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Partnering for real world learning, sustainability, tourism education

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this article is to study how real world learning was used to engender and enhance sustainability principles and practices with 11 micro-, small- and medium-tourism business enterprises and 101 university tourism students enrolled across three university courses.

Design/methodology/approach – Action research processes were used to focus curricula on "education about and for sustainability". A participatory paradigm informed the action research processes. The key methodology was qualitative. Empirical materials were generated through lived experiences, reflexive team conversations, team journals, reflexive journals and student learning materials. Reflexive conversations and reflective dialogue framed interpretations.

Findings – The action research process found that pedagogies, andragogies and ethnogogies that emphasize social processes of meaning making and sensemaking enhance and engender "education about sustainability" and "education for sustainability", especially when coupled with real world learning as a platform for social and profession-building processes between university students, course teaching staff and industry, in this case, micro-, small- and medium-tourism entrepreneurs.

Research limitations/implications – The qualitative findings of this action research study are specific to the participants involved. Generalizability to other university and business settings and goodness of fit require further study.

Practical implications – Insights are provided with regard to implementing real world learning in university undergraduate and postgraduate courses by partnering with industry and focusing on education for sustainability (EfS). A demonstration of the effectiveness of action research as a tool for changing curricula is provided.

Social implications – Learning is a social process of meaning making. Time for real world social interaction is critical for learning. Partnering with industry complements student learning and facilitates the translation of theory into practice.

Originality/value – EfS is engendered and enhanced when learning-teaching engagements are predicated on real world settings, circumstances and experiences.

Keywords Students, Tourism, Sustainability, Education, Action research, MSMES

Paper type Research paper

The Australian university sector has received extended criticism for not preparing graduates, who are "work ready", in relation to a number of employability skills and skill sets (AC Nielson Research Services *et al.*, 2000; Universities Australia, 2008; Jackson and Chapman, 2012). In response to such criticism, educators in the sector have been increasing their use of real world learning-teaching engagements. Internationally, there has been a similar burgeoning. The suite of such learning-teaching engagements includes work-integrated learning (Seethamraju, 2012), work-based learning (Ramage, 2014), internships (Linn *et al.*, 2004), practicum or practice-based learning (Shakespeare, 2010), real-life exercises (Ball, 1995), project-based learning (Blumenfeld *et al.*, 1991), problem-based learning (Dale and Newman, 2005), service learning (Jamal *et al.*, 2011), work experience (Leslie, 1999), profession-based learning (Jennings *et al.*, 2007), and university-industry partnerships influencing university learning-teaching programs and employability outcomes (Jauhari, 2013). In Australia, the incorporation of real world learning-teaching engagements is also related to the Australian Qualifications Framework, (AQF), the national policy for regulating qualifications. The AQF has a specific objective of ensuring ease of movement between the tertiary education sector and the "labour market" [Australian Qualifications Framework Council (AQFC), 2013, pp. 8-9].

The increasing interest in preparation for the "labour market" and emphasis on real world learning-teaching engagements reflects what Gibbons *et al.* (1994) referred to as a change to Mode 2 rather than Mode 1 knowledge production. In Mode 1, academic peers, who are also knowledge producers, evaluate knowledge production. In Mode 2, knowledge production is no longer solely evaluated by peers but also by users of knowledge with their own criteria. This change in knowledge production is demonstrative of broader neoliberalism trends in university sectors, for example "industry-relevant research", "university-industry collaboration" and "commercialization of university research" (Albert and McGuire, 2014, pp. 35-36). Herein, neoliberalism refers to a "political ideology defined by free trade, privatization, deregulation, competitiveness, social-spending cutbacks and deficit reduction" (Neo-liberalism, 2014 in El-Shall, 2014). In this current neoliberal context, students are primary users/consumers of university education (Hill, 1995; Hill *et al.*, 2003) along with the industry. Within tourism education, the implications of neoliberalism have only recently been explored and critiqued (Ayikoru *et al.*, 2009,

Dredge *et al.*, 2012). In this article, our aim is not to engage in further neoliberal critique, but rather to exemplify applications of real world learning founded on sound pedagogical, andragogical and ethnogogical principles to provide quality learning-teaching engagements that enhance work ready skills and competencies. It is within this context that we share our action research study, which partnered with Australian university teaching staff, students and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, (MSMEs) in tourism industries.

Action research context

Our action research study had two aims. First, the engendering and/or enhancing of sustainability principles and practices associated with MSMEs' tourism operations. The second aim was to improve pedagogy, andragogy and ethnogogy by integrating "education *about* and *for* sustainability" (Australian Research Institute for Environment and Sustainability [ARIES] 2008a) into curricula in three Tourism Studies courses. The study was undeniably a university-industry partnership. Implicit in both aims was the provision of quality learning-teaching engagements and experiences.

In this article, we specifically reflect on the effectiveness of partnering with MSMEs to improve pedagogy, andragogy, and ethnogogy by integrating "education *about* and *for* sustainability" into tourism curricula, while simultaneously providing quality learning-teaching engagements and experiences. We recognize that "quality" is a contested term (Urry, 2002) with "multiple definitions and interpretations" (Jennings, 2006, p. 8) influenced by social, cultural, temporal, political and context specificities as well as user subjectivities (Urry, 2002; Jennings, 2006). For us, quality learning-teaching engagements and experiences are defined as those, which are well founded on educational philosophy and principles; professional praxis; cohort, context and real world relatedness; and which optimize authentic, socially constructed, individualized and collective learning. In this article, only one stakeholder group narrates the reflections on the effectiveness of partnering; this group is the academic research-team members.

Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises

Why did we choose to focus on SMSEs? In 2001, MSMEs/businesses accounted for 97 per cent of private-sector businesses in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS, 2001). In 2007, there were around 2 million small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMSEs)(ABS, 2010). These same enterprises employed approximately 42 per cent of total employed persons in Australia (ABS, 2010). In particular, between 2010-2012, the Australian tourism industry was constituted of MSMEs, with approximately 90 per cent of micro and small enterprises employing less than 20 employees (Tourism Research Australia, 2013). Our focus on micro to medium enterprises was instituted to redistribute knowledge and power, with regard to research partnerships, from traditionally included large-scale corporations to MSMEs. The latter by nature of the scale of their enterprises are often marginalized from participation. Although small in scale, they are large in number and tend to be "othered" with regard to knowledge and skills (see Getz *et al.*, 2004; Chatterton and Goddard, 2000 in Gunasekara, 2004). Our research team sought to redress this.

In defining SMSEs, our study used the Australian Bureau of Statistics' definitions of MSMEs. Micro enterprises employ less than 5 staff, small enterprises employ between

6-19 staff and medium enterprises employ from 20 up to 200 staff (ABS, 2001). We drew on a number of tourism MSMEs types, adventure travel, marine tourism, intermediates/ supply chain integrators, the transportation sector, experience providers, and ecotourism. In total, 11 tourism MSMEs participated in our study. The enterprises were contacted through various industry associations and groups, networks, as well as via researchers' personal connections with individual operators. These personal connections were important for:

> A key condition for the pursuit of real-life exercises in industry […], is the necessity for a mature relationship between the educational and industrial participants. (Ball, 1995, p. 22).

Why a focus on sustainability?

Sustainability as a value in education (Barber *et al.*, 2014) is recognized as a potential "motor for change" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2013, p. 3). Graduates have the potential to be "change agents" to achieve this value in society (America, 2014) through valuing "stewardship" (Sheldon *et al.*, 2009, p. 3; Jamal, 2004, p. 136). The incorporation of sustainability as a value was part of our university's values. All team members were keen advocates of "education about and for sustainability". Additionally, our action research study was part of a larger national study. The national study had a central aim to embed education about and for sustainability in business schools in Australia through partnerships between business schools and corporations. The parameters of the national study required all participants to engage in "collaborative research, informed by EfS principles and Action Research to build engagement and capacity" (ARIES, 2008a). The term "education for sustainability" has its roots in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit Agenda 21, Chapter 36 and in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (ARIES, 2008b). Both terms "education about and for sustainability" became widely applied during the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

The term "education about sustainability" (EaS) refers to declarative knowledge sets associated with sustainability. Declarative knowledge focuses on the facts and steps of processes, the "what" of knowledge (Taylor, 1999, p. 2). "Education for sustainability" (EfS) relates to procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge moves beyond declarative knowledge to enactment and application – the "how" (Taylor, 1999, p. 2) and "why" uses of knowledge. Specifically, for our context, five key principles were shaped and embedded in our "education for sustainability" delivery: "[i]maging a better future: envisioning or futures thinking, systemic thinking, critical (reflective) thinking, participation in decision-making and partnerships for change" (ARIES, 2008b, p. 9).

External to our Australian context, similar distinctions between "about" and "for" are mirrored in sustainability competencies (Sterling and Thomas, 2006; Barth *et al.*, 2007; Sipos *et al.*, 2008) and corporate social responsibility literature (Hesselbarth and Schaltegger, 2014). Across this literature, Brundiers *et al.* (2010, p. 310) identify three core sustainability competency sets: a "strategic knowledge cluster"; "practical knowledge cluster" and a "collaborative cluster". The strategic knowledge cluster involves applying declarative and procedural knowledge to assess, analyze, create and develop strategies for sustainable futures (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010). The practical knowledge cluster associates with transferring knowledge into experiential practice (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010). The collaborative cluster of competencies incorporates the

development of effective team and stakeholder engagement skills (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010). The various knowledge and skills sets resonate with the AQF's stated knowledge, skills and application of knowledge and skills for Bachelor and Master (coursework) degrees (AQFC, 2013, pp. 16-17). Additionally, the ARIES approach and aforementioned international approaches have strong synergies with respect to ARIES' emphasis on procedural knowledge, futuring and partnerships.

The university partner

The university action research team included four academic teaching staff and one project assistant. The assistant was also a part-time tutor and PhD student. Two undergraduate and one postgraduate courses were included in the study. The undergraduate courses contributed to the program of study for a Bachelor of Business in Tourism Management. Within the AQF, Bachelor degrees situate at Level 7 of 10 levels. Graduates of a Bachelor degree are deemed to be able to "apply a broad and coherent body of knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake professional work […]" (AQFC, 2013, p. 16). Graduates of a postgraduate Master degree (Level 9) are able to "apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts for professional practice […]" (AQFC, 2013, p. 60). At both Levels 7 and 9 of the AQF, skill sets include the ability to think critically and technically (AQFC, 2013, p. 11, p. 17). The postgraduate course was not a capstone course; it was an elective in a Master of Business Administration (Tourism Management).

The three courses involved in this action research study were convened and taught by three different academics. The fourth academic participating in the research team did not use action research in courses taught. The two undergraduate courses focused on tourism enterprises, ecotourism and the postgraduate course on current issues in leisure and tourism. Only one of the courses, the undergraduate ecotourism course, explicitly made a statement regarding sustainability: "to apply knowledge of sustainable ecotourism to management practices" (Griffith University, 2008a). The other undergraduate course and the postgraduate course focused on embedding "education about and for sustainability" within their respective aims of: "to develop an understanding of the principles and contextual issues relating to the operational practices and challenges, when managing a tourism enterprise" (Griffith University, 2008b); and "to demonstrate an appreciation of policy frameworks […], and issues related to the management of tourism and hospitality, sport- and leisure-related events" (Griffith University, 2008c). All course's aims emphasized critical thought and tourism or event management technical skills. In all courses, the concept of sustainability was embedded in teaching-learning engagements. Wilson and von der Heidt (2013) state that little research has been undertaken with regard to the embedding of sustainability in courses. Our research contributes to that gap in the literature.

Building procedural knowledge for real world contexts

In determining our learning-teaching engagements for the development of procedural knowledge in our courses, we reflected on the composition of our student cohorts; pedagogy, the practice of teaching; androgogy, the practice of teaching adult learners (Knowles *et al.*, 2005); and ethnogogy, the practice of teaching students from differing cultural backgrounds (Phillips, 1994). Our collective learning-teaching engagements were informed by the principles of action learning (Revans, 1980), experiential learning

(see the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Kurt Lewin, as well as Kolb, 1984), critical reflection and reflexivity (Hertz, 1997). Each of these, recognize that learning is a social process of "sensemaking" (Weick, 1995) and "meaning making" (Schwandt, 2000). Relatedly, sensemaking for meaning is best achieved via process (procedural) rather than content-based (declarative) learning. Our learning contexts were also socially structured using seven conditions for learning (Cambourne, 1984): immersion, demonstration, approximation, expectation, responsibility, practice and feedback. These are briefly outlined below:

(1) *Immersion*: In culture, skills, praxis and provision of "real world" models' examples.

(2) *Demonstration*: Both formally and informally, showing process-in-use, that is, "real world" contexts.

(3) *Approximation*: "Having a go", trying out the skills and "rules", making "miscues", refining knowledge and skills.

(4) *Expectation*: "Teacher" and learner expect to be successful.

(5) *Responsibility*: Learner is responsible for engaging in learning teaching engagements.

(6) *Practice*: Using and modifying learnings to improve skills, knowledge and competencies.

(7) *Feedback*: Gaining timely and constructive feedback (Cambourne, 1984).

Furthermore, to enhance knowledge sets, skills and competencies about and for sustainability, we drew from a suite of real world learning-teaching engagements. In particular, we chose to use real-life exercises, communities of practice and profession-based learning that specifically linked to our MSME industry partners.

As the term suggests, real-life exercises situate students in "real-life experiential learning situations and require them [students] to apply theory to actual industrial circumstances and issues" (Ball, 1995, p. 20). Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) capitalize on social processes and emphasize community, identity, meaning and practice. Within communities of practice frameworks, the term *community* is used in the sense of "communitas" (Turner, 1969, p. 78) that is *belonging*. *Identity* is associated with *becoming* a member of a specific community, in our study, *tourism professionals for sustainability*. By including profession-based learning:

[…] learning and teaching engagements […] [were] founded on building a professional culture of praxis in and with the learner. Such profession-based learning experiences […] engender culture – "communitas" (*belonging*) beyond formal learning environments to incorporate "profession" – business and industry as well as enhance learning (Jennings *et al.*, 2007).

The use of profession-based learning enhances *meaning* as knowledge and processes are directly connected to professional practice. Such learning *experiences* embed *meaning* as does *practice*, that is, *doing* based on real-life scenarios, exercises and circumstances.

From pedagogy, andragogy, ethnogogy and real-world learning to practice
In this section, we overview the learning-teaching contexts of each of the courses: tourism enterprise, ecotourism and special issues in leisure and tourism.

Tourism enterprise course. The tourism enterprise course had 48 student enrolments. The real-world learning-teaching engagements involved university-industry teaching partnerships; which were linked to profession-based learning and simulations of real-life using role-play. Ten of thirteen × two-hour lectures included an industry guest speaker in the second hour. In their presentations, guest speakers were asked to include and address issues of sustainability; specifically, how sustainability impacts on both operational and overall management of their enterprises. Volunteer students from the class chaired each industry session. These students met industry speakers, introduced, timed, facilitated questioning, summarized the key points and thanked the speakers. Industry speakers commented that student questions caused the speakers to think more critically and reflexively about sustainability issues. Guest speakers, as real-world sources, translated theory into contemporary practice. Students positively evaluated these sources of Mode 2 knowledge production.

After each guest speaker session, speaker-related foci were used to organize tutorial learning. Tutorial learning was organized around simulation of real world applications through role plays. The role plays included industry panels, public debates and issues-based scenarios. The role plays were effective in engaging students with varying stakeholder perspectives.

In addition to industry speakers and role play, every assessment task required students to think like managers of tourism enterprises and reflect on sustainability issues. Instead of a final exam, each week, students maintained a reflective journal. The journal was used to encourage students, as future managers, to critically think about the lecture content, sustainability, their specific majors, to find other sources and to do their own independent research.

With sustainability as a weekly theme and using profession-based learning and real-life simulation, students were constantly reflecting about sustainability and their role as future professionals. Consequently, EfS principles (ARIES, 2008b) along with strategic, practical and collaborative competencies (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010) were developed and rehearsed.

Ecotourism-focused course. The ecotourism-focused course involved 62 students. This course was an elective course. Its central aim was to ground students in conceptual understandings that would translate into well-founded professional practice for the establishment, maintenance and management of ecotourism experiences. In particular, as would be expected with a focus on ecotourism, one of the course objectives was to couple sustainable ecotourism knowledge with germane management practices. From an "education for sustainability" perspective, critical thinking conceptualization activities were conducted in classes and one of the exam questions engaged students in problematizing sustainability. The question required students to demonstrate understanding from a number of stakeholder positions and theoretical viewpoints.

Real-world learning-teaching engagements involved a real-life exercise of critiquing tour operators and preparing an industry report. Students could either self-select a site or link with the tour operators with whom the course convenor had partnered for the purposes of our action research study. To conduct the critiques, all students undertook site inspections. For the 13 students, who chose to participate in the optional action-research course-assessment, these critiques were submitted to the tour operators for comment, evaluation and then returned to the students. The course convenor was the mediator for this exchange. The direct partnering between industry and university

resulted in a two-way exchange. Students transferred theory into practice and received feedback from the industry partner as well as the course convenor. This Mode 2 knowledge production caused one operator to comment "[…] the student showed creative and insightful thinking and had a few innovative ideas – some of which I liked and may implement". As well as addressing the five key ARIES (2008b) EfS principles, the elective course developed strategic, practical and collaborative competencies (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010).

Current issues in leisure and tourism. The postgraduate course focused on current issues in leisure and tourism and involved 40 students. The real-life learning-teaching engagements in this course included a real-life exercise of critiquing an industry workbook with regard to measuring sustainability and critiquing a tourism or leisure management. Although education for sustainability was a major pillar of the course, the course's remit went beyond solely education for sustainability. Assessment in this course required each student to complete an issues paper.

Two parallel learning-teaching paths were offered to students. Most students chose to study a specific issue in leisure management relevant to their personal interests and values. The remaining students opted to partner with an MSME. In doing this, they joined a community of practice with the course convenor and a marine tourism operator. Students critically evaluated an ecotourism workbook, partook in a related tourism experience with full access and observed and evaluated the operation from a sustainability perspective. There was a particular focus on sustainability principles associated with climate change, as well as energy and water usage. Students commented that engagement with industry from a sustainability context helped to develop their contextual knowledge as well as their research skills and reporting strategies. The students' work produced a baseline for benchmarking and for the development of future policies, guidelines and travel experiences. Students presented their work as an oral and written report to the operator during a final meeting.

This university-industry partnership directly contributed to the tour operator's accreditation process, providing another example of Mode 2 knowledge production. The students in the SMSE path intensively engaged with the key ARIES education for sustainability principles (ARIES, 2008b) as well as developed strategic, practical and collaborative competencies (Brundiers *et al.*, 2010).

Our individual course approaches reflect similarities with curricula predicated on developing philosophical practitioners (Tribe, 2002) and reflective action-oriented practitioners (Dredge *et al.*, 2012). Wherein, philosophical practitioner graduates are able to engage in both liberal and vocational reflection in conjunction with liberal and vocational action (Tribe, 2002). Whereas, reflective action-oriented practitioners are able to engage in "manag[ing] change in positive, creative world-making ways" (Dredge *et al.*, 2012, p. 5).

Study methodology
As already stated and required by contract obligations, our study used action research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Action research is informed by a participatory paradigm (Heron and Reason, 2008). This paradigm views the world as a collective construction of realities generated by the self with others. Such realities are reflexively shaped, socially situated and embodied. Research is value laden and transformative in nature (Heron and Reason, 2008).

The action research model recommended by ARIES followed successive cycles of issue identification, planning and designing action research strategies, enacting strategies, gathering information on enactments, monitoring and observing enactments, reflecting and evaluating enactments, learning and communicating (ARIES, 2008b). Table I represents our translation of the ARIES model.

In conjunction with action research, the research team incorporated critical theory (Jennings, 2009) with specific regard to the nature of business partners. Critical theory orientation views the world as power relation constructions and essays to provide emancipation and, like the participatory paradigm, transformation. Critical theory orientation assumes knowledge is generated by an (inter)subjective-objective interplay (Jennings, 2009). Given the use of participatory and critical theory orientation and related inter-subjective interplays, our action research was informed by a qualitative methodology and associated methods.

Methods
The main methods used included: lived experience (van Manen, 1990), reflexivity (Hertz, 1997), reflexive team conversations, team journals, reflective dialogues and reflective journals. Each of these is briefly overviewed in turn. *Lived experience* involves "a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (van Manen, 1990, p. 36), in this case, the participatory action research process of partnering with MSMEs to improve pedagogy, andragogy and ethnogogy by integrating "education *about* and *for* sustainability" into tourism curricula. *Reflexivity* is about "ways of seeing which act back on and reflect existing ways of seeing" (Clegg and Hardy, 1996, p. 4 in Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000, p. 248). Reflexivity complements the action research stages of monitoring and observing, reflecting and evaluating and learning. *Reflexive team conversations* were held on a weekly, fortnightly or "at need" basis. Initially, these

ARIES action research process steps	Translation into practice in our study
Identifying an issue	The effectiveness of partnering with MSMEs to improve pedagogy, andragogy and ethnogogy by integrating "education *about* and *for* sustainability" into tourism curricula
Planning and designing the action research strategies	Review student cohorts, course outlines and contact partners; review pedagogy, androgogy and ethnogogy's, real-world learning-teaching experiences; modify courses, peer review course outlines
Enacting the strategies	Lived experiences of delivery of tourism enterprise, ecotourism-focussed and special issues in leisure and tourism courses and partnering with industry
Gathering information on the enactment	Lived experiences of teaching staff, students and MSME partners, course materials, student materials
Monitoring and observing the enactment	Lived experiences, student materials, reflexive team conversations, team journals, reflective dialogues and weekly reflective journals
Reflecting and evaluating the enactment	Lived experiences of teaching staff, students and MSME partners, course materials, student materials, assessment items; student and partner feedback; reflexive team conversations, team journals, reflective dialogues and weekly reflective journals
Learning and communicating	Making changes, write reports, writing this article

Table I.
Action research processes translated into practice

conversations were manually recorded using key point notes. With the appointment of a project assistant, digitized recordings of conversations were made. These were transcribed to capture the depth of conversation rather than only previous key actions and modifications to action learning and research cycles. These transcriptions became our team journal entries. In addition to team conversations, each convenor had a *reflective dialogue* with the project assistant to assist with weekly reflections regarding the study. A range of topics/questions was used to focus each team member's reflections on EaS and EfS with students. The range of topics as a question list for convenor reflections is provided below:

(1) What changes have you made to the course?
(2) What were you doing before?
(3) How are you teaching sustainability?
(4) What changes have you had in your reflections in the study?
(5) What has it been like in the (first/last) (this) week(s)?
(6) Are the students interested?
(7) Have you asked baseline questions?
(8) What could we do better?
(9) What was your focus for this week?
(10) What was the sustainability related teaching/learning engagement?
(11) How did the students respond to it?
(12) If there is an assessment item coming up, how are you preparing the students for it and how does it associate with sustainability?
(13) How have you found student participation in the ARIES related side of the course?
(14) Have you had any assessment at this point in time and when are the due dates for assessment?
(15) Anything extra that you want to comment on related to the students' activities?

Study team members initially kept individual *reflective journals*, which were replaced by these *reflective dialogues*.

The variety of methods used enabled the team to "crystallize" (Richardson, 2000) the varying facets of the study as well as the three individual course-related action-learning cycles. We acknowledge that we do not provide an "exact" representation of all of the multiple perspectives/realities of all study participants/stakeholders in this study. We iterate that our intention in this article is to provide our perspectives as university partner members, that is, the academic research team members, and acknowledge that these represent only some facets of our collective stakeholder lived experiences.

Reflections on action research processes

In the main, three reflections are germane here with regard to action research processes. First, the regular sharing and critical reflection by team members regarding course design, in-class delivery, assessment and student-industry interactions generated on-going improvements in the quality of learning-teaching engagements and

experiences throughout the life of the study. In particular, peer interaction increased reflexivity and critical thinking regarding the overall and individual course action research cycles. We lament that such peer interaction is an under-utilized strategy in university environments.

Second, at the individual course convenor level, weekly journal writing was replaced with reflective dialogue with the research assistant. These dialogues or metaphoric "couch sessions" ensured regularity of reflections, constant monitoring and adjustment of "classroom praxis" and teaching styles in accordance with action learning principles.

Third, and external to course delivery, in terms of praxis, the linkage of teaching, research and industry enabled research team members to champion sustainability not only in courses and programs but also in "walking the talk" and influencing daily organizational operating procedures and university culture.

Outcomes of our action research for courses

As a result of action research in the three courses, a number of process outcomes were achieved. First, the study team gained an increased awareness of practical methods of embedding learning teaching processes related to sustainability. Second, participation in this study influenced other course developments. For example, in a course convened by one of the co-researchers not directly engaged in the courses in this action research, critical thinking activities were introduced into tutorial discussions. This was a change from the course's usual computer-based and focused pedagogy. Third, a focus on critical thinking across all courses was explicit in all learning-teaching engagements and students were aware of this skill emphasis and development. Fourth, in several of the courses, the inclusion of student assessment tasks as feedback to industry partners meant that such assessment became a real -life experience of professional review and critique. Real-world learning beyond a vocational focus was achieved in regard to EaS and EfS.

Theorizing this action research study: Effectiveness of partnering

Drawing on our reflective and reflexive accounts, the effectiveness of partnering can be theorized thus:

> […] quality learning-teaching engagements ensue when pedagogies, andragogies and ethnogogies that emphasise social processes of meaning making and sensemaking enhance and engender "education about sustainability" and "education for sustainability", especially when coupled with real world learning as a platform for social and profession-building processes between university students, micro, small and medium tourism entrepreneurs and teaching staff.

This theory is visually represented in Figure 1. The figure emphasizes quality learning-teaching engagements and experiences are related to the connectivity between the social processes of meaning making and sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Schwandt, 2000) associated with university Tourism Studies students, MSMEs, and course teaching staff; and with pedagogical (Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin), andragogical (Knowles *et al.*, 2005) and ethnogogical perspectives (Phillips, 1994). In particular, based on our experiences, quality education about and for sustainability is engendered and enhanced, when the social processes-oriented learning principles of action learning (Revans, 1980), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), seven conditions of learning (Cambourne, 1984), profession-based learning (Jennings *et al.*, 2007), communities of
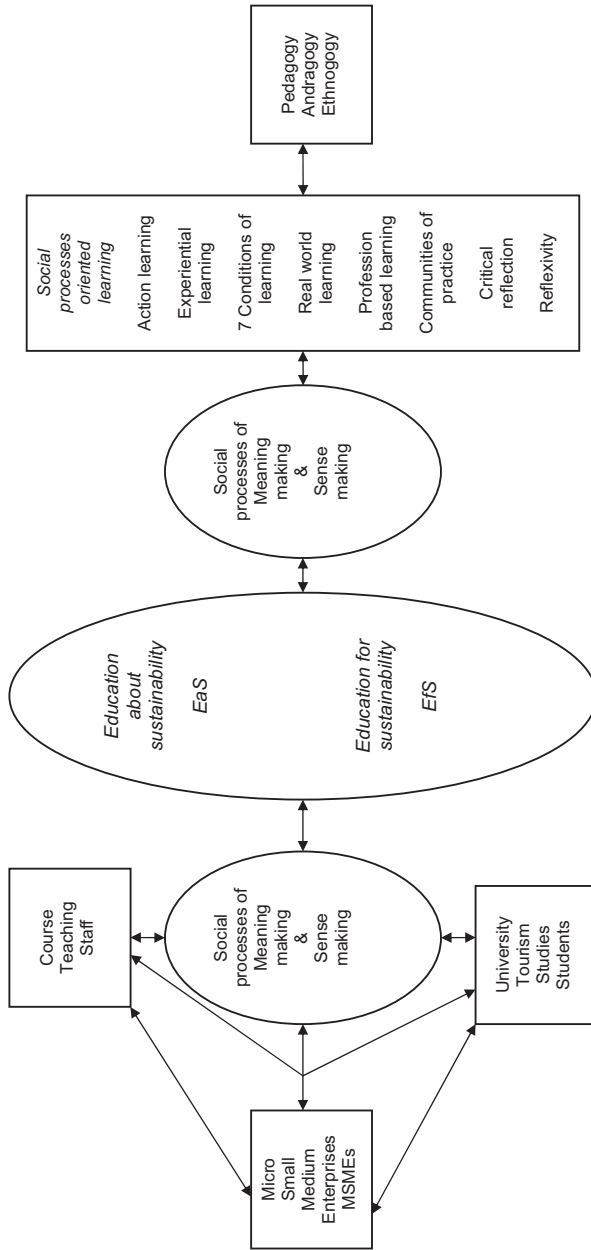
Figure 1.
Theorizing action research: toward quality learning-teaching engagements and experiences - Partnering for education about and for sustainability in tourism education using real world learning

practice (Wenger, 1998) and critical reflection and reflexivity (Hertz, 1997) support meaning making and sensemaking learning-teaching engagements. Like Brundiers *et al.*, (2010, p. 309), we similarly advocate "integrating real-world learning opportunities into undergraduate sustainability education, [and] […] graduate programs".

In summary, our action research study achieved the development and application of a quality-founded practical learning-based model of curricula change, which was applied by tourism studies faculty, students, businesses and corporations. It also emphasized that development of effective teaching programs that incorporate tourism industry partners, in our study, MSMEs, facilitates change in curricula. This action research study reinforced the power of establishing a mutual learning environment with industry partner organizations to demonstrate theory into action and to reinforce the social processes of learning for conveners, tourism industry partners and students. The particular approach of embedding EaS and EfS into course work and assessment meant that the students were required to engage with real-world issues that extended beyond the focus of vocational issues. Students would have been ill equipped to deal with the requirements of their study if there had only been a focus on vocational aspects. Relatedly, when AQF requirements of real world learning-teaching engagements are founded on well-established pedagogical, andragogical and ethnogogical principles, quality learning-teaching engagements ensue.

As a result of our participation in this action research study, we encourage readers to reflect on the quality and effectiveness of their own classroom practices and praxis with specific regard to "education *about* sustainability" and "education *for* sustainability". We also encourage readers to undertake their own action research studies with a particular focus on EfS, as an effective tool to implement change in their curricula design, classroom practice and praxis. Real-world learning through teaching praxis has the capacity to engage students in EfS, which simultaneously operates with neoliberal systems and can challenge the very mechanisms of neoliberal tourism education.

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