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Educating Gen Y: The New Golden Age of Action Research

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Abstract

Educating Generation Y in order to deal with change management in the new golden age of global business is more important than ever in terms of both tourism and management students alike. This extended abstract represents the preliminary results of the first action learning action research (ALAR) cycle and identifies the encouraging contribution to tourism and management students’ commitment, enhanced by the application of Action Research. Revan’s (1983) formula L = P + Q (Learning = Programmed [traditional] knowledge + Questioning) and his six phase (ALAR) methodology. One of the unambiguous objectives for the use of action learning in this undergraduate education setting was to enhance learning of both declarative and procedural knowledge by conceptualising a reflective methodological approach that facilitates inquiry, removes uncertainty, and enhances commitment which in turn increases learning for generation Y students.

Key words: Tourism Education, Action Research, Action Learning, Student Commitment, Generation Y, Higher Education

Generation Y tourism and management students appear to demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm and commitment toward their studies in the early part of their course, however this appears to decline rapidly as the pressures of life and work commitments encroach upon their studies. Many students have factors that detract from their ability to make commitment to their studies, with work and family being among the major distractions.

Literature Review

The development of improved pedagogical methods is a key principal that comes from the engagement and nurturing of student learning (Ramsden, 2007); this cannot be achieved without student commitment. Action learning / Action research (ALAR) aims to encourage thriving, sustainable and beneficial transformations, through insightful
teaching practice. Commitment is maintained in an environment of “co-generative learning among all participants” (Merskin, 2010, p.250). Commitment can also be enhanced by academics who strive for a “processes of establishing communication and common understanding” with their students (Van Manen, 1977, p.105). Action learning and reflection by academics is aimed at achieving student commitment through the “enhancement of participation” and “empowerment”, through curriculum development related to learning activities (Smith and Lovat, 2006, p. ix). Professor Revan’s action learning / action research (ALAR) six step methodology, and his formula of L = P + Q, support experiential learning to resolve problems through questioning, which in turn empowers commitment. (Revans, 1983).

Leader behaviour and participative decision making encourages commitment (Glisson and Durick, 1988). While, age and gender as well as scope and ambiguity impacted upon commitment levels (Randall, 1993). In a similar vein, (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990) found that women and the more mature were more committed, notwithstanding this; limited work has been identified in the area of student commitment. Student commitment has been defined as “a promise to do or give something; a promise to be loyal to something or someone; the attitude of someone who works very hard to do something” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2011).

In a qualitative study of 67 post-graduate students in the USA gender played a role in student commitment and their likely completion (Ellis, 2001). In another study student’s relationship with their adviser was significant in 87% of responses while student commitment was “very important” in 62% of responses and “somewhat important” in 31% of responses (Green & Bauer, 1995, p.537).

A French study of master’s student commitment levels acknowledged that ambiguity leads to classroom chaos, thus, detracting from participation, satisfaction, and student commitment. French students require firm leadership and course direction (Petersen, 2011). Petersen (2011) also identified that student commitment is reflected through “impacts upon their work, the professor, the rewards, the potential for graduation, and fellow students” (p.5). Student commitment research has been aligned to academic principles, enthusiasm and effort. Petersen (2011) also found “perceived organizational effectiveness and commitment” with students desiring feedback and participation in order to enhance commitment (p.7). There is paucity of research in the area of undergraduate commitment.

**Method**

This ALAR methodology has been structured around Revan’s (1983) six phase ARAL cycle. Phase one – identify the problem; phase two, gather data phase three, interpret data ; phase four, act on evidence; phase five, evaluate results – both quantitative and qualitative data; phase six, next step – plan second phase of the ALAR cycle.

**Results and Discussion**

In phase one, identify the problem - literature revealed a paucity of data relating to undergraduate commitment. Commitment was enhanced by: communication and
common understanding (Van Manen, 1977); perceptive and firm leader behaviour (Petersen, 2011); feedback (Petersen, 2011); participative decision making (Gilsson and Durick, 1988) and removal of ambiguity (Randall, 1993).

Phase two, *gather data* – tourism and management students’ were asked to complete an open ended survey instrument.

Phase three, *interpret data* – students identified both positive and negative contributors to study commitment (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1 Feedback from – Phase 2 – Planning - Identify the Problem – Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the things that would make it most difficult for you to make a commitment to this course?</th>
<th>What are the things that would make it easier for you to make a commitment in this course?</th>
<th>What do you expect from your lecturer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The amount and depth of reading required</td>
<td>1. Interesting lectures, less discussions in lectures, not asked questions in lectures</td>
<td>1. Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Too many assignments in this course and other</td>
<td>2. Get slides on time</td>
<td>2. Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Other Commitments / family / work</td>
<td>4. Commitment to assist with examples, discussions, answer questions, help where required</td>
<td>4. <strong>Explanations</strong> of what is required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Developed for this paper
Phase four and five, act on evidence and evaluate results–Four tools were introduced to enhance commitment as a result of findings (see Table 1). Student commitment was measured in weeks six and eleven. Interventions were as follows: 1) Weekly activity sheets – removed task ambiguity with 79 percent of students nominating they were some help or above, this remained consistent from week six to eleven (see Figure 1); 2) Discuss examples – increased common understanding through questioning dialogue and feedback in 90 percent of students in line with (Marzano, R.J., Norford, J.S., Paynter, D.E., Pickering, D.J., & Gaddy, B.B., 2001) (see Figure 1); 3) Explain marking criteria – enabled students to question requirements; increased participatory decision making by 90 percent in week six and 100 percent by week eleven (see Figure 1); 4) Interactive case study analysis – used questioning improved from 68 percent in week six, to 100 percent by week eleven; (See Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1** Tutorial interventions and their impact from week 6 to week 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 11</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Discuss Example Assign.</strong></td>
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<td>5%</td>
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<td><strong>Discuss Marking Criteria</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Interactive Case Analysis</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Interactive Case Analysis</strong></td>
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Source: Developed for this actions learning / action research project

Phase six, prepare for the next ALAR cycle.

**Conclusions and Recommendation**

This extended abstract presents preliminary findings of the first ALAR cycle developed to enhance commitment with generation Y tourism and management students. It highlights the incremental benefits of using Revan’s (1983) formula $L = P + Q$ and his six phase ALAR methodology in the New Golden Age of Action Research with Gen Y.
REFERENCES


