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## Learning from events: Can higher education students reflect more 'critically' on their work-based experiences?

Dr Steven Cock from York Business School, York St John University, writes...

When trying new activities or new ways of working, most people will have been told at some point in their lives that they should 'have a go' and 'learn by doing'. Whether at work, at home or in other areas of their day-to-day personal and social lives, the process of 'having a go' and learning from experience can, at times, be somewhat challenging or daunting. But whether undertaking a new activity for the first time or learning from an activity that an individual has undertaken many times before, there can be important opportunities for people to 'learn by doing' from thinking about and reflecting back upon their relative success – or otherwise – from their involvement in a range of personal and professional practical activities. How else do people learn, reflect and grow, particularly within workplace settings?

Nowadays, many undergraduate degree programmes provide opportunities for students to 'learn by doing' in 'real-world' workplace settings by becoming involved in either external or internal university-based workplace initiatives, activities or events as part of their studies. Through involvement in such initiatives, students then have the chance to put into practice in 'real-world' settings those skills and techniques that have been learned in the classroom. Students are then often encouraged to learn from their experiences in the workplace by reflecting back upon particular aspects of their practice to provide opportunities for experiential learning to take place. In other words, students reflect back upon their involvement in workplace activities in order to consider what went well, but also how they might improve aspects of their performance as a practitioner within similar working contexts in the future.

In a recent article published in the *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, I have argued that there does however remain scope for academic staff and researchers – focussing more particularly within the area of events management – to 'consider and re-evaluate' the processes through which students might potentially develop deeper and more 'critical' forms of self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-learning when they engage in processes of reflective practice and experiential learning.<sup>1</sup> In particular, I have argued that it is important for academics, researchers and other relevant work-based learning tutors within higher education settings to consider how students, graduates, current employees or future workplace practitioners might be able to learn and benefit most effectively from reflecting back upon their experiences in work and placement settings. If students are indeed to 'learn by doing' and develop the necessary skillset to become reflexive lifelong learners and future industry practitioners, then how can deeper and more 'critical' forms of learning best be achieved? How can students reflect and learn more effectively from their time in workplace and work placement settings?

I have argued that, in part, a transition may be needed in staff and student expectations away from students drawing primarily upon their own personal opinion, personal viewpoint and personal held beliefs, assumptions and anecdotal evidence as a means of thinking back and reflecting upon their experiences within the workplace to underpin future changes in aspects of their future practice.<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence from a range of academic disciplines such as healthcare, occupational therapy and education, that engaging in evidence-based forms of reflective practice can help students to develop deeper and more critical forms of learning.<sup>3</sup> Within such disciplines, there is an expectation that students reflect and analyse aspects of their practice more critically by drawing upon relevant forms of 'evidence' that might help students and industry practitioners to consider what might constitute forms of 'best practice' from current industry, evidence and research settings.

A more detailed discussion of such issues can be found in the following article, available via the citation and weblink below:

- Cock, S. (2024) Experiential Learning in Events Management Degree Programmes: A Position Statement on Issues of Evidence-Based Practice. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 35, 100506. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2024.100506>

As I have argued in the above article, there remains scope for academics and researchers to consider whether forms of evidence-based practice might potentially be used and implemented more directly in business-related or leisure-related disciplines (such as events management) in order to support the development of more 'critical' evidence-based forms of reflection among student cohorts. Is there scope for students, industry professionals and practitioners within the area of events management to learn and develop the more 'critical' underpinning skillsets that may be required to engage in more 'critical' evidence-based forms of learning and reflective practice? In other words, is there scope for students to learn more 'critically' from those opportunities that are available to 'learn by doing' as they put into practice skills and knowledge that are learnt in the classroom within industry settings? More particularly, can we, as academics, provide the necessary opportunities for students to then develop more 'critical' evidence-based forms of reflective practice that might aid students in the process of becoming lifelong reflexive practitioners?

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<sup>1</sup> Cock, S. (2024) Experiential Learning in Events Management Degree Programmes: A Position Statement on Issues of Evidence-Based Practice. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 35, 100506.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Bannigan, K. and Moores, A. (2009) A Model of Professional Thinking: Integrating Reflective Practice and Evidence Based Practice, *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 76(5), 342-350.