

An Eye for Eye – Nothing but the Truth

Has the Southern African Society for Co-operative Education claimed its rightful place in the education and skills society? Is the presence of SASCE felt in and by the society? Why is SASCE not receiving the attention and the support it deserves? What is the difference between SASCE and peer glamorous associations? Something is not right!

Did the coop movement ever want to answer these questions or have they become so rhetoric that they deliberately ignore to respond or adequately respond. In an eye for an eye, as an integral part of the association, I challenge the status quo and the conspicuous absence of criticism thereof or you may call it disquiet in co-operative education arena. By observation year in and year out through SASCE constitution members meet in what is as a Forum where business is executed as usual and critic is avoided. Over the years, the Forum meetings have become a platform to vent anger and dissatisfaction about the lack of progress by co-operative education or individual uncertainty about the future of coop as a philosophy and viable method of teaching and learning. Sadly, as if SASCE is alcohol anonymous kind of a body – in some of the meetings there is engagement of reassurance manifested via a sentimental speech by the usually invited Vice Chancellor – to make coop practitioners to understand the situation. Amazingly, most practitioners are persona non-grata in their own institutions. An eye for an eye seeks to strip naked the dysfunctional state of the role of the Southern African Society for Co-operative Education.

Strangely, the Council for Higher Education (CHE) would fund interest groups to carry out work integrated learning projects and similarly give support to the Joint Education Trust (JET) to do workshop ‘events’ and to produce service learning glossy publication – purely by power of adequate business planning and enabling set up. As SASCE, we have a long history of existence but we are yet to send the right message and sing the right tune to the authorities. Something is wrong and I am flabbergasted by the continued ignorance of this illness – an eye for an eye. Guilty as charged! The day light robbery is perpetuated by the system which promotes Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA) by resourcing – the classical example is found in the Transport SETA investing whereas SASCE as an organization and for example was supposed to be supported for improving the tried and tested model of on the job training. Has the body such as SASCE done anything to lay claim to levy monies paid by the companies? On the other hand, is it the same old story that SETAS provide a few bursaries to students and issue out discretionary grants to a few in-service training students? Not fair!

In addition, the lack of funding for co-operative education as a teaching component by the department of education is continually a subject of debate. Task team after task team has found inadequacies, differentials and disorganization in the system. As a result funding proposal for in-service training shall remain in limbo. Have we as SASCE responded to this disjuncture? SASCE has a major task to challenge some of these issues, it is amazing how in institutions coop is regarded as add on, lack of morale and material support is the order of the day. Are we as practitioners relegated to fire extinguishing role, placing students, driving up and down in the name of monitoring and assessment,

producing flashy placement statistics and watch from the side as our products ascend the stage to graduate – and who gets the credit? We are victims of our own ineptness when it comes to stating our case, submitting compelling case of our relevance, providing empirical evidence of our achievements as well as the contribution in the development of the global workforce. In most cases we are a victim of smash and grab from the employers who would elect to be active members of organizations such as the South African Graduate Recruitment Association (SAGRA), once again SASCE is its own victim by lack of infrastructure to avoid such acts of criminology. Higher Education South Africa our own Community of Practice partner is doing good work with SAGRA in what is called Weekly Higher Education News – what has SASCE and HESA done so far within the neatly tabulated agreement with SASCE – a once-of collection of student data for JIPSA purposes?

An eye for eye! What about personality clashes and egos? By self-introspection have SASCE as a body interrogated itself. Why have we suffered exodus of members? How strong is the veterans system? Have we given enough thought on the retention of the experienced SASCE members who would serve as advisors and patrons of the movement? In my opinion, the culture in SASCE is flawed by the ‘old boys’ club system. If you look at the past few years SASCE allowed only a few of the members to become a clique, alternatively the Exco of SASCE seems to become the only active group. It is futile to have Exco being both governance and operational structure – who plays the oversight role if the executive committee determines the agenda and play the operational role at the same time? – player and referee scenario! Many students have come out of the system of co-operative education and yet the government and industry alike is not convinced that coop is a career of choice, why?

In an eye for an eye, I believe SASCE has an opportunity to demystify these issues by the implementation of the new Business Plan that could be the answer to raising the voice of coop in the African continent. A two-man task team comprising of the writer and Mr. Brian Forbes was setup by the SASCE Forum to articulate the turn around strategy for the association.

The Author is the SASCE Secretary and Director of Co-operative Education at the Vaal University of Technology. He wrote in his personal capacity and the opinion expressed is a personal viewpoint and shooting from the hip. He wishes that with this article SASCE would continue to debate and dissect some of these issues with vigor.

Readers are invited to forward factual responses to alpheusm@vut.ac.za

Eye for an eye