the industry more attractive to students

Hospitality establishments need to encourage students to stay in the industry by facilitating their career development, and by providing opportunities for lifelong learning progression. Access to training and promotional opportunities should be foremost as a motivational factor in attracting people to a career in culinary arts. This approach needs to be addressed by industry if it is going to attract a high calibre workforce.

3.2.3 Stakeholder collaboration on curriculum design

Colleges should further forge partnerships with all stakeholders so that everybody can share responsibility for developing a culinary arts curricula and systems of assessment that is both relevant to industrial needs and holistic for the student. Fáilte Ireland's role in this arrangement would be to ensure that all parties be informed of best practice in education underpinned by learning theories and curriculum design.

3.2.4 Suggestions for educational management

Course providers need to consider the role of education in the development of culinarians. The importance placed on training by industry must be matched with the emphasis on education by colleges. This will require continued investment by college management in staff development. This development should focus on a greater appreciation by culinary arts lecturers of the advantages of understanding learning theories and learning styles in order that students maximise their educational experience.

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