

Balancing risk? First year performing arts students' experience of a community arts event

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This study examines participants' responses to first year students' street performances as a non-placement work-integrated learning (WIL) activity over a two year period. The purpose of the study was to determine: (1) community perception, (2) continuous improvement, and (3) future needs. Data was collected through surveying participants' post-viewing of the street performances, students' reflective notes, and a recorded focus group interview. The findings indicated that audience members require additional assistance to value the students' street performances. The results revealed that students require more guidance around researching the sites of practice, understanding group work dynamics, relaxation methods, intra- and interpersonal skill development, conflict resolution and how to effectively build community relations with the local government Council. From the findings, specific recommendations for continual improvement are made. These include offering an explanation of the street performances' historical and aesthetic connections to the building sites for audience members, affording battery operated body-microphones and light rostrum for improved sight lines, delivering group dynamics information and arranging opportunities for students to engage more effectively with the Council. While the recommendations in this study are intended to advance the field of research that evaluates non-placement WIL performing arts curriculum in higher education, the findings are relevant to any group-based performance activity in learning and teaching.

Introduction

Here were young performers in pancake make-up mixing with Saturday and Sunday crowds, their words jostling with rev-heads on motorbikes, brass bands pumping it out from a pub balcony and the crash of peeling bells. Students blossomed. (Ryan, 2014).

The creative industries are increasingly recognised as important to the economic growth of Australia (Australian Government, 2013; Bennett, Wright & Blom, 2009; Ewing, 2010; Giles & Drewes, 2002; OECD, 2002) and the development of "social and cultural well-being" (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 9). This importance gives urgency to the development of educational responses which recognise that performing arts students need to develop individual artistic practices, as well as a variety of professional skills (Bridgstock, 2011; Pollard & Wilson, 2013). Such an educational development focus should move beyond creating and mapping graduate outcomes for the creative industries and offer a broader range of professional capabilities for work readiness (Business Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council, 2007; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2002; Green, Hammer & Star, 2009).

Evaluation research

Recently, a modest suite of educational research considerations have arisen in the area of creative arts in higher education (Bennett, Wright & Blom, 2009; Bennett, 2009; Brown, 2005; Carey & Naudin, 2006; Essig, 2013; Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Maniaci & Chandler-Olcott, 2010; Pollard and Wilson, 2013; Scollen, 2008). Curriculum that assists creative arts graduates to be “established professionally” (Bridgstock, 2011, p. 9) and to enter the workforce with an appropriate and adaptable skill set, in a complex working world, is still something of a challenge for educationists (Graduate Careers Report GradStat, 2013). Research that focuses on evaluating performance arts curriculum such as identifying “what we are doing, valuing why we are doing it, and understanding how we can make improvements in the future” (Walter, 2010, p. 378) is timely and beneficial (Jones, Higgs, De Angelis & Prideaux, 2001). Such research can review the effects of an assessment task on a program of study that is based on evidence, determining community perception and developing specific recommendations for continual improvement.

For the performing arts, audience participation in theatre marketing, theatre studies or “visitors” satisfaction (Boerner & Jobst, 2013) as well as “subjective experience in theatres” (Boerner, Moser & Jobst, 2011, p. 877) have also arisen in the area of evaluation research. Empirical research on the importance and impact of audiences’ responses when visiting multiple types of theatre is rare (Boerner & Jobst, 2013; Boerner, Moser & Jobst, 2011). Other areas where evaluation research is implemented is around the student learning experience, such as investigating specific evaluation instruments or practitioner-based learning outcomes (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Jones, Higgs, De Angelis & Prideaux, 2001; Richardson, 2005) and assessment for learning (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery & King, 2011). A closer review of the literature highlights the use of evaluation research in relation to reviewing assessment for learning. This area focuses primarily on primary and secondary education (McDowell, Wakelin, Montgomery & King, 2011; William, Lee, Harrison & Black, 2004) and undertaking commissioned evaluation reports on key programs (White & Coventry, 2000; White & Mason, 2003; Wilson & Wright, 1993). Alternatively, the literature positions *work-integrated learning* (WIL) as a key contributor for evaluating assessment for learning (Billett, 2009; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Calway, 2006; Coll & Chapman, 2000; Eraut & Hirsch, 2007; Orrell, 2011; Yorke, 2006). However, minimal reference has been made to performing arts WIL and non-placement WIL in these studies (Bruns & Brien, 2002; Hains-Wesson, 2012; Orrell, 2011; Pollard & Wilson, 2013).

In this study, first year performing arts students were offered an opportunity to present street performances to a ‘live’, diverse and roaming audience. The non-placement WIL assessment task was a complex learning experience that had real world value (Billett, 2009; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 1993; Calway, 2006; Coll & Chapman, 2000; Eraut & Hirsch, 2007; Orrell, 2011; Yorke, 2006).

Street performance

It is important to note that in this study, street performance or outdoor theatre can be viewed inversely by audiences compared to an ‘in-house theatre’ experience, because,

“...outdoor theatre remains the unappreciated outsider busily getting on with its own development and expanding its popularity, with very little recognition of its work” (Mason, 2005, p. 3). There have been few research projects which have evaluated the student learning experience of street performance for a ‘live’ audience in higher education as a WIL activity (Kushener & Brooks, 2000; Simpson, 2008). This study expands on research that evaluates assessment for learning and WIL for the performing arts sector.

Why a mixed method?

A mixed method approach to the current study was chosen because it allows for the examination of the same phenomenon in alternative ways. As Walter (2011) notes, a mixed method approach to research is advantageous because quantitative data can illustrate what change has occurred and how much has taken place, whereas qualitative data can aid in understanding why the change has occurred. A mixed method style allowed for the exploration of relationships between categories, how categories fit within the research focus, and why certain themes emerged (Walter, 2011).

The following research question guided the research process and assisted the authors to identify what was being evaluated (the street performance task), why it was being evaluated (impact and effect), and who the evaluation was for (students and audience members). The research question was:

How can responses to students’ street performances influence the re-design of a non-placement WIL activity for enhancing first year performing arts students’ learning experience?

It is important to note that bias around the evaluation process was possible. This is due to one of the researchers being the curriculum designer and lecturer of the unit under investigation. To minimise potential contamination of the evaluation data, all efforts were made for the first author to act as an external evaluator, collect data and prevent any data being released to the second author until students’ grades were finalised.

In the following section, the project and the assessment task under scrutiny are explained, preceded by the methods used, and followed by a results and discussion section. A conclusion section is then presented which focuses on the seven recommendations for continual improvement of the WIL activity, elicited from the findings.

The project

Students who took part in the first year assessment project had minimal to no prior professional ‘street performance’ experience. The lecturer of the unit provided verbal and/or written advice as part of the curriculum’s support resources and prior to students performing the ‘live’ street shows. The verbal and written advice centred on the unit’s performance expectations and the various challenges such as audience interference around working for and with industry.

The street performance assessment task formed part of a regional community arts event titled, *Heritage Weekend* on 11 to 12 May in 2013 and from 10 to 11 May in 2014, in the

City of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. The *Heritage Weekend* event is an annual tourist attraction that celebrates Ballarat's gold rush history and architectural heritage, for and by the community. The event usually attracts around 14,000 visitors (see <http://www.ballaratheritageweekend.com/> for more detail).

The street performances (titled *Living Heritage*) required eight groups of five students in 2013 with the same number occurring in 2014 to devise 5-7 minutes, site-specific performances for *Heritage Weekend*. Student groups developed characters, scripts and created street performances around historical narratives connected to the sites that they were allocated to by the lecturer. The street performances were presented in weeks eight and nine during the first semester. Each student group performed four times over two weekends. During the creation phase of the street performances, students were required to research historical material, and plan and develop the shows, which were based on the research findings. Students were also required to negotiate and collaborate pre- and during the performances with the local community and Council members as well as manage technical requirements and crowd control. This was often challenging for students due to the public outdoor space environment which is often associated with street performance.

A designer was commissioned to help students create a unified performance aesthetic. For example, in 2013, students' presentations were linked through design by the incorporation of a white, web-like fabric destined for landfill but reclaimed. The design technique encouraged students to explore ecological impacts and cultural consumption (Beer, 2013). In 2014, students were allocated a third year visual communications student to assist them with the design of the shows and the development of the groups' artistic identity for the street performances (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Students take part in the *Living Heritage* event and showcase the overall design of their show (Photo: Chrissie Smith, 2014)

Students' ideas and experiences were filmed by a professional camera person for wider audience distribution and for post-performance publicity beyond the project (for more detail see <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B4r2ELVSxx09cEVSMks0Z19qRzQ/edit?pli=1> and <https://vimeo.com/72618852>).

Assessment

Table 1 shows the breakdown of each assessment task in the unit of study that formed part of the Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University. The following study presented in this paper focuses on assessment item 2 only (see Table 1). This assignment task was the 'live' street performances that were connected to the history of Ballarat, which was a community arts event. The assessment was worth 50% percent of the total marks allocated to students.

Table 1: Assessment item breakdown for the first year performing arts unit in a Bachelor of Arts degree at an Australian university

Item	Assessment task	Assessment type	Weighting
1	Attendance and participation.	Attendance and participation at lectures, tutorials and excursions.	10%
2	Class presentation of mood board/performance of <i>Living Heritage</i> .	Presentation of practice-led research, including a verbal report.	50%
3	Casebook, including library task (20%), reflection and test (20%).	Research, analysis, reflection and documentation on an area of study based on the practice-led research.	40%

Students were required to present evidence of research, historical and theatrical reflection, critical thinking and creativity regarding the non-placement WIL activity. Marks were allocated according to a mixed grading approach (formative and summative), which included quantitative and qualitative feedback. This approach aided in providing a clear indication of students' progress towards meeting the unit's learning outcomes. The unit's learning outcomes were:

- Describe the notion of the self-reflexive artist and his/her role within society;
- Describe some key dramaturgical paradigms and practices that underpin an applied study of the performing arts;
- Illustrate what is meant by performance analysis including the specific types of language that might be applied;
- Illustrate some of the complexities involved in creating work in the community;
- Illustrate connections between applied research, theory and practice;
- Illustrate the creative potential of practice led research.

The marking process was completed by the lecturer and was based on giving students quality feedback, and providing an individual grade, taking into consideration the group work outcome (process and product).

Summative and formative assessment

The lecturer provided a variety of feedback to students during the rehearsal process and pre- and post-street performance/s with an underpinning commitment to improve learning for all involved (McDowell, et al., 2011, p. 751). The feedback aided in identifying areas where students could develop and improve. The feedback was given to each student but only once the teams had submitted a brief outline of their street performance plan. This included a title, theme and ideas, historical influence, a prop list, narrative focus and a bibliography.

Students' contributions (process and product) of the creative work were graded according to a Likert grading scale where 5 represented 'always' and 1 represented 'never'. The following lists the guidelines that the lecturer used to determine students' grades.

- The student demonstrated teamwork and commitment to the task;
- The student showed evidence of understanding dramaturgical principles and an ability to effectively apply them in rehearsals and in performance/s;
- The student demonstrated an ability to create a coherent narrative from the research materials;
- The student showed originality and flair in the creative task, i.e. scenographic thinking;
- The student demonstrated an ability to respond to and work with dramaturgical feedback;
- The student demonstrated an ability to work with a range of audiences.

Students' marks underwent a moderation process. This involved two external industry practitioners evaluating the groups' performances (product) and post-street performance/s. This approach helped in ascertaining, for the lecturer of the unit, that the marks were consistent and fair. As a result, a few students' grades were adjusted accordingly.

Methods

This study was a mixed method evaluation investigation that took place over two years, which explored three key areas: (1) areas for continuous improvement, (2) community perception, and (3) future needs. The evaluation identified the assessment task's weaknesses and strengths.

University ethics approval was obtained and information was provided to participants, inviting them to take part in the study. No incentive was offered. A modest number of students (n=80) and audience members (n=69) engaged in the process.

Audience survey

The construction of the audience survey was based on the requirement to evaluate the students' street performance via audiences' perceptions of the shows' aesthetic appeal. Survey questions relating to "authentic and/or engagement" were based on what Boerner and Jobst (2013) have explained as "the perceived artistic quality of the performance"

which is the most complex category to evaluate (p. 393). The audience survey was constructed with an emphasis on performance characteristics such as thematic aspects rather than on spectator characteristics such as their gender, age or education. Therefore, in order to develop an effective survey, Boerner and Jobst's (2013) research that investigated the relative impact of visitors' overall evaluation of a visit to the theatre by studying a "sample of 2,795 visitors viewing 44 performances in 12 German-speaking theaters" was a key resource in the construction of the survey (p. 391).

The audience survey was administered after they had viewed the street performances at the *Heritage Weekend* community event in 2013 and 2014. Closed-ended questions were calibrated on a Likert scale 1 to 5 with a score of 5 indicating that audience members believed that the 'live' performance met their 'entertainment' expectations and to be of a high quality (see Appendix A).

Student survey

McDowell et al.'s (2011) research on developing an effective questionnaire to explore students' responses on assessment for learning was a key resource when developing the project's student survey. The survey was further developed in terms of three main curriculum areas for continual improvement, which the lecturer of the unit believed were required. This decision was based on past students' unsolicited comments to the lecturer. These were:

- Researching the sites of performance
- Theory to practice when creating and presenting the street performances.

The survey was administered upon completion of the assessment task/s (see Appendix B). Closed-ended questions were based on a Likert scale 1 to 5 with a score of 5 indicating that the student believed that the content of the unit and the research activity to be of a high benefit to the assessment task, their studies and beyond. The open-ended questions aided in eliciting students' beliefs and opinions about the performance activity in more detail.

Reflective notes and focus group

Students' summative reflective assessment notes about their personal learning experience (pre-, during and post-street performances) were collected for qualitative analysis. A recorded focus group interview was completed with twenty-two students. The questions that guided the focus group discussion were based on the results from the student survey.

Data collection

The quantitative data was transcribed and placed into an *Excel* spreadsheet and pivot tables were used to analyse the findings, using bar graphs (see Appendix A). The qualitative data was analysed by conducting a priori and inductive coding with the final re-coding completed using a computer assisted data management program, *NVivo*. Seven codes were agreed upon with a pilot trial for each code completed on a randomly chosen

piece of data from the qualitative collection phase. This process confirmed that each coder was coding in a similar fashion and to the agreed coding definition. All data was rendered anonymous.

Five distinct themes arose from the codes which aligned to the researchers' non-placement WIL framework and the research question for this study. For example, the development and understanding of the following WIL related outcomes such as theory to practice, group work, intra- and interpersonal skills and lifelong learning are important factors for effective learning during WIL placements (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini, 2004, p. 1). When WIL activities are incorporated into learning it is a key opportunity for improving the work readiness of all graduates (Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Rossin & Hyland, 2003). This includes students studying in disciplines that have not traditionally been linked to clear employment outcomes such as performing arts and creative writing (Haigh & Clifford, 2011; Hains-Wesson, 2012; Lee, McGuiggan & Holland, 2010). The themes were:

- Research skills
- Group work
- Audience experience to the performances
- Learning styles
- Lifelong learning.

Results

Audience members

Sixty-nine (n=69) audience members responded to the survey. Of those who chose to report where they resided and why they attended the shows, thirty audience members (43.48%) said that they were local Ballarat residents, seventeen (24.64%) said they were visiting from Melbourne, six (8.70%) mentioned that they were from an Australian capital city outside of Melbourne and four (5.80%) wrote that they were visiting from overseas. Thirty-eight audience members (55.07%) stated that they viewed the street performances due to a family member or fellow student being in the show. Twenty-two participants (31.89%) stated that they viewed the shows because they were invited by a student. The responses to why participants watched the street performances ranged from a desire to "to see what the performers make of this city and how they use their skill/s to express that" to "I wanted to know more about the City of Ballarat and its iconic building sites via an alternative way" in order to "celebrate or observe cultural heritage".

The majority of audience members either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' to the questions being asked about the street performances in relation to 'authentic', 'engagement' and the 'quality' of the shows. This result indicated an overwhelmingly positive response to the student street performances in 2013 and 2014.

The following section highlights the audiences' quantitative responses in detail. A visual representation of the quantitative data sets, using bar graphs, is shown in Appendix A. The data is presented in the same order as the survey questions that were asked.

Audiences' perceptions of understanding the street performances

In 2013, 100% of participants suggested that they understood the show/s and in 2014, 4.44% of participants suggested that they did not understand the show/s. A modest number of participants (29.17%) in 2013 said "neither disagree nor agree" to the question: "did you understand the show?" and in 2014, 13.33% said the same. The majority of audience members (70.83%) in 2013 stated that they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" to understanding the show/s and in 2014, 82.23% of participants said similar.

Audiences' perceptions of hearing the street performances

In 2013, 20.84% of participants suggested that it was difficult to hear the street performances and in 2014, 8.89% suggested the same. A modest number of participants (37.50%) in 2013 said "neither disagree nor agree" to the question: "could you hear?" and in 2014, 15.55% of participants said the same. In 2013, 41.66% of audience members stated that they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" to "could you hear?" And, in 2014, 75.56% of participants suggested the same.

Audiences' perceptions of seeing the street performances

In 2013, 4.16% of participants suggested that it was difficult to see the street performances and in 2014, 2.22% suggested the same. A modest number of participants (16.17%) in 2013 said "neither disagree nor agree" to the question: "could you see?" and in 2014, 11.11% of participants said the same. The majority of audience members stated that they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" in 2013 (79.17%) to being able to see the performances well, and in 2014, 91.11% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the characters in the street performances as being authentic

In 2013, 4.17% of participants suggested that the characters "were not authentic" and in 2014 100% suggested that the performance were authentic. A modest number of participants (12.50%) in 2013 said "neither disagree nor agree" to the question: "were the characters authentic?" and in 2014, 8.89% of participants said similar. The majority of audience members stated that they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" to the characters being authentic in 2013 (83.33%), and in 2014, 91.11% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the issues and themes of the street performances

In 2013, 4.17% of participants suggested that "the issues and themes were not well presented" and in 2014, 2.22% of participants suggested the same. A modest number of participants (20.83%) in 2013 said "neither disagree nor agree" to the question: "were the themes/issues well presented?" and 8.89% of participants said similar in 2014. The majority of audience members stated that they either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" in 2013 (75%) that the shows' themes and issues were well presented, and in 2014, 88.89% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the street performances connecting the city and its people

In 2013, 4.17% of participants suggested that the show/s “did not connect to the city and its people well” and in 2014, 4.44% said the same. A modest number of participants (12.50%) in 2013 said “neither disagree nor agree” to the question: “did the show connect the City of Ballarat and its people well?” and in 2014, 13.33% of participants said similar. The majority of audience members stated that they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” in 2013 to the “shows connecting to the city of Ballarat and its people well” (83.33%), and in 2014, 82.23% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the street performances illustrating historical evidence

In 2013 and 2014, 100% of participants suggested that the show/s “illustrated historical evidence”. A modest number of participants (33.33%) in 2013 said “neither disagree nor agree” to the question: “was the historical research evident in the show?” and in 2014, 6.66% of participants said the same. The majority of audience members stated that they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” in 2013 (66.67%) that the historical research was evident in the shows, and in 2014, 93.34% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the street performances adding value to the City of Ballarat and its surroundings

In 2013 and 2014, 100% of participants suggested that the shows’ “design did add understanding to the city of Ballarat and its surrounding”. A modest number of participants (12.50%) in 2013 said “neither disagree nor agree” to the question: “did the design add to your understanding of the City of Ballarat and its surrounding?” and 2.22% of participants in 2014 suggested similar. The majority of audience members stated that they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” in 2013 (87.50%) to the “design adding understanding” and in 2014, 97.78% of participants said the same.

Audiences' perceptions of the street performances' connection to the building sites

In 2013 and 2014, 100% of participants suggested that the shows connected well to the building sites. A few participants (6.66%) in 2014 said “neither disagree nor agree” to the question: “did the show/s connect well between the building site and the performance?” The audience members stated that they either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to the “shows connecting well” in 2013 (100%), and in 2014, 93.33% of participants said the same.

It is worth noting that the volume of data illustrating “neither agree nor disagree” in the qualitative data sets may have been due to the nature of street performance *per se*; for instance, where overall engagement and entertainment with the event is not always dependent upon a single element of performance such as acting techniques, lighting or design. As a result, it is possible that participants may have answered the questions in this

fashion (such as choosing “neutral”) due to the complex ‘nature’ of effectively evaluating street performance.

A further and detailed analysis of the audience’ and students’ responses is presented in the discussion section of this paper. In the following section, the students’ qualitative responses from the survey, reflective notes and recorded focus group interview are presented. The data is presented in order of the themes that emerged from the analysis.

Student members

Students’ perceptions of the street performance to research

Most students’ response to the unit’s set readings suggested that they were “moderately” or “slightly” effective. A few students stated that they were either “very” effective with others expressing “not effective at all”. Often students commented that the readings were a “good starting point” but that they were often left “desiring more direction and further guidance when researching the historical sites”. Some students commented on “not” feeling confident to transfer the theory learnt in the classroom to the practice of developing, creating and performing a street performance for a ‘live’ audience. A few students also felt that the requirement to research the allocated site for performance making and linking the theory to practice was, “a little bit tough as we did not find as much information as we would have liked”. Many students also found the research component of the project worthwhile. For example, one student noted: “I would like to say that the *Living Heritage* project has taught me how powerful and beneficial thorough research can be” and “there is already a foundation to your performance and if we hit a dead end we can always fall back to what we already know [the research]”. Another student wrote:

I never used to rely on research all that much and used to go into a performance head on which only caused a lot of worry and sleepless nights. But now that I understand the benefits of research I can apply this method of work to all of my work as a performer.

Students’ perceptions of the street performance to group work

Students commented positively about group work skills being developed during the creation phase of the street performance task such as how to be inclusive with their peers. Students often found the task to be complex and challenging. The key areas that students elaborated on in terms of what they believed that they had learnt “the most” regarding group work were:

- The balance of give and take;
- Being open to new ideas;
- Not taking difficult situations personally;
- Developing mutual and consistent group goals and expectations;
- Listening to others, being flexible and welcoming everyone’s ideas;
- Resolving conflict early by communicating openly and clearly;
- Acknowledging and welcoming diverse and individual skills and perspectives.

Students who found the group work stressful often expressed that it was mainly due to a particular team member either controlling the project or not listening to other's ideas. At times, students said that they felt "ashamed to say that I held back ideas due to this occurring". Students therefore suggested that they found it useful if each member of a group had a clear and defined role so that those roles worked collaboratively with everyone. A few students suggested that they "naturally" got on well with team members while others stated that it was "difficult" to work with some team members due to their learning and/or working styles in comparison to their own. Students also regularly commented on certain group members being 'riders' or 'free loaders' which is documented well in the literature for the creative industries (Bryan, 2004; Orr, 2007a; Orr, 2007b; Orr, 2010; Smart & Dixon, 2002). Students articulated their "frustrations" around "not being able to do anything about [group work and free loaders]" and the need to "just get on with it [the task]" and "hope for the best".

Students' perceptions of the audiences' experiences of the street performances

Students stated that they felt "added pressure" due to their perceived inability to anticipate the reactions of the audience, and that this was stressful:

It was expectantly rough, but I learnt a lot about how much I can cope with and my ability to deal with added pressures through interaction within my own group and the live audience from the experience.

Other students noted that they felt "even more pressure" to perform "live" on the street, which brought about an intensity to the performance, especially when "some audience members walked through our space" and "even to the point where they couldn't move because we were performing" or "a scary biker man threatening us". Another student expressed the following:

The biggest complication for me was the traffic lights. Having to improvise while waiting for the lights didn't aid the performance but broke the proverbial fourth wall.

The majority of students stated that they were able to "stay in character and continue as normal" and that they "learnt that as a street performer, I can continue and the audience will pay attention, even if it's not their intention to do so".

Students felt highly motivated when they heard comments from the audience such as "being genuinely moved by our piece". It was these types of verbal reactions from the audience members that validated many students' beliefs about themselves in a positive way, even though they experienced considerable stress managing the creative task and the audience members.

Students' perceptions of their own and other's learning styles

Students found that working with others and being privy to new ideas allowed them to come to terms with their own particular learning style and how they "best learnt". For instance, "my own ideas will always be mine, but if I use someone else's point of view, I can reach new areas to work with and explore".

Students viewed the task as “risky”. Students felt overwhelmed and did not know if they could achieve the required outcome. One student noted, “I haven’t worked in front of a live audience on the street before. It was a new experience and honestly, I didn’t really know how to react to some of the situations that came up”. Many students found opportunities through the complex and “risky” assessment challenge by discovering new ways to link their particular learning style to future everyday life experiences such as:

I am starting to realise now that I don’t have to go searching for something clever or creative when devising a performance because it’s already there. I think I can also apply this to my everyday life.

Overall, students felt tested by their peers’ learning styles but they were also able to become more flexible with how they worked with their peers such as, “I had once thought of myself as a very individual ‘pen and paper’ type learner but the attitude of my group helped me to find new ways of learning and accomplishing tasks”.

Another student said:

So much of what I learn in all my classes is about awareness and connection – bringing it outside of yourself to the people around you and I think that this sort of focus on others helps us to get along better with people in both acting and life.

Students’ perceptions of the street performance task to lifelong learning

Students who found the street performances challenging and stressful discovered that it was also life changing. They noted that the assessment task was a major event in their lives which allowed them to develop self-confidence and transferable skills such as self-awareness so that they could be “more” prepared to take on new obstacles in study, work and life; for example, “it was through my one poorer performance that I learned that a performer must come into every performance with a sense of purpose and in turn newfound purpose. This is something I can be doing in all aspects of life”.

Another student wrote:

In life, we would always be faced with the prospect of working with difficult people or people who we may not feel comfortable to work with. But in an ironic way, these are also the people that we would mostly likely gravitate towards as a means of confronting our habitual ways of dealing with things.

Other students proposed that the experience was a means to “test themselves” in order to gain knowledge about the areas they needed to improve on such as preparing themselves for professional work: “if we do not feel brave enough to take on the challenges presented to us in life, we will never know what possibilities lay out there and we will never learn from them”; and, “I can apply these principles to many aspects in my life because I am always going to be working with people and so I need to understand how to deal with issues that arise in order for me to work effectively”.

A number of students said that they “learnt more” about themselves as a developing professional due to being involved in a complex and difficult WIL assessment task. One student said:

There will be differences in opinions and people who will get on your nerves but there are ways to manage these issues and as long as it is achieved in a professional and respectable manner then the work shouldn't be too difficult.

No matter the experience from students' perspectives, the weather, audience interference, nerves or a lack of confidence, students felt that they had completed an effective performance, learnt something new about themselves and their peers as well as acquired a range of transferable employability skills such as:

If I can apply the positive interactions with other team members and proper forward thinking and commitment to a piece of work to other scenarios in life, such as working in a company and jobs that involve working with people and reacting and responding to the general public, then I think that some of the skill sets that I have gained over the experience of *Heritage Weekend* will have given me a positive and long lasting basis for my future.

Discussion

To assist in embedding graduate attributes in degree programs there has been considerable investment in expanding on the notion of non-placement WIL activities in the higher education sector (Oliver, Jones, Ferns & Tucker, 2007; Oliver & Tucker, 2004). It is therefore imperative that investigation and evaluation of non-placement WIL activities are undertaken and made available for students and staff, which is one of the main reasons for the present study. Students' regularly commented that participating in the WIL activity benefited their learning, because it was challenging, on site, ill-defined, complex and a “crucial means of preparing [them] for career” (Krause, Harley, James & McInnis, 2005, p. 5). The non-placement WIL activity was noted by students as an authentic and complex assessment task due to it being onsite and its close proximity to a ‘live’, diverse and roaming audience. The findings also suggest that students found the assessment task ‘risky’, stressful and challenging. A majority of students expressed that the curriculum re-design should focus on supporting their learning and involvement in the ‘risky’ assessment task by:

- Offering research skill development;
- Designing group work strategies and group dynamic skill development;
- Offering resources around understanding peer and self-awareness of learning styles;
- Discussions around lifelong learning via a stressful and life changing learning activity.

At times, students also stated that they required further set readings or skill development in the area of locating the historical research information to connect it to the sites of the performances more effectively. When audience members noted areas for continual improvement it was often around students' performance techniques such as voice projection, spatial awareness alongside a greater awareness of integrating theory to

practice which is a key distinguishing feature of an effective WIL experience (Smith, 2012).

With this in mind, it could be argued that curriculum development for non-placement WIL activities is dissimilar to traditional types of learning, especially for the performing arts. Firstly, the need to provide students with non-traditional resources to help support them with their individual learning experiences, managing stress and integrating theory to practice is crucial. Secondly, the findings from audience' and students' responses have helped the research team to unravel practical areas for continual improvement around the WIL activity, especially when the learning is "complex and occurs outside the classroom environment" (Fitch, 2011; Herrington, Oliver & Reeves, 2003). Thus, a set of seven specific recommendations for central planning for the activity have been developed. These are:

- Provide students with the opportunity to create and hand out small flyers/postcards about each performance to explain the themes and the specific development journey of each group's work so that the audience members have a framework to follow;
- Consider introducing battery operated body-microphones so that audience members can hear well;
- Consider using light, solid boxes (mobility and storage use) to improve sight lines so that audience members can see well;
- Provide students with a group work resource/workshops that can assist them with conflict resolution, goal setting and managing time more effectively;
- Provide students with a brief outline of the tangible benefits of problem-solving, group dynamics, conflict, stress and crowd control in order to support students around the complexity of the 'risky' assessment task;
- Provide relaxation workshops throughout the rehearsal process to assist in developing students' self-confidence, minimise stress and nerves prior to performances;
- Provide ongoing opportunities for the community and Council workers to interact with the student groups earlier. This, in turn, will enable the forging of stronger, lasting relationships, which have the potential to go beyond the university experience.

Interestingly, there were no student complaints around the grading of group work. This might be due to students' performances being individually graded or that we did not highlight the challenges, complexity and nature of group processes in the questionnaire. While there are opposing ideas about what "might constitute fair assessment of process in group work" (Orr, 2010, p. 310) within the performing arts (Bryan, 2004; Orr, 2007a; Orr, 2007b; Smart & Dixon, 2002), we acknowledge that this research project only covers this topic minimally if at all.

Conclusion

In this study, the mixed method approach that was used to evaluate the street performance assessment task provided validity to aid in identifying areas for continual improvement for the non-placement WIL activity. The results from this study highlight

the necessity of providing students with non-traditional resources to enhance and support the students' WIL learning experience.

The study presented here is limited in that it is specific to a performing arts discipline in an Australian university context. However, the recommendations developed from the findings are relevant to teaching and learning across the creative arts industry, locally, nationally and internationally, and to any non-placement WIL group-based assessment activity that has a 'performative' component.

A similar research method at other universities would be useful in order to compare findings and differences. Therefore, the results from this study need to be interpreted with caution due to the modest sample size. In addition, undergoing qualitative interviews with audience members to gather similar data that was collected from students may have gained wider understanding. Time and opportunity did not permit the research team to undertake such a task. This was mainly due to the mobility of the audience members as they roamed from one performance site to another, creating difficulties for the researchers to capture data.

Students' and audience members' responses, beliefs and opinions around the creating, performing and/or viewing of students' street performances for a community arts event (as a non-placement WIL activity) illustrates a major concern for the teaching of this unit. Firstly, audience members require specific assistance in order to value the shows more effectively, and secondly, students often viewed the street performances as a 'risky' activity, which was complex and stressful. This in turn, emphasises the urgency for the teaching team to implement a variety of non-traditional learning support resources to enhance and support participants' learning experiences without necessarily 'watering down' the authenticity, proximity and complexity of the opportunity. Students often expressed that despite the assessment task being 'risky' it was important for developing self-directed learning and professional skills via a life-changing event. Therefore, the implementation of the seven specific recommendations will provide students with crucial and needed support. Finally, a future mixed method evaluation process is planned for this unit in order to identify whether or not the recommendations aided in achieving such an outcome.

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Appendix A

Audience survey questions and overall percent scores of audience' responses and perceptions about the students' street performances in 2013 and 2014 where SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neither Agree nor Disagree, A=Agree and SA=Strongly Agree.

#	Question	No.	Score 2013	No.	Score 2014
Q1	Did you understand the show?	0	SD 0%	1	SD 2%
		0	D 0%	1	D 2%
		7	N 29%	6	N 13%
		6	A 25%	19	A 43%
		11	SA 46%	18	SA 40%

Q2	Could you hear?	1 4 9 7 3	SD 4% D 17% N 37.5% A 12.5% SA 29%	1 3 7 20 14	SD 2% D 7% N 15.5% A 44.5% SA 31%
Q3	Could you see?	1 0 4 6 13	SD 4% D 0% N 16% A 25% SA 55%	0 1 5 20 19	SD 0% D 2% N 11% A 45% SA 42%
Q4	Were the characters authentic?	1 0 3 9 11	SD 4% D 0% N 12.5% A 37.5% SA 46%	0 0 4 17 24	SD 0% D 0% N 9% A 38% SA 53%
Q5	Were the issues/themes well presented?	1 0 5 5 13	SD 4% D 0% N 21% A 21% SA 54%	0 1 4 22 18	SD 0% D 2% N 9% A 49% SA 40%
Q6	Did the show/s connect the city of Ballarat and its people well?	0 1 3 12 8	SD 0% D 4% N 12.5% A 50% SA 33.5%	0 2 6 16 21	SD 0% D 4.5% N 13% A 35.5% SA 47%
Q7	Was historical research evident in the shows?	0 0 8 6 10	SD 0% D 0% N 33% A 25% SA 42%	0 0 3 16 26	SD 0% D 0% N 6.5% A 35.5% SA 58%

Q8	Did the design add to your understanding of the city of Ballarat and its surroundings?	0	SD	0%	0	SD	0%
		0	D	0%		0	D
		3	N	12.5%	1	N	2%
		7	A	29%	11	A	24.5%
		14	SA	58.5%	33	SA	73.5%
Q9	Did the show/s connect well between the building sites and the performances?	0	SD	0%	0	SD	0%
		0	D	0%		0	D
		0	N	0%	3	N	7%
		2	A	8%	6	A	13%
		22	SA	92%	36	SA	80%

Appendix B: Student survey

Research

- Do you believe you were given enough training in research to adequately respond to your site? (Please circle one of the following answers):
 - Yes, and please state why you have answered this way
 - No, and please state why you have answered this way
- How effective do you believe the readings were in developing your understanding of the performance-making task? (Please choose from one of the following):
 - Extremely effective
 - Very Effective
 - Moderately effective
 - Slightly effective
 - Not at all effective

Please state why you have answered this way

Work-in-Progress

- What were some of the challenges of the performance-making process? (Please explain)
- What were some of the challenges of the performance-making rehearsal process? (Please explain)
- What problem-solving skills did you bring to these challenges? (Please explain)
- How did you manage the time limitations in your rehearsal process? (Please explain)
- How did you manage the group dynamics in this performance-making task? (Please explain)
- In your opinion do you believe that you received enough information to successfully accomplish the performance-making task? (Please choose from one of the following answers):
 - Yes, and state why you have answered this way
 - No, and state why you have answered this way
- What practical instruction/s was/were most useful in accomplishing the performance-making task? (Please explain)

8. What practical instruction/s was/were least useful in accomplishing the performance-making task? (Please explain)

Performance Day

1. How do you feel the audience affected your work? (Please explain)
2. In your opinion how would you rate your preparation of being adequately ready on the day of the performance? (Please choose from one of the following answers)

Extremely prepared
Very prepared
Moderately prepared
Slightly prepared
Not at all prepared

Please state why you chose this answer

3. How did your involvement in this performance event affect your understanding of yourself as an actor? (Please explain)
4. In your opinion what was the most important thing that you learnt throughout this unit experience? (Please explain)
5. What might have you done differently? (Please explain)
6. Are there any other comments you would like to make about the performance-making process that affected your learning throughout this process?

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