

Stories from the field: Taking Training across Cultures

A case study by Roslyn Cameron developed as part of the ALA-ANTA Innovation Grant 2004

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy was an innovative program that assisted people working as chefs in twenty nine Chinese and Indian restaurants in the Fortitude Valley - New Farm area of Brisbane obtain formally recognised qualifications. Funded under the Community Training Partnerships program and operated by the Multicultural Community Centre in partnership with the Hospitality & Tourism Association (HTA), the project developed from several areas of need.

The Multicultural Community Centre was established in 1989, in Brisbane's Chinatown, to meet the needs of Brisbane's culturally and linguistically diverse community in and around Fortitude Valley and New Farm. A volunteer association, the Multicultural Chinese Centre works with migrants, the disadvantaged, the poor and the elderly, as well as seeking to promote multiculturalism more widely.

The Inner City Hospitality Strategy was developed in response to the need to look at supportive mechanisms for arriving immigrants in terms of employment, training and recognition. There was a need to ensure that chefs from other countries were familiar with Australia's hospitality industry standards. The Multicultural Community Centre partnered with the HTA College to meet these needs.

The HTA College is a not for profit, private training organisation established in 1992 by the hospitality industry to provide training in a wide range of areas of Hospitality and Tourism. The HTA College provides nationally and internationally recognised training in all facets of Hospitality Management, Food and Beverage, Cookery and Front Office and Accommodation through the delivery of short course and Certificates right through to Diploma level qualifications. HTA specialise in Tourism & Hospitality training and are the largest employer of apprentices in Queensland. They conduct more apprenticeship training in commercial cookery than any other private or public provider in Queensland.

For the *Inner City Hospitality Strategy*, the Director of the Multicultural Chinese Centre identified the 29 restaurants for involvement in the project and worked within the community to alleviate the fear and scepticism that was apparent. As the CEO of the HTA notes:

It is a closed knit community, there was a lot of scepticism, a lot of fear from the participants and all that had to be overcome because we were coming into their establishments. Are we going to be critical and why are we doing this? So it had to be done to gain the actual support and trust of the owners and then moving down the line to the actual trainees.

The participants were new immigrants, mainly men aged in their forties, who were already very skilled and very experienced in professional cookery but had no qualifications.

The trainees were new immigrants undertaking a Certificate II in Kitchen Operations which took from 6 months to 15 months / 2 yrs to complete. The Trainer described the project as an RPL process for existing tradespeople. These trainees had been tradespeople in their own country for anywhere between 2 – 12 years.

In terms of issues specific to their needs the Trainer referred to the culture clash new immigrant's experience. Part of this is the Australian lifestyle and what he referred to as the '*abruptness in the European way of thinking*'. The Trainer saw this as contributing to feelings of being alienated from the mainstream and being fearful. The language barriers were also referred to and that for many new immigrants they are '*scared of losing their cultural identity and scared of changing into someone too European*'

The HTA developed a program, which started with undertaking a skills gap analysis. The gap analysis was conducted using a combination of observation and questioning. Every restaurant was visited and HTA staff spent time in the kitchens of all the twenty nine restaurants collecting evidence that included looking at the style of menu, the products being used and the level of skill involved in preparing the food. A series of skill matrices were compiled to establish what each establishment was doing and not doing. HTA conducted some formal off the job sessions and identified that English was not the first language for most of the chefs so an interpreter was appointed to facilitate communication. The Multicultural Chinese Centre provided HTA with interpreters in Mandarin, Cantonese and Indian and this was budgeted for in the project so that communication and trust between the trainer and chefs could occur.

There were, however, issues which emerged from the translation of training packages. Some expressions used in the description of standards, for example, did not have equivalent words in the languages used by the trainees. The trainer found, for example, that there was no word that corresponds to the English word for 'Braising'. However, after some practical demonstrations it was observed that the student did indeed 'braise' even if they did not describe it as such.

The Salad elective posed similar problems. Not a lot of Chinese cooking involves salads in the western sense. The focus for this unit, then, shifted from salads to garnishes, of which play an important role in Chinese cookery. As the trainer noted, there is a need for sensitivity in wording the competency standards so that they are meaningful in a number of cultural contexts.

Another challenge arose from the fact that, in many cases, literacy and numeracy levels were quite low. As the CEO of the HTA explains, strategies had to be developed so as to allow training and assessment to be undertaken around this obstacle:

'From our point of view it was very important for us to have the validity of our assessments, and I suppose a moderation between the restaurants to ensure there was a continuity with the standards. That was achieved by the on and off

the job assessments and oral and written exams. We did a number of oral examinations because of the low literacy and numeracy skills.'

Being able to observe the chefs at work at their busiest times which, of course, was the time when the restaurant least wanted intruders in their kitchens, presented yet another hurdle. The CEO explains:

'The first thing a lot of the restaurants say is we don't want you here in our busy times because you will be in the way, if I'm observing I've got to be there in the busy times because that is when the action is. It's no good being there at 9.00am in the morning because all I am seeing is everyone getting their coffee, that's not showing me what they do. I need to be there when the action is on and I want to be there when they've had 200 people come through the door and everything is fine in the kitchen because I can see what they do, that's the time to assess the hygiene, not at 9.00am when everything is pristine, otherwise we are kidding ourselves.'

'There were the teething problems and we had to get quite forceful sometimes ...but we also respected that we had to gain some trust first. It changed once that trust was developed... what made the difference, as the trust formed, when they realised we were there to be supportive and not critical and that they could see the benefits of what we were doing.'

Another challenge to the program was the fact that the chefs usually worked six and a half days per week and only get half a day off a week:

'It's not like our culture where you do 38 hours a week. We were saying you've got to come to college, but they were saying I only get half a day off. We had to go back to the drawing board and again we came up with the matrix. Out of the 29 restaurants maybe 16 of them have got to do these components..

There's a little module which is a 3-4 hour module on telephone techniques, everybody could do that. But there was one component, screening for bomb scares, which the average person isn't going to know about that so we said, that will take us about 1 ½ hours and we'll run it on Monday morning, Monday afternoon, Tuesday morning, Tuesday afternoon, Wednesday morning and Wednesday afternoon so there's no excuse for not being able to get here. You only had to turn up to one of those sessions but we multiplied it so that different restaurants, if you were busy on the Monday you could come on the Tuesday or so on . We had to be flexible and we almost had to write daily and weekly timetables to accompany that..'

The off-the-job training environment proved difficult for some participants. Again the CEO of the HTA explains:

To leave their work environment to come to a foreign environment was very strange for them, so it was just putting those support mechanisms around.... A lot of that we actually delivered down in the hall, the church hall. We turned that into a classroom at the Multicultural Chinese Centre rather than cause

discomfort... they were comfortable with the Multicultural Community Centre, rather than a formal training environment.'

The teaching and instructional methods used by the trainer were tailored to suit and meet the needs of the trainees. The training was characterised by small groups of 3-5 people. The HTA Trainer used storytelling, comparisons and side stories as a means of gaining the trainee's confidence rather than lecture to them.

He would explain concepts using illustrations from the trainee's own experiences. Moreover, in delivering the theoretical elements, he employed a lot of 'to and fro between workplace and training rooms'. There were a lot of visual observations, descriptions, questioning techniques, prompting and workplace observation.

The trainer also noted the importance of his own cultural heritage had assisting in gaining the trust of the chefs.

'It is very important to network and maintain links within the community that is why HTA has maintained links with the Multicultural Community Centre. We realised the partnership and my heritage helped this process.'

When asked about the trainees awareness of RPL the Trainer responded with:

'Most don't know about it. Those that do don't understand the process but once you sit down and explain it they see benefits, its like the 'Big unknown''

'You have to ease them into it. 80% were keen to go to certificate III on RPL once the shortfalls were identified. They were keen to take lessons to gain full goal. It acted as a pathway. You need an intermediary to assist them, for help and guidance' (Trainer, HTA).

While the HTA allowed a very open and flexible approach to their training provision in this project they were determined not to 'lower the bar' in terms of meeting national curriculum standards. As the CEO explained:

'We won't lower the bar but we will give you every opportunity to jump over it, we'll put the steps there for you to jump over it without lowering the standards. So when we talk about the constraints that's how we get around things and its just a different way of thinking, and that's all it takes rather than become stereotyped, we say now we can do this if we think about it.'

But the benefits of the course extended further that helping the participants gain formal qualifications. The program helped the chefs approach their work with a sense of pride. The trainer actively supported this aspect of the program. He saw himself as a role model and so, when he visited the kitchens of the trainees he did so in his full chefs uniform. This gave the trainees insight into how they could dress and be proud of their profession. He was sending a message to the trainees that:

'This is the way we should look. This is the respect we should have for ourselves and from others....stepping forward from a lonely dirty labourer in a kitchen into a Chefs uniform.'

On graduation day 99% of the participants had purchased a uniform themselves, many with their names embossed on them.