

# Integrating practice with theory through student engagement in local community events

Category:  
Refereed research

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This paper is based on the premise that in order to provide students of event management with the skills and knowledge to run events, they must firstly experience organising and managing an ‘actual’ event. Balancing the theoretical input with the practical aspects of events in Tertiary degree courses in event management will enable such students to become multitasking and as a result gain highly portable skills that will help them succeed in securing employment in event management and many other, associated professions. One of the most important challenges facing higher education institutions in the future will be to equip students with the skills necessary to secure professional employment, such as in event management. Indeed, in a survey involving 1100 employers in Australia Neilsen (2000) reported that the five most important skills needed for graduate employment were oral business communication skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, independent and critical thinking skills, and flexibility. Furthermore, Greenan et al (1997) reported similar findings in the UK, as did Braxton et al (1996) in the United States. Experiential learning approaches are a valuable tool to overcome the knowledge-practice gap recognised in many vocationally orientated disciplines (Kennedy, Lawton & Walker, 2001) In this study, an experiential learning model and rationale was put into practice with undergraduate students in an Introduction to Events (Recreation 212) module/unit, in partnership with Sport Canterbury (one of 17 regional Sports Trusts, throughout New Zealand). Students enrolled on this module/unit were made responsible for every aspect of managing the annual Rebel Kiwi Sport Challenge (a series of recreation based half to full day events for primary school children based in the Canterbury region). During the module/unit students explored the creation and manipulation of an event experience and gained real life, hands on experience and in this process, acquired skills and knowledge that helped them plan, implement, and evaluate an event.

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## Introduction

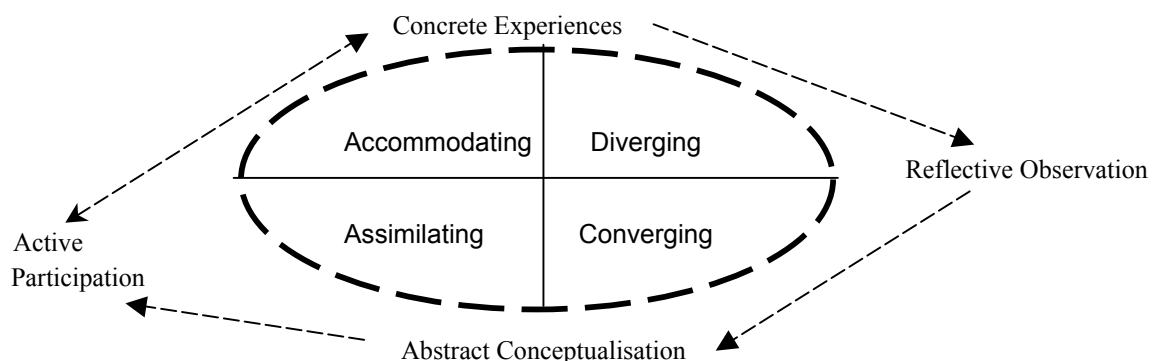
This paper is based upon a research project that evaluated the effectiveness of an experiential learning model in the teaching of ‘real life’ event management — “one of the most important components of the modern university curriculum” (Drummond, 2003: p.1). The study involved students from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including New Zealand Maoris, New Zealand Pakeha and a small number of Caucasian students from Europe, with a mean age of 25 years, consisting of 55% women and 45% men. All the students were enrolled on a first year Introduction to Event Management unit (Recreation 212) at Lincoln University, as part of their degree in either Recreation Management or Tourism Management degree, with a small number of international students, studying the unit as an elective. This study reviews experiential learning theory and then explains the experiential learning model devised for this study. The event context is then evaluated under the auspices of ‘Kiwi Sport’ involving a multi-agency partnership. An account is then given of the methods used which included both qualitative methods using interviews to analyse data by themes and quantitative methods which, provided aggregated findings for the online questionnaire and other survey data produced by the Review and Analysis Management group. Next, the key findings of this study are presented and discussed. In the final section of this paper, the outcomes of the study are evaluated and conclusions given.

## Connecting the model to the theory

In using experiential learning theory, my primary concern was to facilitate student learning, by designing a learning model to provide students with the opportunity to experience a real event and in some way counter the knowledge-practice gap mentioned earlier. Enabling students to make the transition from study to work, requires vocational relevance which experiential learning methods and techniques can provide (Daly, 2001). The opportunity for students to share their experience with their colleagues enrolled on the module/unit was important and simply providing an event experience was not my intention, as this would not create experiential learning (Birley 2003 and Connor 2005). In addition, the students needed to understand their experience, utilise, record and reflect on their observations (experience) and adapt their experience (learning) to new situations.

Experiential learning has been described as a type of holistic learning theory that identifies a range of learning styles (Atherton, 2005). Here the emphasis is on participants reflecting on their experiences to generate understanding and transference of skills and knowledge. Furthermore, the underlying principle of experiential learning emphasises learning by doing and using experience in the process of learning (Kiser & Partlow, 1999). In management education, experiential learning has been used successfully in a number of innovative ways to match learning styles with the learning environment and program design, as noted by Boyatzis (1997).

Experiential learning theory has been a useful vehicle to better understand learning which, can lead to a deeper and more comprehensive learning compared to other learning theories, compared to more traditional forms of learning such as, teacher centred learning (Sewchuk, 2005). The theoretical underpinnings of experiential learning theory can be traced back to the pioneering work of Kolb (1984), see (figure 1). Kolb, (1984) emphasised the important role experience plays in the process of learning and describes experiential learning as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.



**Figure 1: The experiential learning cycle and basic learning styles (Kolb, 1984)**

The origins of Kolb's work, relies on a number of schools of thought including philosophical pragmatism (Dewey), social psychology (Lewin), and cognitive development theory (Piaget). His model consist of four elements or stages of learning, that he describes as concrete experience, observation and reflection, abstract concept forming and testing new situations (figure 1). These four inter related elements highlighted above, have been clarified by (Connor 2005, p.1).

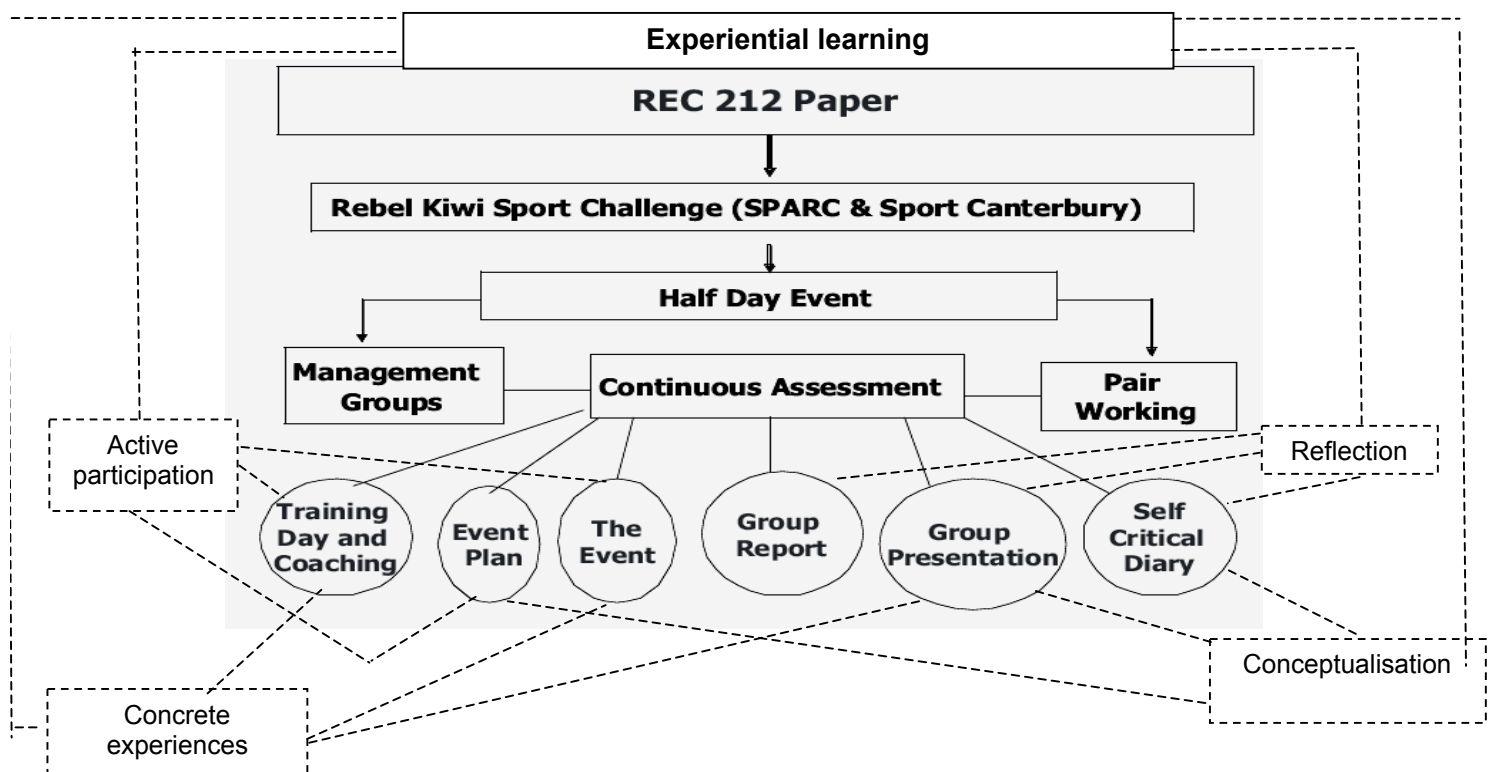
Concrete experiences that allow us to reflect on new experience from different perspectives. From these different observations, we engage in abstract conceptualisation, creating generalisations or principles that integrate our observations into sound theories. Finally we use these generalisations or theories as guides to future action (active experimentation).

Kolb's model has been criticised by a number of commentators as over being descriptive (Atherton 2005) and as unrealistic, prescriptive and needlessly academic (Race 2005). Boud and Walker (1998) believe there is a lack of attention in the model, in regards to the process of reflection and the model takes little or no account of cultural aspects involved in learning (Anderson, (1988). Others such as

Jarvis (1995) and Rogers (1997) argue that the model is over simplified, accusing Kolb of assuming that one stage of learning, naturally leads to another. Indeed, Jarvis (1995) has criticised the lack of research to test the model and the fact that Kolb's experimental research base was small.

Kolb's model may be limited but, according to Tennant (1997, p.2), "it is a useful framework for planning teaching and learning activities". Rodgers (1996) is more positive and comments that Kolb's ideas have been useful in directing educational thought from the teacher, back to the learner. The key objective in designing the experiential learning model was to motivate students and subject them to an active role in their learning. In addition, the model was designed to stimulate student engagement, to provide a module/unit that was innovative, flexible and creative (Ineson 1999).

The experiential learning model was designed to be primarily 'hands on' to what Kiser & Partlow (2001), refer to as yielding learning. The structure and assessment for the module/unit emphasised a number of experiential learning techniques (see figure 2). Firstly, the self reflection diary instructed students to, "record, on a weekly basis their observations and comments with evidence, to a number of key questions, to help structure the content of their diaries" (Lamb 2008 p.7). The diary required students to record their experiences with honesty and integrity with the purpose of encouraging what Schon (1983) refers to as a 'new understanding', where thinking and doing are linked through the action of reflection.



**Figure 2: The experiential learning model for Recreation 212**  
(Indicating tenets of experiential learning model, as in Figure 1)

In order to substantiate the diary entries, students were instructed to attach evidence and supporting information and to learn from their experiences by what Boud and Walker (1998) describe as real-life practice. Students enrolled in Recreation 212 were required to reflect critically on their experiences and observations, to what Brookfield (1987) comments, should be a universal goal for all higher education institutions. Although, Michelson (1996) has argued that reflection can depersonalise the learner and presume knowledge will result from experience learning. The diary in practice did however provide a useful means in which students could debrief their own experience. This moved their experience of events beyond learning by the action of doing in compiling their diary entries on a regular basis. This gave students the opportunity to think critically and reflect on their learning, giving meaning to their experience, expanding what Jarvis (1995), refers to as the 'learning' potential.

The primary objective of utilising an experiential learning model was to stretch students out of their 'comfort zone' in developing career-orientated event management skills to: "engage students in active citizenship and real world preparation" (Swiderski, 2000 p.125). Furthermore, the integration of the academic curriculum with community services generates a winning teaching-learning model. This approach moves students beyond what Yorke and Knight (2003), refer to as 'knowing that' and 'knowing how', to encourage elements for 'doing' and 'reflecting'.

Secondly, to support them in their learning, students were encouraged to make effective use of the resource book for the module/unit which, consisted of a number of selected readings from both academic and professional journals focusing on different aspects of event management. The information contained within the resource book provided the basis for supporting evidence needed for the self reflection diary.

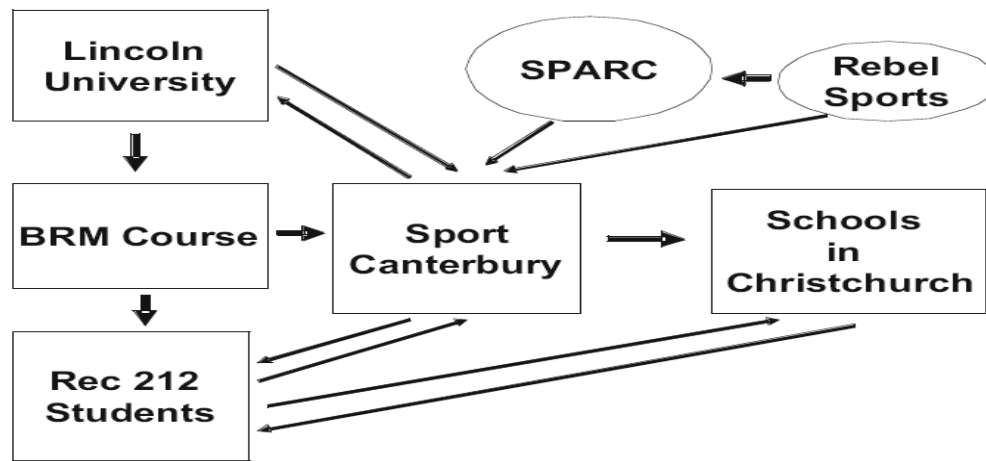
Thirdly, lecture materials were available online for students, with each lecture based around a different aspect of event management, so that students were provided with the principles upon which good event management practice is based (Bowdin et al 2003). Fourthly, since communication was the key to the success of the experiential learning model, students were encouraged to contribute on a regular basis to the web discussion forum for this module/unit. This enabled students to stay in regular contact with the examiner, graduate tutor, Sport Canterbury staff and fellow students. In doing so, they were able to acquire key skills in using information technology, which are crucial to securing future employment in the event management industry (Christchurch City Council, 2003). Engaging in reflective and interactive online learning activities was an important part of the learning process and encouraged students to help each other in evaluating issues and problems and making decisions. Fifthly, in a practical sense, students were involved in organising their own event with a partner and worked in one of five management groups as illustrated in figure 2, above.

## **The community events**

SPARC (Sport and Recreation New Zealand), play a crucial role in government sport policy in New Zealand. At a regional level this policy is operationalised through work undertaken by Sport Canterbury, as part of their strategic goal to "increase sporting and physical recreation participation to improve health and well being" (<http://www.sparc.org.nz/research-and-policy/>). One of the key programs used to achieve this objective is through 'Kiwi Sport' (SPARC 2003). SPARC funds the Kiwi Sport Program on a national basis and devolves funds to the Regional Sports Trusts, such as Sport Canterbury. In turn, Sport Canterbury works in partnership with Rebel Sports, a major sports retailer in New Zealand and the main sponsor of the Kiwi Sport Programs. This program involves physical activity for young people through primary and intermediate schools, where according to Tau (2008) the focus is on participation to promote physical growth, body awareness and active/healthy lifestyles.

For the purpose of Kiwi Sport, modified or miniature versions of adult sport are used with specialist equipment, reduced playing areas and relaxed rules with the emphasis on active learning through full participation. Students enrolled in Recreation 212 were part of a wider partnership for the provision of sporting experiences for young people (figure 3). This relationship provided the basis for the experiential learning model that underpins the module/unit, where students were able to participate in, control and direct the learning process taking responsibility for their own learning (Estes 2003), rather than being reliant upon acquisition of knowledge (Lave and Wenger 1991).

The experiential learning model devised was used to extend student learning beyond the lecture room and provide them with experience of engaging with communities in organising an event for a specific group.



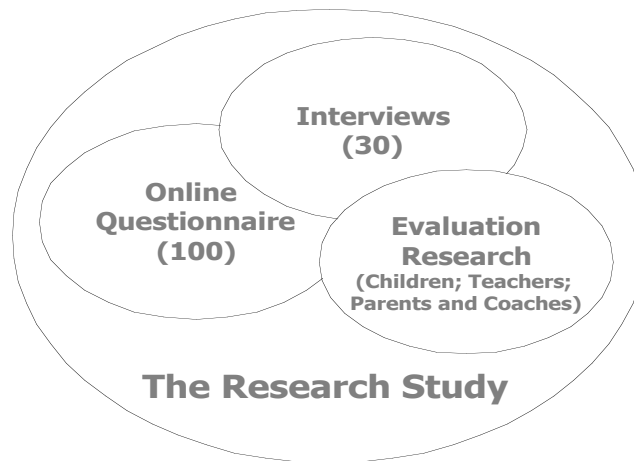
**Figure 3: Kiwi Sport: Multi agency network**

## Methods

The proposal for this research study was evaluated and scrutinised in some detail, before being accepted as an ethically appropriate study for research purposes by the University Human Ethics Committee (HEC). This was a useful exercise in helping streamline the research plan to determine what was feasible and acceptable as an ethical study. The evaluation of the success of the module/unit was based on a mixed method approach (figure 4), incorporating three different sets of data. Firstly, the Individual interviews (n=30) were undertaken using a stratified sample to account for the different characteristics of the student group towards the end of the semester. The interview guide consisted of a number of ‘open’ ended questions based on the themes and ideas that emerged from the previous year’s review of the module/unit and was augmented by a series of ‘prompts’, as advised by Tolich and Davidson (1999). This strategy encouraged students to talk freely and as a result they provided detailed feedback about their thoughts and opinions on the experiential style of learning in which they were involved. The interview guide was not simply a list of fixed questions, but used as an, “outline of things to ask that evolve constantly as more and more knowledge about the research is gained” (Tolich & Davidson, 1999: p. 108). Becker (1998, p.16) further clarified this assertion that small scale and detailed studies bring forth, lots of rich and useful data.

Without knowledge, based on firsthand experience to correct our imagery, we not only don’t know where to look for the interesting stuff, we also don’t know what doesn’t need extensive investigation and proof. Lacking personal knowledge we assume that the ordinary things are among the great social science mysteries that need to be cleared up with a big study and a lot of data.

Secondly an online questionnaire (n=100) was generated from the interview data to ascertain the views and opinions of a number of students and was analysed quantitatively using aggregates. Although, completion of the questionnaire was voluntary over 90% of students completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by students at the end of the semester, which gave students the opportunity to reflect on their experience after completing the module/unit, before leaving for their summer break. The online questionnaire was managed by the Learning and Teaching Services (LTS) Centre as part of a virtual learning project at Lincoln University and accessed via the module/unit webpage. Students were asked to give their opinions and observations on the experiential learning model adopted for Recreation 212.



**Figure 4: Research methods**

Thirdly, the Analysis and Review Management Group designed a range of questionnaires to evaluate the views of other key stakeholders such as, the coaches, event planners, parents/supporters and children involved in the community events. These were distributed at each Kiwi Sport event, by the event pair responsible for that particular event. Children's responses to the enjoyment of their school event was sought by students with a questionnaire, that was modified to keep it short and simple (for example, a limited range of options presented as 'happy' or 'sad' faces). Consent for children's involvement in the research was part of the ethic's approval for this study and parental/guardian consent was arranged through each teacher contact at each school. Each parent/guardian was provided with a brief information sheet on the research project and with the exception of one parent who did not give consent, all other parents/guardians allowed their child/children to take part in the study. Seeking the opinions of children involved in the school based events was judged by the University Human Ethics Committee as low or minimal risk to the children. The data from the questionnaires is reported later using aggregate findings.

## Findings and discussion

### Interviews

The digital audio recordings from the interviews were listened to several times, before downloading onto a computer. Once the files had been saved and checked, the audio files were transcribed in full into a word document file. Once transcription was completed, the transcripts were read in full to gain a general impression of what was said. This part of the process was undertaken 'naturally' without any reference to structure. The next stage involved, a more detailed reading of the transcripts in order to identify the emerging themes. To accomplish effective analysis of the transcripts, the principles of grounded theory were used. The first stage of this process involved 'open coding' where the dominant themes were highlighted within the text (transcript) and given a title. This stage of analysis is referred to by Glaser and Strauss, (1967) as 'cluster coding'.

The second stage involved 'axial coding' or 'pattern coding', where the themes from stage one were collapsed into a smaller number of themes. This was an interpretive process, where the themes or patterns of data were matched together. The third and final stage of analysis involved selective coding, which meant that a smaller number of themes identified at stage two were selected for analysis purposes. The selective codes (themes) then formed the basis for structuring the findings, reported next.

The two main themes that emerged from the data were, working individually in developing personal skills and secondly, working collectively as a group. Many students commented that planning events

had encouraged them to practice time management skills, which helped them design strategies to make better use of their available time. They also commented that they had gained confidence as a result of taking individual responsibility for specific tasks. This was consolidated when their success in key tasks was acknowledged by others. Although, mistakes were made during the organising, planning and staging of the events, collective responsibility for them was shared amongst the group.

The web discussion groups and group meetings were used as a forum to resolve conflict and outstanding issues. Working as a pair and as part of a bigger management group brought many challenges to students, which they had never faced before and had to resolve as a team.

A number of students reported that they had improved their ability to consult with one another which lead to better delegation of event associated tasks, through the use of negotiation skills. Decisions had to be made that required leadership amongst students and often well-laid plans were curtailed because of outside influences, beyond the control of students. As a result students had to plan for contingencies, when school events were cancelled because of bad weather or lack of an indoor alternative event. Therefore, in theory students were required to plan three events: an outdoor event for good weather; an indoor event for bad weather; and an alternative event in case of a cancellation. During the interviews it was apparent that students acknowledged the importance of individual and collective responsibility in taking ownership of their event. As one student remarked:

It was a new kind of learning; we needed to work it out for ourselves. I think the idea was to expose us to new ways of learning to acquire skills in running events. Holding our hands too much will not achieve true learning and in turn teach us little about organising real life events

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire was organised into two sections. The first section asked a number of general questions and the second section asked more specific questions, related to the two key outcomes of the interviews. Namely, how and in what ways the learning style of the unit/module, had developed their team based skills and individual skills in the context of event management. The results were very positive and confirmed many of the findings from the interviews. In response to one of the questions, one student remarked that the event had created:

I have managed to learn some new skills from scratch. Another aspect I really enjoyed was working in a team environment. I have to say, I was very fortunate to be working in a great group with great hard working people. We all got along really well and had distributed the responsibilities and tasks evenly. It was a really good experience.

Many students mentioned they had lots of fun and really enjoyed working with other students for the first time. The overwhelming majority reported positive comments, in relation to the module/unit and more specifically that the Kiwi Sport training day had been useful in preparing them to coach at events and plan their own event. As one student, remarked. "It was really useful, as I have never coached before, without it, I would not have known the basic points in order to coach young children". There was some variability in the usefulness and effectiveness associated with different learning resources, but, all were received positively (figure 5). [Note: there were nil responses in the "Strongly Disagree" category, so for space this category has been omitted from the chart.] The results quantified from the online questionnaire (figure 5), demonstrate that most students found the module interesting (85%). The web based resources were well utilised (90%) with only 10% of students giving no opinion, due largely to their lack of interaction with the web. It is pleasing to note that 90% of students made good use of the resource book whereas, only 10% who had no opinion. A total of 95% of students enjoyed working as part of a team whereas, 5% disagreed, as they preferred independent styles of learning. A wide range of event skills were developed and practised during the module with 90% agreement amongst students. It is disappointing to report that only 80% of students made effective use of the web discussion forum while 10% of students did not interact with it, at all. Clearly there is a need for more work to ascertain why some students are reluctant to engage with technology. Students developing confidence through involvement with organising events, showed 90% agreement with 5% of students

still lacking confidence at the end of the module. This could be due student unfamiliarity, with experiential styles of learning.



**Figure 5: Online questionnaire**

### **Review and analysis management group findings**

An important aspect of event planning is to learn from past events from evaluations of them. For the purposes of the events, the Review and Analysis Management group were given the task of designing a range of evaluations tools in order to make this possible. Separate evaluation questionnaires were designed for coaches, event planners, parents/supporters and children. The questionnaires for each event were distributed through the module/unit web page for easy access. Each individual event pair was given the responsibility of distributing the questionnaires to the different evaluation groups that were collected at a later time by the Review and Analysis Management group.

Designing the evaluation questionnaire for the children posed several problems, so it was decided to keep the questionnaire short and simple. For this purpose, children were simply asked if they had fun or not, by lining up behind one of two signs. One sign was used to indicate if they had fun whereas, the other sign indicated they did not have fun. For other questions such as whether they had learnt something new or whether they would like to take part in a similar event again, children were given the option of a smiley face or a sad face to indicate their response to the question.

A total of 100 responses were received from all stakeholders, and there were some important 'headlines' to emerge from this element of the research. Parents and supporters were mostly enthusiastic although, they would have preferred to have more information about the Kiwi Sport day before the event took place. Many were unsure of the purpose of the event, and this was important feedback for the Marketing and Media Management group. However, the parents and supporters were very pleased with the quality, promotion, timing and content of the events. Coaches played an important role in the success of the events and there were some problems in a small number of events where there was confusion about the logistics of an event. The coaches in general were rated as very enthusiastic, with good delivery of coaching sessions and appropriate content for the age groups involved. More importantly, all students dealt with and followed good health and safety procedures designed by the Health and Risk Assessment Management group.



## The study outcomes

During the design stage of the module/unit, there were some difficulties in communicating with the Learning and Teaching Services Unit (LTS) at Lincoln University. LTS had recently undergone restructuring and resulting staff changes. As a result it was difficult to establish a relationship with a named person, who would help set up the web based forum for this module/unit. This was important, as there were some teething problems with accessing the forum and posting messages to it. This was also the case when students first accessed the forum as some student ID numbers had not been recognised, due to late processing of module/unit registrations. Encouraging students to use the forum in the early weeks of the module was problematic, as some students had mentioned in their diary entries. To overcome this problem the LTS contact person visited class to further clarify how students could log on to the forum 'on' and 'off' campus. A small number of students did not attend this session, instead choosing to seek assistance from their fellow students. Other students had developed a reluctance to utilise the forum and instead used mobile texts to communicate with other students. In conjunction with the LTS contact person, the forum was adapted so that all students were able to access posted forum messages via their email address.

This proved very successful, as students could now read and if need be, respond to any message posted on the forum. Furthermore, this facilitated more effective communication channels between the students, Sport Canterbury staff and the examiner and tutor for the module/unit. Students worked in pairs to plan an event in consultation with their selected school and had the choice of two days provided by the school to run the event. Most events were scheduled for late August or early September, each year, depending on which dates the school had selected. This caused two problems, as some dates clashed with the inter-semester break for students at the University or with timetabled classes. This was unavoidable as traditionally Kiwi Sport events were an essential part of the yearly program for Junior Sport in Canterbury and designated dates for the events to run were planned well in advance. Events scheduled in August were subject to inclement weather and students had to plan for contingencies. A strategy to manage this problem was to have a cancellation date for the event and if the event was rained off on the second date, to have an alternative indoor plan for the event. This experience was crucial for students to consider contingencies when planning events, again stressing the realities of real life event management.

Working in pairs to organise events required regular consultation and communication with schools to discuss the event plan, to meet the needs of the participants. However, during the planning stage of organising their events some students had difficulties with the contact person at the school and conflict did arise between the two parties. These problems were resolved by regular contact and discussions between the school and the pair to work towards an agreed understanding of the purpose of the event. For this purpose, the importance of open dialogue with each school was stressed and students were advised to meet with their school representative during the pre-event stage on a regular basis.

Allocating coaches to events caused some problems as students were required to coach at a minimum of three events, other than their own event. Once all students had been allocated to three events, it became evident there was a shortfall of coaches to cover all events. This problem was managed and resolved by the Human Resource Management Group (HRM), who secured the services of students from the New Zealand Institute of Sport in Christchurch, to help with the shortfall of coaches. Although, students were made well aware of their responsibilities as coaches, some event pairs reported that some coaches had not shown up to their event or had failed to attend briefing meetings to discuss the running of the event. To manage this issue, penalties for missing coaching sessions were introduced in agreement with the students and as a result a small number of incurred a penalty. The HRM group reported some difficulties with allocating coaches to specific events, where event pairs had failed to communicate their coaching needs. In these cases event pairs, were allocated coaches that had not been already assigned to three events. Although, all students had attended a full day on coaching methods and instruction specifically geared towards Kiwi Sport, a couple of students with no prior coaching experience required further assistance from more experienced students. It was very encouraging to witness more seasoned coaches in the group, giving up their time and offering coaching assistance to less experienced colleagues.

Diary entries differed greatly in quality and detail, amongst students with regard to fully utilising, underpinning lectures, the resource book and their experiences throughout the pre-event process. It was encouraging to witness that some students provided a wealth of evidence in their diaries, discussing in detail how they had utilised lecture material and resource book articles. This was certainly the case for one student.

The diary provided me, with a great opportunity to keep track of everything that was going on and helped me reflect on a weekly basis what I'd done. It also helped me realise where the problems and issues were and how they might be resolved, by reflecting on them and writing about them.

Other students had basically described what had happened to them during the event process, with minimal self reflection and no in-depth analysis. The structure of the diary was composed around a number of key prompts (questions) to encourage students to be critically reflective in a number of ways. This comprised a critique of their own contribution and their effectiveness as an event pair and as a member of a management group. Students were asked to reflect on what went well or badly and what they learnt from their experience, with the objective of generating understanding and transference of skills and knowledge. Connecting student learning to a real life task and problem helped students think more critically (Ormrod 2000), where they could apply their skill to real life contexts (Woolfolk, 2001).

## Conclusion

This study provides evidence to support the case for using experiential learning techniques in better engaging students in their learning, to encourage them to take a more active role in their learning. More specifically, academic programs utilising experiential methods have the potential to bridge the learning-theory gap that exist in many vocational fields of study, including event management Moscardo & Norris, (2004). Furthermore, one of the key challenges identified by Getz (2007) in event management education is to make it more applied in its orientation. This philosophy was inherent in the design of the Recreation 212 unit/module to provide students with a real life experience of an event that could be transitioned to the workplace. In this study, students acquired a range of skills and knowledge specific to the event management industry sector to assist them in making a smooth transition, from university to the world of employment.

In planning their events students were required to secure and maintain relationships, network, consult and liaise with a number of different people and organisations, as an individual, in a small team as a pair, and in a larger management group consisting of 25 people. This reality of organising an 'actual' event was invaluable in helping students appreciate that key tasks and decisions associated with event management practice, to enable them to develop their decision making skills, through experience. This required students to plan, before decisions could be made and involved many of the key skills required by future event managers (Allen et al, 2010).

Learning, by doing was central to the philosophy on which this module/unit was designed and delivered. Gaining practical experience in event management was thought to be a worthwhile endeavour by most students and they regarded it as very useful for their future careers. The events planned held collective benefit for the students, Lincoln University, Sport Canterbury, Primary schools in Christchurch, and the community in which the events were held.

Planning a real-life event provided students with a good grounding in the professional practice of event management, a key feature described by Yorke and Knight (2003) as effective delivery of good work experience embedded in the curriculum of vocational programs. Students were encouraged at all times to conduct themselves in a professional manner, as they had an important ambassadorial role within the community on behalf of Lincoln University.

The experiential learning model supported students in developing event specific skills, provided practical experience and an applied context for their learning. A growing body of knowledge and associated theory now exist to support the notion that experiential learning in tertiary education in

vocational/applied based courses encourages ‘deeper’ learning as students are more involved and motivated (Hamer, 2000). This study supports this assertion, in that the more students are directly involved in their learning, the more they take ownership of their learning and the more they gain from the experience. This is best demonstrated by concluding the paper, by allowing the students to speak for themselves in their own words in presenting with their permission, a number of their diary reflections, below.

I have found Recreation 212 to be very challenging but, also the most rewarding paper I have studied. I have learnt both the practical and academic skills I need to acquire a job in events management as now I have skills in time management, communication, coaching, organisation, planning and presentation skills.

I have really enjoyed the experience as it has taught me a lot about working in a team and has given me a useful insight into event planning and management.

I feel, I have learnt so much, it has been very interesting. I have gained a lot of knowledge from taking part in my event. I think it is really good that the paper is so practical, so we’re learning from doing things ourselves, out in the real world, not just sitting in lectures.

All in all, the last 12 weeks have been a big learning curve for me. We were thrown in at the deep end and came out with a great experience and I’ve learnt so much, just by being involved in events. It’s a shame we don’t do more papers like this in the rest of our course.

Overall, I found the unit great fun and got to know other students really well. The paper was very practical and related to real-life management. We had to make decisions for ourselves and work in a team and not only developed our knowledge of events but, our hands-on practical skills.

This is the last week of my diary for Recreation 212 and I have gained a lot of important knowledge from this paper in terms of what’s involved in running, planning and carrying out an event. I think the practical aspects of the paper make it invaluable and I will put my experience to good use in the future. I really enjoyed this learning style of doing, rather than sitting in a classroom and talking about it.

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