

## DEVELOPING ACTION RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM: UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' ADOPTION OF ASSESSMENT

Sacha Reid  
School of Leisure, Sport and Tourism  
University of Technology Sydney  
PO Box 222  
Lindfield NSW 2070  
[Sacha.Reid@uts.edu.au](mailto:Sacha.Reid@uts.edu.au)

### ABSTRACT

The proliferation of event management subjects/courses offered at tertiary level in Australia and overseas has grown dramatically over the last 10 years. Of the 27 universities offering tourism and hospitality education within Australia approximately 93% of these (25) are offering at least one subject focusing on event management. Additionally, 37% (10) of universities are offering specific programs majoring in event management. However, the theoretical nature of university education is often perceived by the industry as lacking a practical edge and focus. There is a need to address this imbalance, particularly as universities are aiming to provide 'job ready graduates'.

This paper reports on the implementation of assessment which focuses on experiential and deep learning outcomes over a six month period in 2004. The research was designed using an action research approach consisting of three phases. This paper discusses the results of the first two phases of this approach. Findings indicate that assessment which is designed to incorporate theory combined with industry experiences was perceived by students as adding value to their learning experience. The use of experiential design in assessment also contributed to enhancing the networks between the university as a tertiary institute, the events industry and students. Therefore, designing assessment which contains experiential learning objectives has the potential of enhancing students learning, maintaining industry links and developing future professional event practitioners.

**Key Words:** action research, assessment practices, experiential learning, event management

### INTRODUCTION

Event management has emerged to become a key sector of the tourism and leisure industries worldwide. As the number of events increase and the field of event management matures, there is a growing realisation about the continuing need to develop event management professionals who are able to create, organise and manage events (Arcodia & Reid, 2002). However, there is concern among many educational disciplines that higher education is providing theoretically astute professionals that are unsuitable to the practical nature of many industries (Schön, 1995). Therefore, there is a need to design curricula that reflects the diverse requirements of the event industry while not compromising the theoretical foundations and knowledge creation that is the purpose of universities. Employing high-quality individuals who are both trained and qualified in the field may satisfy several objectives. This will help to ensure professionalism in the field; equip managers with the necessary skills to deal with: the specific challenges of the industry (McCabe, 2001); new challenges as they arise (Neale, 2000); and will ultimately help to sustain the delivery of high quality events (Harris & Jago, 1999). This paper reports on an action learning project designed to implement assessment that reflects the need to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As the event management industry has a practical orientation it requires entrants who have studied its theories at a higher educational institute as well as being able to apply their knowledge in real life situations. It is important to provide graduates that are skilled in not only the theoretical foundations of a subject but that can also understand why something occurs and then manipulate this for a real life situation or project. Course curriculum that is a combination of both theory and application can assist students in developing these skills. Additionally, it will facilitate deeper learning outcomes due to students having the opportunity to learn through doing the activities or projects and then being able to reflect on how this interrelates with the theories and their understandings of this knowledge (Biggs, 1999). The educational philosophies of Dewey (1938) support this approach by stating the importance of experience in learning, which provides an interesting and interactive way of bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Students are diverse and as such they all arrive at university with different perspectives and experiences. Based on the social constructivist philosophies students are encouraged to learn from one another as a social process. This enables students to build upon their own experiences and knowledge with that of their fellow peers, and to reflect on their learning experience (Vygotsky, 1978). According to this approach, meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities (Kim, 2001). The use of real life experience ensures further depth of learning outcomes amongst those that participate.

The 'learning through observation/experience' or experiential learning offers the potential for students to achieve deep learning. Deep learning outcomes have the potential of enabling a better understanding of course concepts and how they interrelate, and are consequently difficult to forget (Ramsden, 1988; Biggs, 1999). As noted by Hutchings (1988:65) "we learn more, and more deeply, when learning touches on things that we know about, care about and have experienced to some degree. The capacity for reflection is what transforms experience into learning".

Experiential learning facilitates interpersonal characteristics that assist students with group work and allows for presentation skills to be developed through the presentation of ideas and concepts to the group in a non-threatening environment. This provides the students with confidence in their abilities and their knowledge, with the added benefit of making them a marketable resource for future employers. This again aligns with a social constructivist educational teaching philosophy and builds on students' knowledge by being involved in the process (Vygotsky, 1978). The learner is anticipated to have an educational experience in which they have an understanding of why and how the new knowledge is related to what they already know and are capable of using this new knowledge not only in the classroom in which they learnt it, but in other contexts to which they take this such as the work environment (Lederman, 1992). Therefore, learning through action has deep learning outcomes that benefit students' depth and application of knowledge that will assist employers. It will assist employers, as they will be provided with employees that are not only theoretically knowledgeable but also skilled in the application of this theory to real life situations.

In the context of event management education there has been limited research into the application of experiential learning (McDonald & McDonald, 2000; Burley, 2005; Daruwalla & Fallon, 2005; Williamson, 2005). McDonald and McDonald (2000) examine the introduction of an experiential educational technique for a higher education event management class in the United States. They argue, "experiential education explores previous experiences of students and builds upon that background through questioning" (2000:5). This enables the learner to be involved in a learning activity and to examine his/her actions through formative and summative reflective

activities. The authors propose that students will enhance their life long learning skills by being involved in a course that is based on the principles of learning through action. A similar approach was discussed by Daruwalla and Fallon (2005) in designing a Convention Management course within an Australian context. However, within this study the use of students to plan, organise and implement an event deviated from the objectives of specific learning relating to convention management. Burley (2005) and Williamson (2005) examine experiential learning within the construct of practical work placements/internships. They acknowledge the benefits that are derived from students having to engage with industry in a work environment and the learning gained from critical reflection of these experiences. Therefore, there is impetus to develop curriculum that supports the foundations of social constructivist philosophies and experiential learning techniques.

A key theme of the experiential learning literature is the need to incorporate reflection within the curriculum design and the assessment tasks (McDonald & McDonald, 2000; Pearce & Sutton-Brady, 2003). Reflection, or 'debriefing' and 'evaluation', prompts the learner to be aware of their own prior experience and understandings and how this new knowledge impacts upon, alters or progresses this knowledge. Reflection should not be treated as a supplementary benefit of curriculum design, but should be integral in developing learning outcomes. This is achieved by effective evaluation or reflection facilitated by the lecturer/tutor to enable students to discover what they have learnt and how this has developed them as a learner. A feature of this method is that students have fun in discovering their own abilities and knowledge, and if they are having fun they are more likely to gain significant educational outcomes from the process.

## METHODOLOGY

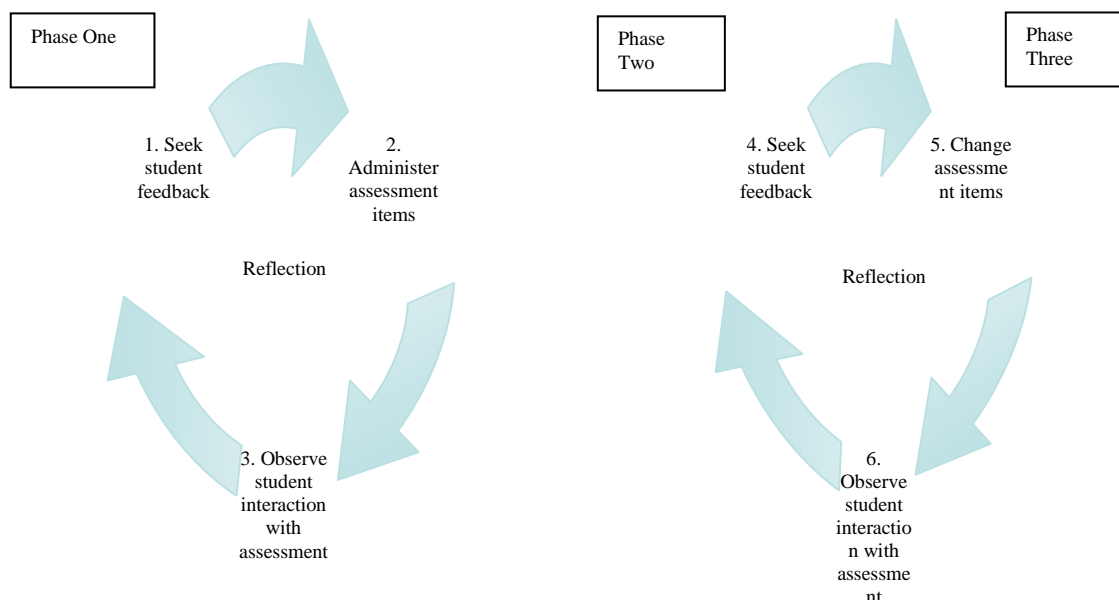
*Event Management* is currently taught at both an undergraduate and a postgraduate level at the University of Western Sydney. This is offered as a single subject within a wider tourism degree based within a business paradigm at the University. A review of the structure of the subject was undertaken to ensure that it aligned with university values as well as having effective assessment that aligned with the subjects' goals and objectives. The existing assessment consisted of tutorial participation, creating an event report and a formal exam. This revealed that the assessment that was being administered within this subject was too basic, and did not allow for experiential and deep learning outcomes amongst students. As such an action research project was developed to redress the imbalance between assessment, subject objectives and university values.

Action research has been defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:5) as "a form of collective, self-reflective inquiry that participants in social situations undertake to improve: (1) the rationality and justice of their own social and educational practices; (2) the participant's understanding of these practices and the situations in which they carry out these practices. The approach is action research only when it is collaborative and achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members." However, as Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerrit (2002) acknowledge it can be difficult for teachers to implement action research projects as it is difficult to achieve 'participation' and 'collaboration' at the beginning of the process amongst students who have never previously encountered this approach. These authors go on to note that although difficult it is a beneficial process of engaging students, particularly as action research is aimed at facilitating social change. Therefore, students become engaged in facilitating changes to assessment practices through the action research process.

Action research uses an iterative process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kolb, 1984; Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998; Dick, 1999; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). This is derived from the works of Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951) and Kolb (1984). This action research approach was

chosen based upon the benefits derived from this process for problem solving as well as implementing, monitoring and reflecting upon the changes to curricula (Burns, 1997; Wadsworth, 1997; Jennings, 2001). The research design is depicted diagrammatically in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Research Design



During Phase One student's feedback, ideas and beliefs about effective learning styles, strategies and assessment items were sought. This enabled the students to participate in providing individual reflections on assessment which they considered would assist their learning and understanding of the events industry. The administration of the assessment items was then conducted. Observation of their interaction with the assessment was undertaken and feedback from students was sought within Phase Two. The results of the student feedback were disseminated to the students for them to reflect and engage in debate about altering the assessment or constructing new assessment items to facilitate the objectives of the study. Phase Three incorporated the student feedback within the design of or alteration of the assessment items. However, this paper reports on Phases One and Two as the third phase is ongoing. Throughout the phases identified above a continual critical reflective process was engaged by students and the lecturer. This research approach ensured that throughout the process there was continual evaluation and reflection of the effectiveness of the assessment items in achieving goals of experiential and deeper learning within a social constructivist perspective.

The use of this dynamic action research approach ensured that as the result of the problem being identified research into the problem could be used to frame an appropriate solution. This incorporated students' discussion, observation and reflection of the implemented assessment items. The reiterative process of the action research approach allows for the continual modification to plan for future changes (Dick, 1999). This approach aligns with implementing new assessment into a subject to ensure experiential and deeper learning outcomes amongst students, as is evidenced in this paper.

The assessment items included: an individual critical reflection of either attendance or volunteering at an event, a group project designing an event within a declining rural community of

Australia, and a final exam. This paper reports on the findings from the questionnaire administered to students prior to and post completion of assessment tasks for the subject, aligning with Phase One and Two of the research design.

A self completed questionnaire, incorporating both closed and open ended questions, was administered to students of the subject utilising a 2 phase data collection process. The first set of data (Phase One) was collected in week 6 (31<sup>st</sup> August 2004) during tutorial times. This phase was seeking students' views in terms of the assessment of the subject and its appropriateness to facilitating experiential learning. The questionnaires were completed prior to the submission of assessment items. A total of 76 questionnaires were completed. The results from this phase of the data collection process were then used in conjunction with critical reflection to assist in refining the assessment items for the subject. Students were also engaged in discussion throughout the tutorials of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to achieving deep learning through the introduction of assessment framed by experiential learning. The second phase (Phase Two) of the data collection process was conducted in week 14 (26<sup>th</sup> October 2004 - last teaching week) during tutorial times. This was administered after all assessment had been submitted. A total of 67 respondents were captured within this data collection round.

The questionnaires in each of the phases were analysed using two data analysis techniques. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilised for analysis of quantitative data. The qualitative data was analysed using an iterative thematic analysis process. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) acknowledged the analysis of qualitative data requires the systematic grouping and summarising of descriptions and providing an organising framework that encapsulates and explains the respondents' perceptions of the phenomena. Students' responses were coded (labelled) in terms of as many themes or associated characteristics (sub-themes). This process, of coding or labelling, was used to assign "units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information" contained within these responses (Miles and Huberman, 1994:56). After this initial coding had occurred, the researcher reconsidered the labels to identify salient trends or patterns. This process of axial coding, referred to by Neuman (2003), is aimed at identifying relationships within or amongst coded data. This code consolidation process led to the development of a theme schema which drew together respondents' perceptions and their inter-relationships.

## FINDINGS

### *Phase One Data Collection Process*

The respondents were required to indicate the appropriateness of the assessment for the subject. The majority of respondents (96%) indicated that they found the assessment appropriate for the subject. Responses were focused around the following areas of practicality, reason for attending an event, interesting, freedom, broader perspective, challenging and future employment choices (evidenced in Table 1). This indicates that while the majority of respondents feel that the assessment for this unit is appropriate, there are a number of reasons for this. The most frequently mentioned theme was the practical nature of the assessment. Respondents indicated that they liked the fact that the learnt theories were required to be implemented or were evidenced in the assessment design.

**Table 1**  
**Qualitative Responses to Appropriateness of Assessment**

Theme	Respondents' Quotes
Practical	"we have to apply the learnt theories – learning by doing." [R31] "it involves taking a hands on approach to organizing an event which

	helps us to obtain first hand knowledge about implications of the subject as opposed to learning straight from the textbook, which does not give as much insight to reality” [R15]
Reason to attend an event	“I like having a reason to go to an event as it is part of the assignment, it allows me to notice and become aware of things I didn’t before.” [R3] “observation assessment enabled you to go into a real event and attain first hand experience and information.” [R41]
Interesting	“they seem interesting, allow for creativity” [R49] “the group assignment allows us to be creative” [R14]
Freedom	“it real covers a lot that we are doing, and it also gives us a lot of freedom in how we put it together.” [R40]
Broader Perspective	“it provides knowledge of the industry and gives a broader perspective.” [R36]
Challenging	“challenges you to think in-depth of the different aspects of event management” [R25]
Prospective employment opportunities	“Assessment 2 could be used for employment later.” [R37] “it is relevant to the work and my future career choice” [R65]

A majority of respondents (83%) indicated the assessment provided a ‘very high’ (6.6%) to ‘high’ (76.3%) insight and/or experience of the events industry. This is aligned with the purpose of this research, in identifying and providing ‘experience through doing’ assessment framework as outlined previously. Additionally, all the respondents (100%) indicated that university assessment should provide them with this insight and/or experience in the events industry. As one respondent indicated “theoretical knowledge these days is not enough; managers (employers) look for practical knowledge too” [R69].

Students’ perceptions as to modifications or changes needed to the assessment were also sought in the first phase of data collection. This allowed for reiterations of the action research process to be conducted and ensured that modifications to the assessment could be incorporated in the future. Students commented on a number of aspects of the assessment that they would like modified. First, there was concern with the weighting of the assessment items that needs to be revisited in the future. Limitations based on University Senate approved documentation detailed that change to assessment or weighting needs approval through the Academic Board, which was unachievable in the limited time span for this research project. Additionally, limitations also exist for changing assessment items once a unit outline has been published and distributed to students. As a result, weighting of assessment can be changed anytime providing it is prior to the students receiving the unit outline. However, this process could be overcome for future cohorts with effective planning.

Second, some respondents indicated that a final assessment piece was not useful. It was necessary to have a final individual assessment piece, such as the final exam, even though some respondents indicated that this was not useful. The university has policies governing the weighting of individual assessment in conjunction with group assessment which needs to be approximately 40(group):60(individual). Students have only one other individual assignment to depict their own knowledge and grasp of the subject, therefore it was deemed necessary to have a final individual assessment piece.

Third, some of the respondents indicated that the group assignment was too large. However, as this assignment constituted 5000 words completed in groups of three, this equates to less than 2000 words per individual group member, and therefore it would be difficult to argue this case. These respondents might not have liked the level of depth and thought that goes into this assignment; this may be the result of them never having to do an assessment piece like this in the past. Student feedback based on previous year's students (2003) indicates that while many disliked doing the assignment they now look back on it with a differing viewpoint. While many respondents indicated that they did not like to have group assignments the assessment provided a valuable lesson in people management, working with others and sharing responsibility that is integral in an event management work environment.

Fourth, there was some consternation also in terms of the students being limited to rural areas for their second assignment. Logistical and equity reasons have ensured that this is the case as it is difficult to grade assignments when you are comparing 'apples with oranges'. Additionally some respondents indicated that they would have liked this assignment to go to the next level by having them stage an event at the university or other location. This is a good idea and will be investigated further based on resource and logistical issues for the future.

Fifth, respondents indicated that they would like to see a class excursion added to the unit, so as a group they could experience an event and have talks from event organizers in a real world setting. The time sensitive nature of events may make this difficult, however potential exists for this to be incorporated in the future. Additionally, this would assist those students that had difficulty in finding an event for assessment item 1 as they could all do this one event in their critical reflection assignment. However, this stifles some of the creativity and flexibility of this assessment item and also aids students in not learning how to think and solve their own problems of researching and locating an event.

The final issue that a few respondents noted would be advantageous was the addition of work experience. However, resource issues of having one academic for the 100 students that are undertaking this unit could result. The students are encouraged to immerse themselves within the events industry in whatever capacity, being paid or volunteer work, however it will never be an enforced component of the unit due to the abovementioned factors.

#### *Phase Two Data Collection Process*

The second phase of the data collection process was conducted in week 14 of the second semester (last teaching week) during tutorial times. This was administered after all assessment had been submitted. A total of 67 respondents were captured within this data collection round. The first question respondents answered required students to retrospectively assess the appropriateness of the assessment. A total of 98.5% (66) of respondents indicated that the assessment for the subject was appropriate. However the major differences between Phase One and Two has been the qualitative responses to this question, as depicted in Table 2.

After having completed the assessment the respondents had a greater awareness as to the appropriateness of the assessment from a learning perspective. This is evident in responses to this question referring to the encouragement of thinking and understanding, depth of content covered, the link between theory and practice, as well as feedback evident in students' responses. Therefore, students reflected upon the assessment based on their learning experience and outcomes of the appropriateness of the assessment in more depth post assessment rather than pre assessment.

**Table 2**  
**Qualitative responses to Appropriateness of Assessment (Phase 2)**

Theme	Respondents' Quotes
Link between theory and practicality	<p>"Because it emphasizes the information learnt about in class and allows students to see their practical application in the real world." [R33]</p> <p>"It helped out with the whole 'experience' of you yourself learning how to run an event and trying to cope with pressure and learning how to handle different aspects of producing an event. It's the whole EVENT MANAGER process at good work." [R16]</p>
Covered all content	<p>"because it required us to cover all aspects associated with events planning and execution." [R31]</p> <p>"There are a variety of areas covered in the assessments where we have to demonstrate skills and knowledge learnt." [R4]</p>
Real life situations	<p>"brings out issues that can be faced in real life situations. It helps you think and deal with the situations allowing you to know how to deal with them later on." [R27]</p> <p>"because it enabled me to experience what it was really like in the real world by the extensive research required it gave me more knowledge about the events industry." [R1]</p>
Encourages thinking	<p>"As it actively involves students to think within an event management context." [R35]</p> <p>"Valuable in way that made you think beyond what you basically need to know – had to think about what's beyond the 'face value' of events management." [R10]</p> <p>"it gives us chances to have critical thinking about this subject." [R3]</p>
Encourages understanding	<p>"It made the student understand more about how to organize events and more knowledge about a variety of events around the world." [R15]</p> <p>"the ideas and focus encapsulated within the assessments allow the students to realize just how much work there is when organizing an event." [R64]</p>
Fun/Interesting	<p>"It was fun actually going out to an event to experience what it was like rather than just reading and researching in books." [R40]</p> <p>"were relevant to the subject and interesting to complete." [R23]</p>

Additionally, another significant difference between results in Phase One and Two surveys was the depth of answers. While students initially explained that the assessment was appropriate because it was fun, interesting, a reason for attending an event, practical, could lead to employment opportunities and was challenging, post assessment completion detailed a greater level of learning, experience and understanding. This aligns with the deep learning outcomes proposed at the beginning of the action learning project. If the assessment was presented in a way that was interesting and fun for students their learning outcomes may penetrate deeper than traditional methods of teaching and learning assessments.

Approximately 88% (59) of respondents believed that they had learnt something from this first assessment piece. However, when respondents were asked what they learnt it was very diverse. This is evidenced in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Qualitative responses to Learning from First Assignment (Phase 2)**

Theme	Respondents' Quotes
-------	---------------------

Reading/theories	<p>“basic concepts from each of the relevant text chapters that were related – its an incentive to actually do the readings as well as know of theory applied to the event on the actual day” [R39]</p> <p>“I learnt how some of the theories in the textbook apply in the real world of events” [R30]</p>
Level of coordination and planning/hard work	<p>“There is more to events than purely what you initially see. I didn’t realize half of the things covered were involved in event management” [R49]</p> <p>“value of planning and how planning should start well in advance for the event to run successfully” [R48]</p>
Organising	<p>“I had learnt how hard it is to organize an event, there are so many things that I need to think about in order to organize an event” [R13]</p> <p>“I came to understand how events are organized and run successfully” [R17]</p>
Logistics/Sponsorship	<p>“logistics of an event are very complex and essential to an events success” [R7]</p> <p>“sponsorship of events and how different level sponsors should be treated” [R19]</p>
Training of staff	<p>“that all employees or volunteers are well trained and know the procedures” [R34]</p>
External factors	<p>“that there are many external factors to be considered when planning an event” [R31]</p> <p>“I learned that social, cultural, economical, environmental and political facets of events impact its success.” [R7]</p>
Time management	<p>“I learnt more about time management” [R15]</p>
Critical thinking	<p>“I learnt more about critical thinking about what has to be done by looking into small sections” [R15]</p> <p>“because I’m already in the industry I knew a lot, however it did teach me to be more critical” [R56]</p>

Responses indicate that students learnt valuable industry tools such as time management, critical thinking, coordination and depth of planning required, while also learning academic tools such as linking theory to practice in an applicable manner. Therefore the experience of assignment one met the objectives of the action learning project by developing experiential learning of both industry and academic requirements.

Improvements required to enhance the learning experience from the first and second assignment were also sought (evidenced in Table 4). The responses indicated that there was disunity amongst respondents’ perspectives about potential improvements. This could indicate that while some students want more time, less thinking and direction others prefer less time, greater word limits and comparison between events. Unfortunately consensus will not be achieved as students expect and want different things from their learning experience. This also supports findings from other research as to the diversity of learning styles of students (Biggs, 1999; Guild & Granger, 2001).

**Table 4**  
**Improvements recommended for First and Second Assignments (Phase 2)**

First Assignment		Second Assignment	
Theme	Respondents’ Quotes	Theme	Respondents’ Quotes

<i>Locational Issues</i>			
Excursion	<p>“maybe we could all do the same event as an excursion and follow with an observation. We could view them all later to see the differing opinions and ideas” [R32]</p> <p>“perhaps an excursion to an event where all students are exposed to the same elements. A fairer assessment of students’ knowledge and observations of the day could then be compared” [R11]</p>	Visit or communicate with town	<p>“visit the small rural town for a thorough experience” [R2]</p> <p>“would have been nice to actually attend the town that was chosen for the festival as a better understanding of the community would have been gained” [R27]</p>
Define suitable events	“selecting an appropriate event proved challenging, perhaps providing students with a list of potential events and contact details could minimize this confusion” [R52]	Give towns	“maybe give suggestions of what rural town to use” [R4]
Comparison study	“possibly attend two events and compare or something along those lines” [R29]	Not have rural towns	<p>“the whole rural community with a declining population concept restricted just how much we could do or how far we could take the event. Although it is an important issue for event managers it did make completing the assignment a bit harder” [R30]</p> <p>“not limit it to the rural communities, but I guess that was part of the learning experience” [R39]</p>
Recency of event	“I understand that its important events be recent but maybe they can be any event a student has attended that year. I used to work at a fashion company and I would help plan functions and events and I felt that if I was able to use one of those events that took place in Autumn semester I would have provided a more concise report” [R7]	Consider international student knowledge	“consider more about international students when designing the assignment, make the assignment more global” [R8]
<i>Assignment Logistical Issues</i>			
Time (-ve and +ve)	<p>“need more time to complete the first assignment, even though it doesn’t take that long to actually do the task, there were some other events that run after the due date that I would have really liked to attend” [R6]</p> <p>“maybe have it due much earlier than what it was, say week 5” [R46]</p>	Spread due date across semester	<p>“perhaps set meetings/times for different sections to be due. By making segments due each tutorial this would minimize some members doing more work than others” [R49]</p> <p>“review everyone’s proposal half way through to monitor our progress and direction” [R63]</p>
Extend Word limit	“the word limit should be extended as there was a lot to write about the event” [R4]	Make assignment >/+ weighting	<p>“possibly make the length of the assignment longer and give it more weighting in terms of percentages, possibly 40-50%, due to the extensive work required” [R35]</p> <p>“make the weighting more, it seemed a lot of work for only 30%” [R46]</p>
<i>Group Work Issues</i>			
Group Component	“maybe include a group component whereby students can prepare a report which highlights comparisons between each of the events they attended. This will raise common issues as well as emphasize differences which impacted on the success of a particular event.” [R31]	Peer assessment forms	<p>“have peer assessment forms for all group members”[R9]</p> <p>“a peer evaluation form in order to entice group participation and to eliminate laziness” [R52]</p>

		More members per group	<p>“maybe make the groups a little larger in order to be able to develop the concept more and ensure all areas are considered and managed” [R34]</p> <p>“have at least 5-4 students in a group, and make sure the group is working as a group” [R44]</p>
		Not group work	<p>“I think future students would benefit more by completing it by themselves as it would be more hands on and they won’t have the chance to pass parts of the assignment on to others and hence learn more for themselves. Also it was hard to come together and do the work and in the end stressful” [R41]</p> <p>“the enormity of the assignment made it difficult for some members to coordinate and complete work, therefore perhaps make the assignment an individual task” [R50]</p>
<i>Issues for the Future</i>			
Abolish it	<p>“not to do it at all” [R54]</p> <p>“perhaps scrap first assignment and do end assignment in 2 parts” [R55]</p>	Staging the event	<p>“actually staging the event...it does make a difference putting a report into reality” [R31]</p> <p>“setting up and organizing a real event for uni! It would make the subject more fun and interactive...as well as letting other students at uni become more involved” [R40]</p>
		Present the proposal	<p>“maybe get the groups to present the proposal” [R36]</p> <p>“make this second assignment a presentation” [R37]</p>

The issues that respondents identified as areas for improvement for both assessment tasks included: having flexibility in the location of the event, assessment logistical issues, group work related issues and recommendations for future inclusions. While it is encouraged that students thoroughly research the rural town that they have decided will benefit from hosting their event, it is beyond the realms and objectives of this unit to take them on an excursion to this location. This is due to groups of students all having diverse locations throughout Australia. Additionally, while individual groups may wish to visit their town of choice the cost implications of this may be beyond the means of some students. A number of respondents indicated that a list of rural communities could be distributed to assist in choosing a community to stage the event within. However, giving students lists of towns may not be beneficial to the students learning as they will not engage in the research process of finding a suitable town that fits the description of a ‘declining small rural town’. A cynical view of this response would be that some students are challenged as a result of the research process of elimination and would prefer to have been guided or directed through this process. Although as one respondent indicated international students may be disadvantaged by the use of an Australian rural community context [R8].

Assessment logistical issues were discussed by a number of respondents relating to the submission dates and weighting of the assessment. A number of respondents suggested that the second assignment task be compartmentalised, so that different sections were due throughout the semester. This may ensure that the students remain on task and progressing through the assignment. This will result in additional academic resources required to mark progressively throughout the semester. However, this may be beneficial in rectifying students that have deviated

from the requirements of the assessment or to ensure that they have understood the event management concepts. The issues regarding weighting of the assessment were once again discussed by students, as evidenced above. This indicates that students are concerned by the level of emphasis that the second assignment pieces has on the total mark for the subject. As discussed previously, a long term strategic approach to the altering of this weighting needs to be implemented.

Another contentious issue was the inclusion or not of group work. Unfortunately due to the size of an assignment of this nature it would be not feasible to separate the second assignment into an individual assessment piece. Additionally, learning to work in a team is an essential skill for event managers. However, a peer assessment component of this assignment will be further refined for inclusion in the future. This ensures that the marks allocated to each student is reflective of the contribution that they have made to the group assignment, their demonstration of learning through a reflective diary and how other group members assessed their work and contribution.

Respondents also identified a number of strategies which could be implemented for future consideration, such as presentations and operationalising an event. The use of presentations to peers ensures that the creativity and planning detailed in the event reports is disseminated amongst the class. This also aligns with the social constructivist model of learning as discussed previously, therefore is planned to be included as a component of the second assignment in the future. The inclusion of a presentation may also assist in reducing negativity about the weighting of the assignment, as this will include the written and verbal component to the assignment. Once again the issue of actually creating and implementing an event was discussed. As students want to have additional involvement in the planning and operationalising of an event potential exists for this subject to work collaboratively with the Marketing and Communications organisational group to assist in future events for the University. These students could then integrate theory, learning, application and reflection through practical experience in planning, organising and operationalising an event within the University. Additionally, this has the potential of facilitating more effective partnerships within the University and the utilisation of resources.

## CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of assessment designed to encourage experiential and deeper learning objectives was well supported by the students. It was encouraging that students found the introduction of experiential or learning through assessment items as beneficial for their learning experience and future careers. It often appears that students like doing assessment that they find 'easy' and will give them the best marks, however feedback from this research indicates that in fact they like assessment that is useful for their learning experiences and future careers.

This research was useful in providing feedback and thoughts of the students on assessment items. This was due to the fact that the information/data was collected before the submission of their first assessment item and after completion of the second assessment item. Therefore, responses are based on students' expectations of learning through doing and based upon the assessment items that have been set in the subject outline. Additionally, further feedback post assessment completion has also been catered for. The gap in the expectations of students and the actuality of their learning experience was also interesting to assess. The students initially thought that the assessment was fun and provided freedom and creativity, however they noted after completion the depth of learning that was achieved from doing these assessment pieces.

As a result of this action research project it is encouraging that students overall find the changes to the assessment as beneficial. Additionally, the positive response to the design of the

assessment is also promising. Being provided with choices enables students to be creative and flexible, applying theory to an area that is of interest to them. The real life design of the assessment also provides valuable insight into the events industry which may assist those of interest in gaining employment within this field. This is all linked with teaching and learning philosophies of encouraging deep learning through a 'hands on' approach to learning within a social environment. What was specifically interesting to note was that many students also discussed this in some of their responses.

Action research as a research technique is an underutilised area in the tourism and events management education area. However the continual cycle that is involved in receiving feedback and making alterations is a style that is both adoptable and extremely beneficial for the future development of event management curricula. This is particularly important as improvement to subjects, and courses, is only achievable through a continual process of receiving feedback and making adjustments.

#### LIST OF REFERENCES

- Altrichter, H., Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2002). The Concept of Action Research. *The Learning Organisation*, 9(3), 125-131.
- Arcodia, C. & Reid, S. (2002). The Mission of Event Management Associations. In K.W. Wober (Ed.), *City Tourism 2002*. Vienna: Springer, 63-72.
- Biggs, J. (1999). What the Student Does: Teaching for Enhancing Learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 18(1), 57-75.
- Burns, R. (1997). *Introduction to Research Methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Melbourne: Longman.
- Cannon, R. & Newble, D. (2000). *A Handbook for Teachers in Universities and Colleges* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- Daruwalla, P. & Fallon, W. (2005). Experiential Learning in Events Management Education: Developing Reflective Practitioners. In J. Allen (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Impacts of Events Conference*, Sydney: Australian Centre for Event Management, 587-603.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- Dick, B. (1999). *What is action research?*. Accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2005. Available online at <http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/whatisar.html>
- Getz, D. (2002). Event Studies and Event Management: On Becoming an Academic Discipline. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 9(1), 12-23.
- Guild, P. & Garger, S. (1998). *Marching to Different Drummers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Harris, R. & Jago, L. (1999). Event education and training in Australia: the current state of play. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 6(1), 45-51.
- Holstein, J. and Gubrium, J. (1995). *The Active Interview*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Hutchings, P. (1988). Integrating Seminar: Bringing knowledge and experience together. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 35, 63-74.
- Jennings, G. (2001). *Tourism Research*. Brisbane: Wiley and Sons.
- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (Eds.) (1988). *The Action Research Planner* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Geelong, Melbourne: Deakin University Press.
- Kemmis, S. & Wilkinson, M. (1998). Participatory Action Research and the Study of Practice. In B. Atweh, S. Kemmis & P. Weeks (Eds.). *Action Research in Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Kim, B. (2001). Social constructivism. In M. Orey (Ed.), *Emerging perspectives on learning, teaching, and technology*. Accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2005, Available online at <http://www.coe.uga.edu/epltt/SocialConstructivism.htm>
- Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Developing*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lederman, L. (1992). Debriefing: Toward a systematic assessment of theory and practice. *Simulation & Gaming*, 23(2), 145-160.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field Theory in Social Sciences*. New York: Harper & Row.
- McCabe, V. (2001). Career paths and labour mobility in the conventions and exhibitions industry in eastern Australia: results from a preliminary study. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3, 493-499.
- McDonald, D. & McDonald, T. (2000). Festival and Event Management: An Experimental Approach to Curriculum Design. *Event Management*, 6, 5-13.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Scrapbook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Neale, M. (2000). Time for a new school of thought on degrees. *Marketing Event*, Sept, 7.
- Neuman, W. (2003). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Pearce, G. & Sutton-Brady, C. (2003). International Business Theatre (IBT): An Alternative Evaluation Method for Enhancing Student Learning in International Marketing. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(1), 3-15.
- Piaget, J. (1973). *To Understand is to Invent: The Future of Education*. New York: Grossman.
- Ramsden, P. (1988). Studying Learning: Improving Teaching. In P. Ramsden (Ed.), *Improving Learning: New Perspectives*. London: Kogan Page, pp.13-31.
- Schön, D. (1995). The New Scholarship requires a New Epistemology. *Change*, 27(6), 27-34.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wadsworth, Y. (1997). *Do it yourself Social Research*. St Leonards, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (Ed.) (2002). *Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management*. Bradford, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.