

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

AN EXPLORATION OF THE
NATURE OF STUDENTS' SOFT
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE
CONTEXT OF EXPERIENTIAL
EDUCATION IN CONTRASTING
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, MEDICINE AND SOCIAL CARE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Higher Education within the UK has been subjected to extensive change since the turn of the twenty-first century. Government intervention, massification, and the standardised measurement of institutions, has resulted in students adopting the role of consumer; seeking a tangible value from their education and a return on their financial investment. Furthermore, the widely-documented skills gap and the expanding demands of employers have prompted institutions and educators to consider a range of innovative pedagogies and programmes.

This study explores a specific pedagogic method; experiential education; and the impact this active-learning approach can have upon an undergraduate's soft skill development. It considers the intersection between contrasting higher educational programmes, employer demands, and student needs.

Through a nested case study approach, this naturalistic, constructionist study utilises symbolic interactionism within a thematic analysis of qualitative data. The study explores two groups of undergraduate business management students; one traditional group, and one group of degree apprentices. Through the triangulation (Alvesson, 2003) of teacher field notes, student reflective journals and focus group interviews, the following exploration is undertaken;

An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

The study found that a range of soft skills were developed by undergraduate students through experiential education. The findings determined that soft skills were more deeply and broadly developed within students who: were afforded freedom to act autonomously; focused on experiential projects rather than merely assessments; and who were able to experientially learn, both inside and outside of the classroom. The study also concluded that degree apprenticeships are a convenient vehicle for the development of soft skills within undergraduate business management study. A set of models arise from the study, which might function as a tool for researchers and practitioners, embarking upon practice within the field.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

This chapter provides the introduction to a study exploring the nature of student's soft skill development in the context of experiential education across contrasting business management undergraduate programmes. It contains an overview of the Higher Educational landscape within the UK and the challenges faced by institutions. The chapter introduces the rationale for the study, states its aims and objectives, and frames the context for the study; inclusive of my positionality and background. Section 1.4 offers a holistic overview of the thesis. Section 1.5 introduces the research topic, exploratory statement and research sub-questions, and section 1.6 introduces the original theoretical and practical contributions which this study offers to the field.

2. Overview of difficulties faced within the UK higher educational landscape

The following sub-section will present an overview of the higher education landscape within the UK between 2016 and 2020.

2.1 Government Intervention

The purpose of universities has long been a contentious issue. What one is; what one is for; what one should and should not be doing; and even the idea of universities themselves has been greatly pondered, (Barnett, 2021; Collini, 2018; Busch, Bowker, & Edwards, 2017; Peters and Barnett, 2018) and the landscape of Higher Education within the UK is an ever-evolving one. In recent years, government economic policies, interventions and a neo-liberal discourse has: shaped curricula (Bernstein, 2000), led to increased unitization and commodification (Collini, 2018), and influenced the ways in which universities are measured; despite such measurements creating opportunities for universities to manipulate results and to game the system (Caulkin, 2018).

2.2 Massification

Recent massification has led to larger class sizes, and has subsequently produced a growing number of graduates entering the labour market (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). These increased student numbers and pressure upon institutions to produce measurable outcomes has posed a challenge to universities seeking to deliver a quality education and to promote student learning (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Furthermore, the autonomy of learning designers has become endangered by the intervention of government who have sought to shape the nature of universities. Higher education institutions have been forced, through massification, to change their frameworks to reflect that of a commercial enterprise (Naidoo, 2005). As such, academic integrity and quality has been questioned whilst universities have created business models which view the student as a consumer who is more likely to seek a return on their investment – often in the form of tangible benefits such as demonstrable skills or an increased salary (Fletcher, 2017).

2.3 In compromise of learning quality

There is a belief that the number of students within a class – which has increased during the period of massification – has had an adverse effect upon the quality of the learning experience (Cuseo, 2007). However, whilst the issue of class sizes is not seen as a distinguishing feature of student performance, in and of itself (McKeachie, 1980), it is considered to hold a limiting influence upon engagement, problem solving and critical thinking amongst students (McKeachie 1980; Cooper and Robinson 2000; Mulryan-Kyne 2010). This is exacerbated by the environment of league tables, quantitative performance measurement and the new consumerist attitude of students.

2.4 The measurement of universities

A cultural shift has occurred within the higher education sector over the past decade. The increasing emergence of degree apprenticeships and the notion of graduate attributes and employability skills has seen a shift in focus, partially caused by the ways in which universities and the success of their courses are now measured –

through quantitative measurements such as the National Student Survey (NSS) which measures student satisfaction levels, and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) survey which publishes data on graduate earnings across all higher educational establishments registered with the Office For Students. These factors place increasing pressure upon HEIs to be more target driven and to compete with other institutions to create what the OfS deem to be 'better' student outcomes (Hazelkorn, 2008). One effect of these drivers is that HEIs feel pressured to ensure that graduates, or consumers, are equipped with successful measurable outcomes. Some benefits of relevant new pedagogies, such as classroom teaching initiatives, work-based learning and degree apprenticeships, are still to be fully explored, however.

2.5 Student-consumers expect a 'valuable' education

There is now an expectation upon universities to provide students with a *valuable* education. Barnett (2010) suggests that a student must, to some extent, educate themselves. This calls into question the notion of exactly what a student is paying for when they enrol upon a degree programme. Newman (2016) asserted that universities should serve society through a collegial approach, rather than seeking to serve an individual or an enterprise. However, Caplan (2018) argues that individuals paying for a university education might fairly prioritise their own interests rather than ensuring value for money for the taxpayer. Apprenticeships, however, may offer benefits for both the apprentice and the employer, who will ultimately be providing them with a salary. Further debate exists over what constitutes value. Wolf (2002; 2016) presents the idea that value is measurable through the salary a graduate earns, in comparison to the salary they would earn without a degree. However, determining the financial value of a degree can be misleading as many students have studied prior to degree level study, and many are aware of the job they wish to work towards, therefore increasing their intrinsic motivation. Another way in which the student-consumer seeks value is through their employability or their skills development.

2.6 Employability and the skills gap

The need to fill national and local skills gaps has, in part, become the preserve of universities. Employers have demonstrated their high expectations of graduates by questioning the abilities and competencies of their graduate recruits in recent years (Confederation of British Industry Review of Education and Skills in the Workplace, 2019). This leads one to consider the ever-increasing importance of employability and its link to professional competence and skills development. The importance of soft skills is prominent within employers, and thus this study has sought to explore ways in which those skills can be developed, in order to assist students entering today's workforce. Furthermore, the study considers the role that work-based learning, experiential education and degree apprenticeships have in the HE landscape today, and how they might facilitate the development of those soft skills.

2.7 The expansion of work-based learning, experiential education and degree apprenticeships

Expectations upon universities, heightened by a varied programme delivery, has placed increased pressure upon the sector. In order for universities to compete within the marketised landscape, traditional classroom-based teaching is now being supplemented by work-based learning and degree apprenticeship programmes. This needs careful consideration from institutions (Fletcher, 2017). Barnett and Coates (2005) argue that curriculum should be deemed separately to pedagogy, and that whilst curriculum is a set of aims; pedagogy strives to realise those aims in the most efficacious way. This efficacy might be realised through supporting students to be self-directed (Petty, 1998), nurturing students through regular assessment and measuring of development (Vygotsky, 1978), and ensuring collaborative relationships between teachers and students (Hahn and John-Steiner, 2002).

There is, evidently, the potential for universities to reconsider their pedagogic approach. Some institutions have utilised modern learning and teaching approaches within their programmes to provide students with the skills and attitudes to thrive in a complex labour market (Edge Foundation, 2021). Within the UK these include Cardiff University's National Software Academy, Dyson Institute of Engineering, Eden

Project Learning and The University of Salford. Similarly, Minerva Schools at the Keck Graduate Institute in the US offer a good example of the integration of experiential learning within an institution. However, the vast majority of these active learning initiatives are being delivered within practical programmes such as engineering, design and technology. They are far less prevalent within business management programmes.

Other universities have begun to consider how modern, experiential approaches should form a major part of their learning and teaching strategy. For example, Anglia Ruskin University have developed a framework for an inclusive curriculum which is incorporated within an Active Curriculum (Active Curriculum Framework, Anglia Ruskin University, 2017). This framework demonstrates a thorough and comprehensive institutional drive towards an active, inclusive curriculum. It aims to ensure that student's "educational experience engages, challenges and empowers them to reach their full potential" by: embedding critical enquiry skills; building confidence, and; fostering enterprising, entrepreneurial and creative mind-sets. The framework offers a range of practical considerations for educators, such as how to embed: inclusive assessment and classroom practice; diversification of the curriculum, personalised learning. Furthermore, the promotion of students acting as co-creators, inquiry-based education, authentic assessment, co and extra-curricula learning and real-world work opportunities are all included within the framework and guidance to teaching staff. The University of Northampton are a complementary example of how some institutions have chosen to move away from a traditional lecture-seminar approach. In their recent campus move, their new Waterside Campus does not contain any lecture theatres and the institution have advocated the use of Active Blended Learning within the curriculum (Northampton.ac.uk, 2020). Further exploration of the changing nature of learning and teaching initiatives is explored within section 3.4 of the literature review: the pedagogic design of degree apprenticeships.

However, despite moves towards more active approaches by some institutions, traditional approaches to university teaching are still prominent (Helder & Brent, 2016; Gerba, 2012; Goubeaud & Yan, 2004). The assumption that there is a significant knowledge gap between a lecturer and their students; and the view that

lectures are effective because ‘they exploit the spontaneous human aptitude for learning from spoken - rather than written - information’ (Charlton, 2006) is one which perpetuates the need for large-scale dissemination of information to those who are deemed to lack the aforementioned knowledge. These lectures do not, however, appear to meet the need for intra-group discussion or its associated benefits. Neither do lectures appear to aid the development of student’s soft skills – something which universities should consider to be within their aims and objectives; in addition to the gaining of knowledge.

To conclude this section, whilst other institutions are examining and promoting the utilisation of modern, active, experiential approaches there is a knowledge and practice gap which needs further exploration – there is an absence of evidence to demonstrate the adoption of these pedagogic approaches for the benefit of student’s soft skill development, particularly within business management programmes.

2.8 The developing role of the teacher - Teaching for knowledge and for practice

The development of varied curricula, the drive towards work-based learning and degree apprenticeships, and the ever-widening skills gap leads to the potential for a new teaching approach – teaching for practice, not merely knowledge. However, Elton (2010) argues that this may be abnormal for many university academics, as they tend to teach as they were taught, which leads to little research of teaching and assessment. This view is supported by Rushton (2014) who espouses that trainee teachers adopt the norms and pedagogic methods of experienced lecturers around them, and by Caplan (2018) who espouses that those entering the profession are too scared to challenge its cultural norms. This poses a predicament to universities who must now meet the ever-increasing demands of their students.

It is asserted by Boud and Symes (2000) that work-based learning, such as degree apprenticeship programmes, has a focus on learning, rather than on teaching, where the customer replaces the student and the teacher becomes more of a facilitator (Roodhouse & Mumford, 2010; Mabletoft, 2020), but I believe this distils the role of

the educator to too great an extent. This study views work-based learning as a branch of experiential education, and asserts that the role of the learning designer and teacher is crucial. The onus, arising from these factors, is placed upon universities to ensure they foster environments where relationships can be built, and where learning and development happens. This does not need to eradicate the important role of teaching, rather it ought to strengthen it by both ensuring knowledge is gained via teaching for knowledge, whilst skills are developed through facilitation for practice.

2.9 Review of difficulties faced within the UK higher educational landscape

This section has highlighted the ways in which universities have evolved over recent years. It summarises how government policies and interventions have caused a massification in the sector leading to increased student numbers, more graduates entering the workforce than ever before and an arguable reduction in educational quality. Furthermore, the ever-widening skills gap and increase in work-based learning programmes such as degree apprenticeships, has prompted the need for pedagogic change in order that student-consumers, employers and taxpayers can see greater returns upon their investment and so that the skills gaps can be closed through student soft skill development.

In the following sub-section, the chapter will consider the rationale for the research study, gaps within the relative research fields, and the aims and objectives of the study.

3. Rationale

3.1 Need for this study

There is a wide variety of terms for teaching methods: pedagogy, andragogy, mystagogy, and synergogy (Parslow, 2006; Mouton & Blake, 1984; Barnett, 2012). For the purpose of simplicity, this thesis will continue to use the term pedagogy, meaning ‘the method or practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or a theoretical concept’.

The study reviews the emerging literature surrounding both traditional undergraduate students and degree apprentices, and collects data from their participation in experiential learning activities. From conducting a review of the literature, it was evident that institutions, employers and governmental departments view degree apprenticeships as an emerging market with a high level of importance being placed upon them (Mulkeen et al, 2017). Whilst teaching and learning are considered by many to be secondary to the political aims of governments (Fletcher, 2017), the expansion of student numbers and the need for skills development requires the design of a suitable pedagogy to encapsulate academic knowledge alongside practical, experiential, work-based learning.

Experiential education is the process of learning through doing, or, more specifically, learning through the reflection upon doing (Kolb, 1984). It is becoming more prevalent within adult education and is distinct from the role of didactic education which has been more traditionally used in higher education (Miettinen, 2000). The study, through a review of the literature, examines what is meant by experiential education, which has recently seen a renewed interest amongst educational literature and practice due to the changing dynamics of universities and an increased focus on employability. However, traditionally, lecturers have practiced a more didactic approach through formal use of lectures and seminars as opposed to practical group work. This is particularly the case within certain programmes such as business management and law.

There is an increasing concern that some universities are struggling to balance their competing priorities of a quality education, commercial success and strong graduate outcomes; much of which has been influenced by the neoliberal discourse of

government and the outside influence of employers. This, along with the growing need to develop graduate skills in order to aid employability, has prompted this study, which explores the use of experiential education as a potential vehicle for soft skill development.

The literature review uncovered a number of gaps within the field, which there is urgent need to explore further. These are summarised within the following sub-section.

3.2 Gaps within the field

The major research findings that currently exist within the field of experiential education are theoretical concepts which state over-arching beliefs and models, rather than detailed, practical steps which teachers and learning designers might consider implementing. There has also been no detailed exploration of the link between experiential education and the extensive range of soft skills development within a UK higher education context. Furthermore, it is surprising that the effects of experiential pedagogies upon either traditional undergraduate business management programmes or degree apprenticeships have not been investigated. This study sets out to address these gaps.

Furthermore, given that employers within degree apprenticeship programmes are not comfortable with teaching the knowledge part of the course (Mulkeen et al, 2019) and that work-based learning often contains two distinct elements: academic classroom learning and practical on-the-job learning, there is scope for a re-design of the degree apprenticeship, ensuring that flexible learning, which fits around the learners lifestyle (Carter, 2010; Bravenboer, 2016; Rowe et al, 2016), is offered. Additionally, there have been advocates for the design of a pedagogic method (Mulkeen et al, 2019), distinctive to degree apprenticeships, which has not yet been practically realised. This study sets out to explore the effectiveness of experiential learning methods within two contrasting groups of undergraduate business

management students, and the ways in which such methods affect the development of their soft skills. Such a study has, to my knowledge, not been conducted previously.

4. Aims and objectives

The aim of this study was to explore experiential education within a Business Management undergraduate course across two parallel student groups; traditional full-time students and degree apprentices. The study examined the value of experiential education in the development of soft skills within the two sets of student participants. This encapsulated the type of soft skills which emerged, the conditions which prompted them to develop and the potential that this pedagogic method might have upon future educational practice.

The objective of the study was to conduct a nested case study in order to uncover findings and to make meaning from them. A multi-method approach was taken, whereby teacher field notes, student reflective logs and focus group interviews were undertaken in order to allow the study to naturalistically emerge through symbolic interactionism and a thematic analysis.

5. Context for the study

This section addresses the context of the study, with an illustration of my role as an insider-outsider researcher, my ontological and epistemological positions, and a summary of the setting within which the research study was conducted.

5.1 Positionality

The ontological position of this study is that experiential learning exists as a method for educating people. It differs from traditional learning, as students actively participate in their learning, through a range of interactive, authentic experiences, rather than learning through more didactic, passive methods, such as lectures. The ontology of degree apprenticeships considers that this form of learning differs from traditional undergraduate study due to the different schedule the students are subjected to. In example, degree apprenticeships spend eighty per cent of their week within the workplace, whereas traditional full-time students do not undertake work as a formal, compulsory part of their course.

The epistemological approach of this study is one of constructionism, where meaning is constructed, not discovered. The study undertook a systematic review of the literature. It explores the research statement and answers the sub-questions through the thematic analysis of symbolic interactionism in order to make further meaning from the central case study.

It should be noted that the study is not seeking to uncover a definitive *truth*. Such *truth* can only come into existence through the ways in which participants make sense of their actions and the world around them, and with how the researcher engages with the realities of the world in which they are researching (Crotty, 1998). This does not mean to say that *meaning* will not be constructed, though. Whilst meaning might be constructed in a variety of different ways, it is through that variety that a more generalisable understanding of reality might begin to emerge.

The research framework has been designed in order that subjective meanings can develop from the experiences within the study. The meanings may be varied and the analysis considers their complexity rather than simply narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. Furthermore, the study offers a construction of meaning from a specific set of circumstances. These have been generated inductively through patterns, meanings and theories which emerge from the symbolic interactionist thematic analysis.

The symbolic interactionist approach is appropriate for this study due to its exploration of a group of students who are working within a societal framework – a consequence of their experiential learning. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that addresses the ways in which face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions are created by individuals to maintain the society they live, work or play within (Carter and Fuller, 2015). The study sought to understand and explain a set of processes and how those processes create meaning. Thus it informs the case study methodological approach, which provides the potential for a high degree of internal validity for an insider-outsider researcher within their own setting.

The hermeneutic nature of this study is interpretive and seeks to better understand the constructionist nature of soft skill development of undergraduate students undertaking an experiential project.

In summary, considerations have been met to ensure the methodological design and methods of data collection are entirely appropriate for a study of this nature.

5.2 Positioning of the researcher - Insider-outsider research

The study has been undertaken by an insider-outsider researcher, and thus, the participants are known very well to myself, the researcher, as their teacher. There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to inside research which this study has considered, in order to ensure the research is ethical. One such advantage is the opportunity to ensure that the study gathers suitable and relevant data and that the data I am left to analyse is valid within the setting of the institution at which it has been collected. It may then add knowledge which can be used to inform the field of experiential educators. The study has considered the relationship that I have with the participants - one of a teacher-researcher, and the ethical considerations relating to the recruitment of participants. I have taken care to carefully describe and transcribe my findings with detailed evidence in order to ameliorate against bias that may arise from data which is not thoroughly documented, during the analysis process (Ballinger, 2006).

5.3 Professional background

For 13 years I have worked within the field of education. I have taught a variety of subjects within the disciplines of Law, within which I studied for an undergraduate and a Master's degree, and Business Management, which I taught following many years of practical field-based experience. Within my time working in the field of education I have held many roles across both public universities and private higher education institutions; Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Programme Manager and Vice Principal. Throughout my personal journey I have positively espoused the need for engaging learning activities within the classroom, as I strongly believe that engagement, and the enjoyment of learning, can positively influence student satisfaction and success. My experiences both as a student; where I was discouraged from entering the profession of Law due to the disengaging, didactic teaching methods of lecturers; and, more widely, as a teacher; offer anecdotal evidence suggesting that experiential learning may be more beneficial than traditional, didactic learning. My previous Post-Graduate Certificate of Education research demonstrated thus, and has led me to explore experiential education further within this doctoral study.

6. Setting and Participants

Having outlined my personal and professional rationale for the study, let me now move onto a summary of the setting and participants.

This study is set within a higher education institution. It is not a university as it cannot award its own degrees. The institution does, however, teach university undergraduate programmes and awards degrees through a validated model partnership agreement with a university. Therefore the terms university and Higher Education Institution (HEI) have been used interchangeably within the thesis.

This is a study of experiential education within two contrasting degree level Business Management programmes. The institution had also developed a pedagogy which promoted authentic, practical learning. This pedagogy was practiced largely within its degree apprenticeship programmes. However, the institution also delivered

traditional full-time undergraduate courses to students. The two cohorts were taught in parallel in the same institution, during the same semester and by the same teachers.

The study researched the programmes upon which I taught. Due to my position, at the time of the study - Head of Business Management and Degree Apprenticeship Programmes - I had easy access to student participants and was able to plan timetables to facilitate suitable data collection methods. This is outlined in further detail within Chapter 3 – Methodology.

Thus far the chapter has outlined the context of the study. What follows in the preceding sub-section is a holistic outline of the thesis.

7. Framework of the thesis

This first chapter provides an introduction to the context of the problem, the rationale for the research, a context for the study, an overarching framework of the thesis, the research statement and sub-questions which are being addressed, and some overview of the original theoretical and practical contributions to the field.

Chapter two provides an overview of the literature which encircles the fields of experiential education, degree apprenticeships and soft skill development. The chapter explores these three concepts, particularly within the scope of higher education in the UK and reviews the literature pertaining to undergraduate students with particular regard to the field of business management.

Chapter three outlines the methodological approach adopted for the research. The chapter explores the concepts of constructionism and naturalistic enquiry, and explains the rationale for adopting a nested case study approach. The chapter also outlines the positionality of the researcher, the credibility of the study, and the methods and tools used for data collection, namely; researcher field notes and observations, student reflective journals, and focus group interviews.

Chapter four highlights the significant findings emanating from the data. The chapter suggests a range of soft skills which were developed by the students within the experiential project they participated in; categorised into eleven themes and thirty-nine sub-themes. The chapter explores the soft skills developed through experiential learning activities, the nature of teacher facilitation within experiential education, the range of soft skills developed both within and externally to the classroom setting, the personal skills and characteristics which student participants developed, and the important part that reflexivity played within the development of student's soft skills.

Chapter five amalgamates the findings and discusses their significance to the field. The chapter determines the effects of experiential learning upon undergraduate soft skill development and explores the range of factors which affect that development.

Chapter six offers further interpretations of the findings and provides insight into the practical and theoretical contributions to the field via a range of interrelated models and theories.

Chapter seven directly addresses the research topic and sub-questions; and the scope and limitation of the study. This chapter offers conclusions to the exploration, suggestions for future work, suggests implications for the field of knowledge and tentative guidance to researchers and practitioners who are engaged within the fields of experiential education, degree apprenticeships and soft skill development. The chapter also addresses the implications the study has had upon my own practice and some reflections upon the study overall.

The following sub-section draws from the review of the literature to outline and offer rationale for the exploratory statement and research sub-questions which form the basis of the study.

8. Research statement and sub-questions

This chapter has demonstrated that higher education establishments within the UK face a number of competing pressures. It is thought that many of these pressures can be alleviated through a student-centred pedagogy which may also develop soft

skills, thus providing students, whether degree apprentices or traditional undergraduates, with long-term benefits which may aid their careers. This section will introduce the research statement and sub-questions.

Following a review of the literature and an analysis of the gaps contained within the field at the time of the study, the topics explored within this study are as follows;

Research statement (RS1):

An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

Research sub-questions:

RQ1) In what ways do students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ2) In what ways are experiential learning activities supported by teachers?

RQ3) What soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ4) What are the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes?

It must also be noted that for the purposes of this thesis the term *experiential education* refers specifically to the activities outlined in the course that was studied within the research setting. Whilst a range of experiential activities have been undertaken by the student participants the experiential education they entered into was specific to this programme and replication at another institution cannot be

assumed. Neither has the programme sought to duplicate any other types of experiential education.

9. Original theoretical and practical contributions to the field

Though much literature has been published within the fields of experiential education, apprenticeships and soft skill development, this study serves to address a gap within the research field and offers original theoretical and practical contributions to knowledge, as follows:

A first contribution to knowledge is the Integrated Experiential Education Approach Wheel (IEE). This is a model which highlights how practitioners can tailor a range of experiential approaches to suit their student body, to meet the learning outcomes of their programme and to address their pedagogic aims.

A second contribution to knowledge is the ExpEd framework and the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity. These models offer scope to ensure that practitioners and students are focused on the bigger picture of soft skill development through a thoughtful approach to experiential learning.

A third contribution to knowledge is the demonstration of the relationship between SLL (student-led learning) and SSD (soft skill development). The contribution highlights how allowing students the time and space to lead their own learning autonomously, might lead to more depth and breadth of soft skill development.

Theoretical and practical contributions to the field have been achieved within this study through the exploration of the effect of experiential education upon student's soft skill development. By using a nested case study approach and by gathering data through student reflective journals, teacher observations and field notes, and focus group interviews, the study has developed a series of contributions which are outlined through models and description within Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Therefore the study makes a contribution to research on experiential education and degree apprenticeships by demonstrating the ways in which experiential pedagogies might aid student's soft skill development.

10. Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter outlined the background and rationale for the research study, explaining the context of the study and outlining the three key themes of the research; experiential education, apprenticeships and soft skill development. The chapter also introduced the research statement and sub-questions. Furthermore, the chapter summarised the original and theoretical contributions which this study makes to the field.

In the next chapter I undertake a critical review of the literature related to three key areas; experiential education, apprenticeships and the development of soft skills. This review captures what is already known within the field and helps to shape this research study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review of the literature encompasses four distinct sections: (1) experiential education, (2) the pedagogy of business schools, (3) degree apprenticeships, and (4) the development of soft skills for students.

1. Experiential Education

This section reviews the experiential education landscape and demonstrates its importance within the modern, higher educational landscape – a landscape which includes degree apprenticeships in addition to traditionally taught degrees. Sub-sections within the chapter include an examination of: how experiential education theory has developed over time, core tenets of experiential education, the link between experiential education and the classroom, the role of an experiential educator, a taxonomy of types of experiential education, and potential outcomes from experiential education.

1.1 Experiential Education increases knowledge, develops skills, clarifies values, and develops people's capacity to contribute to their communities

There is no, one, agreed definition of the term experiential education (Johnston and Sator, 2017; Moon, 2004). However, this study is using the definition stated by the Association for Experiential Education as its statement of meaning.

The Association for Experiential Education (2020) defines experiential learning in the context of a growing field of classroom-based practitioners, co-operative learning practitioners and outdoor educators, as thus; *'...a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities.'*

Whilst Johnston and Sator (2017) assert that experiential education programmes; *‘...have experience at their core, and are intentionally linked to the learner’s academic and professional goals, and are directed and monitored by the institutions so as to develop the learner’s knowledge, skills and values.’*

Fox (2008) offers some common usages for the word ‘experience’, which includes; the action of putting to the test - to make experience of; to make trial of, a tentative procedure to ascertain or illustrate some truth, the actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge, a state of condition viewed subjectively; an event by which one is affected; events that have taken place within the knowledge of an individual, community, society, etc; knowledge resulting from actual observation or from what one has undergone.

Miettinen (2000) and Jensen (2000) noted that there is no such thing as a ‘direct experience’ independent from theories, as students will always come to an experience with differing ideas, knowledge and backgrounds and this will provide an element of bias within the process. An alternative stance is offered by Higgins (2009) who views experiential learning as an approach to education that implicitly trusts the learner’s ability to learn through experience, rather than attempt to force learning, or change the learner’s mind-set. This links to the Brandt & Wolfe study (1998) which found that the brain changes physiologically as a result of experience and this happens quickly, as it is having to simultaneously process a wide variety of information at once. Whilst fixed, didactic approaches are often used within teaching, experiential methods allow the learner to learn in their own way, offering a solution to the view espoused by Jensen (2000), that the brain is extremely individualised in terms of physiology and development. Students are likely to play different roles within an experience and therefore will extract different types and levels of understanding from them.

In conclusion, the study notes that a range of definitions for the term experiential education are available. It is important, however, to note how the theory of experiential education has developed, so that we might begin to consider the ways in which it works in practice.

1.2 The development of experiential education theory

This section outlines the views of seven key experiential education theorists and grants the reader a clear guide as to how experiential education has become defined.

Early in the twentieth century, progressive educators sought an education model which; eliminated the separation of ideas of the world from ideas of the classroom (Dewey, 1938); and which might develop a holistic educative experience (McRae and Johnston, 2016). This was furthered by constructivist theorists who philosophised that learners should be engaged within the construction and re-construction of their knowledge, with many theorists moving away from a purely behavioural definition of learning to suggesting and meaning – which can be difficult to observe and measure – is central to learning (Kolb, 1984; Marsick and Watkins, 1990; Mezirow, 1998; Schon, 1987). These theorists support a constructivist approach which highlights the importance of critical reflection within learning, in order that learners are best able to mobilise what they know, and can do, from one context to another (McRae and Johnston, 2016).

1.2.1 Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin's work had a significant effect upon the discipline of social psychology and on organisational behaviour, though it was his work on group dynamics and which has been most far-reaching. He was concerned with integrating theory and practice and was responsible for the innovative T-group training method, where participants actively learn about themselves through reflective activities (Kolb, 2015).

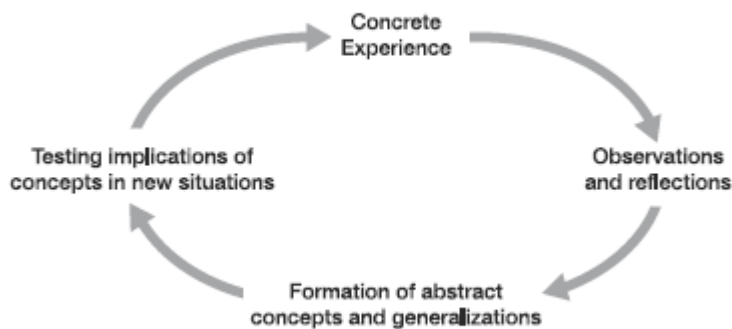


Figure 2.1: Lewin's Experiential Learning Theory Model (1951)

The experiential learning model (Figure 1), devised by Lewin in 1951, and was seminal. It offered a theoretical model to the field, which has since been built upon to develop a more comprehensive understanding of experiential learning, particularly by Kolb (1984). However, the roots of experiential learning theory can be traced back to Lewin's work. Lewin offered a major finding within the field of experiential education research. He highlighted that neither life experiences nor inborn attributes can be solely accountable for the behaviour and skills demonstrated by an individual. This view also finds synergy with Blumer's interactionist perspective (1937).

Lewin's key contribution was the belief that groups and individuals change dependent on their environment and the people around them, summarised by the equation $B = P \times E$; Behaviour is equal to the person and their environment (Lewin, 1936). This can be closely linked to both constructivist and constructionist epistemology, which are explored within Chapter 3.

1.2.2 Jean Piaget

Another key exponent of experiential education was Jean Piaget, whose theory (1936) described how experiences can shape individuals. He argued that intelligence arose as a product of the interaction between a person and their environment and not through innate characteristics. Therefore, facilitating environments which were advantageous to the development of an individual should be promoted. This work

was supported by Bruner who, through the growing knowledge of cognitive developmental processes, laid the foundations for a theory of experiential instruction. He found that experience-based learning had an exhilarating effect on learners, who became individualised and self-directed (Kolb, 2015).

Piaget's key contribution to experiential education research was his cognitive development theory (1936); linked to experiential learning, particularly co-operative learning (Eames and Cates, 2011). Piaget asserted that co-op students develop reasoning strategies related to their activities within the classroom and the workplace. The author suggested three fundamental processes in the development of logical thinking which are relevant to experiential learning; firstly, assimilation, which brings external elements of knowledge within a learners internal structures; secondly, accommodation, which allows the learner to adjust their internal structure to transform their thinking, and thirdly, equilibrium, which organises and balances old knowledge with new knowledge in order to change the learner appropriately. Garder and Koslowski (1993) support Piaget's theory and further state that students who have learnt through traditional, non-experiential education, often have to undertake adjustment periods when they enter the workplace, whereas experiential students find the transition smoother.

1.2.3 John Dewey

Dewey retains a position as a significant voice of an experientialist perspective (Schubert et al, 2002) and his work is given vast attention within the literature. He believed that schools were the cultural institution where experience could, most powerfully, be put into practice (Roberts, 2008). Studies conducted by Dewey (1897) and Freinet (1964) advocated for enquiry-based, co-operative learning, within which learning is a social construct; an experience created by the student, with the focus on action, social interaction and self-determination. Knowledge and skills are constructed, not simply transferred from educator to learner (Levant et al, 2016). Knowledge is created based on student's creating meaning that is realistic to them (Dellaportas & Hassall, 2013).

There are critics to Dewey's work, however: Bowers (2003) believed that it offered no foundation for an ethical construction of experience in environmental education, whilst others (Noddings, 1995 and West, 1989) noted that there was no evidence that marginalized groups found experiential methods beneficial. Furthermore, Roberts (2008) stated that experience-based education is just as likely, if not more likely, to reproduce and legitimize systems of domination over any other curricular approach.

There have been several key exponents of experiential learning and Dewey must certainly be included within that list. Dewey's key contribution (1963) was the assertion that participation in active learning was key for individuals to gain knowledge and to develop as citizens and to see the goal of education as encompassing 'being able to understand and use our experience'.

The Lewinian model, interpreted by Kolb in Figure 2 (1984), suggests that students initially have a concrete experience, which is then followed by a period of observation or reflection, they then go on to form abstract concepts before testing the implications of those concepts in new situations. Dewey, however, made far more explicit the developmental nature of the learning process. He believed that participants within an experiential learning setting went through three key stages; an observation of surrounding conditions, knowledge of what has happened to them in the past - partly obtained by recollection and partly by gathering information, advice and warnings at the time or just prior to the experience, and judgement, which puts together the observations and the knowledge to form a conclusion to see what the two signify (Kolb, 2015). More recent theorists espouse that high levels of student engagement with real-world problems, and facilitated reflection within the learning process, can lead to an educative experience which can develop the student holistically, beyond merely the gaining of knowledge (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

1.2.4 Paulo Friere and Donald Schon

Paulo Friere's (1970) work on teacher/student relationships was a key contribution to the belief that experiential learning can facilitate a more balanced relationship in

which both parties are equally responsible for, and engaged in learning. He stated a number of factors which support the facilitation of experiential teaching: independent and critical thought, consciousness-raising and societal intervention, and a response from students who receive challenges relating to themselves in the world. His research found that much learning takes place within the period of reflection towards the end (and at the end) of an activity. Furthermore, Freire (1973) called for a change to the education system in Western civilisation through what he called critical consciousness (Kolb, 2015) - the active exploration of personal, experiential meanings of abstract concepts through dialogue among equals - or reflection with peers.

This stands alongside Schon's (1983) theory which promotes two concepts; reflection-on-action, which takes place following an experience or event; and reflection-in-action, which is a continual process of reflexivity that occurs throughout an activity or experience. Schon espoused the view that experiences within which students can experiment and reflect upon simulated professional activities are beneficial to students and that reflection-in-action prompts participants to become 'researchers in practice' who examine their own position, their role and their situation in order to learn and grow.

The key contribution gleaned from the work of Friere (1970) and Schon (1983) is that reflection is a crucial element of experiential learning.

1.2.5 Albert Bandura

The key contribution made to the field by Bandura (1977) espouses that experiential students learn not only from their own actions and failures, but also through observations of others'. Additionally, that consequences of behaviour are essential to learning, meaning that their successes and positive acknowledgements are equally important to their failures in ensuring an experience will embed itself within the student and learning will occur.

Bandura (1986) asserts that people tend to avoid tasks which they believe are beyond their capabilities, and that when self-efficacy is high, individuals will engage,

confidently, with tasks. However, if self-efficacy is low they will not, which will prevent them from learning new skills, experientially. Bandura further suggested (1991) the factors which can affect an individual's perception of their self-efficacy; personal experience, observing others succeed or fail, and verbal encouragement.

1.2.6 David Kolb

Kolb (2015) argues in support of seven key themes which offer guidance and direction for programmes of experiential learning. These, he asserts, stem from the works of Dewey, Lewin and Piaget (see figure 1).

This highlights the similarities between the different approaches to experiential education; development towards a purpose, dialogue and pragmatism (with experience being an organised focus for learning), whilst also outlining a number of contemporary applications, many of which we see evidenced in the various branches of experiential education which the chapter will outline subsequently.

Kolb's learning cycle theory (Figure 2), which builds upon the work from Lewin (1951), has been widely examined within educational pedagogy – the concrete experience giving the learner a deep understanding to achieve the best learning outcome possible, and indeed, it appears to be the case that researchers in the field of experiential education largely conclude that having at least an element of 'learning through doing' is beneficial to the students and the teacher. Whilst there are drawbacks to a continual use of and reliance upon experiential methods, and issues with facilitator participation and control within the classroom, it is demonstrated that students can benefit from having experiential learning as a major teaching

component within curriculum design.

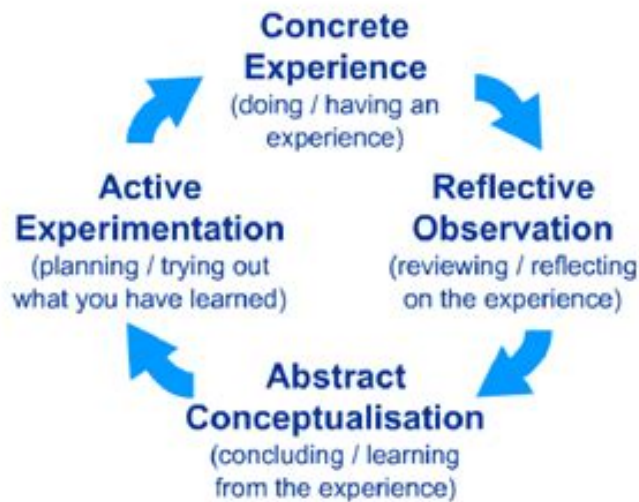


Figure 2.2: Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory Model

Critics of Kolb's model (1984) include Webb (2004), who argues that very little research has been undertaken to understand the learning process from the perspective of the model and that whilst experiential learning techniques may facilitate change and promote learning, it does not necessarily offer epistemological explanations for how that learning occurs. Furthermore, Webb asserts that learning takes place not at the end of a continuum, but rather it emerges continually and progressively, as a result of the full transformation of experiences, involving all parts of a cycle and all faculties of consciousness. A further critique of Kolb's model is made by Heron (1992) who suggests that the model downplays the importance of feelings and intuition in experiential learning.

Nevertheless, despite criticisms, Kolb's key contribution of work is seen as prominent within the field of experiential education and the reflective learning cycle is a key model for experiential education researchers and practitioners.

1.2.7 Review of key contributors to experiential education theory

In summary, several key, prevalent theorists of experiential education have been at the forefront of demonstrating the benefits and advantages of this method of teaching and learning. Dewey, Lewin, Piaget and Kolb have all been instrumental in outlining how important experiential teaching methodologies are; not only to outdoor educators but in various classroom-settings also. It can be argued that whilst these major contributors to the field of experiential education research do define the benefits of experiential education, they do not offer simple, practical tools for learning designers to use when creating engaging experiential activities for their students – this is a gap which needs to be filled within the field. Finally, the major contributors to experiential education research do not reflect the needs of a modern, diverse higher education classroom setting.

To conclude, experiential education has been shaped through theoretical knowledge, developed largely within the twentieth-century. The following section will explore the core tenets of experiential education.

1.3 The core tenets of experiential education

This section offers a critique of the inner workings of experiential education and how the method is practiced.

1.3.1 Experiential Education contains a series of practices and attributes

Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) suggest five modes of experiential learning with each mode containing the features of the previous mode along with a major increase in the proposed ‘fullness’ of the experience involved. They entitle this the scale of experientiality (figure 2.3)

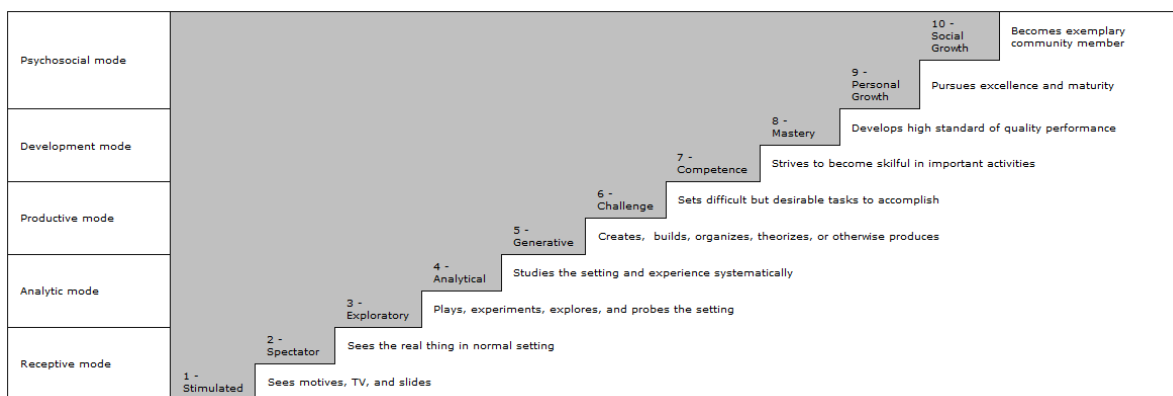


Figure 2.3: Gibbons' and Hopkiss' Scale of Experientiality

Priest and Gass (1997) conclude that according to the scale, learners take on more responsibility for their learning as the degree of experience continues. Gibbons and Hopkins (1980) demonstrate a preference for active, engaging activities and tasks, of which the student is heavily involved in the planning. In contrast, Neill (2005) critiques this approach as being one in which the learner is actually receiving rather than interacting with their learning, due to the design of the experience emanating from the teacher. Therefore the scale is an important framework for experiential learning designers to consider when creating activities and determining how much teacher – and/or student – involvement there should be.

Chapman et al (1995) provided a list of characteristics which they deem should be present in order for an activity to be defined as experiential; a mixture of content and process; an absence of excessive judgement, where the instructor creates a safe space for students to self-discover; engagement in purposeful endeavours, where the learner is learning something which has personal meaning and relevance for them; a 'big picture perspective', which allows students to make a connection between their learning and the wider world; reflection; emotional investment, whereby students are fully immersed in the project, not merely the outcome; a re-examination of values, where students can alter their value system; the presence of meaningful relationships, such as learner to self, learner to teacher, learner to learners, and learner to learning environment; and, learning outside of one's comfort zone, in order that students push themselves to become more comfortable and skilled in new tasks and to grow their levels of accountability. The project at the centre of this research study sought to emulate these characteristics.

Lave and Wenger (1991) propose that the person and the situation are entwined, and that individuals learn as they participate with other people, with tools, with communities and with activities; fourthly, resistance (a critical cultural perspective), suggests that structures of dominance which govern social relationships are at the centre of learning; and finally, co-emergence (the enactivist perspective), suggests that learners and settings co-emerge, with experiential learning assuming that cognition depends upon the type of experience (Maturana & Varela, 1987; Varela et al, 1991).

McRae (2016), summarising Johnson et al (2016), outlines a series of practices and attributes synonymous of experiential education. These are components of quality experiential education programmes, founded in the literature (Anderson et al, 2000; Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004; Schon, 1983). The author asserts that an experiential learner is; actively engaged and helps develop their own curriculum; engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially and/or physically; and, prompted to reflect in and on their experience, before during or after the learning event. They also suggest the results of experiential learning are very personal, and form the basis for future learning, that relationships and connections are developed, that experiences and their outcomes cannot be predicted and that disruptive opportunities are nurtured so that learners and educators can explore and examine their own views and beliefs. These high impact practices offer a range of benefits and advantages to a practitioner who is considering teaching using experiential methods and frameworks.

In summary, these four schools of experiential thought can be considered as key tenets of the field for those wishing to practice or study within it. They offer a starting point for the variety of approaches available within experiential education, though do not explain the ways in which students or teachers can benefit by implementing them within their practice. These two points are, once more, important considerations that are not given due attention within the field, but which are explored within this study. This section has explored the key tenets of experiential education. The following sub-sections, 2.3.1 to 2.3.4, outline some of the practical ways that experiential education is undertaken and the reasons for those.

1.3.2 Experiential Education is socially constructed, through teamwork and inter-group relationships

This sub-section explores experiential education from a constructionist perspective. Much research has been conducted into the benefits of group work within experiential education. Sibthorp et al (2011) found that motivated, experiential learners will be more likely to continue engaging in a learning process than traditional learners. Davis et al (2000) espoused that groups of learners are capable of actions and understandings that outweigh the capabilities of the individuals on their own. Davis (2000) also asserts that learning is not something which is done purely by (within) an individual themselves, but also takes place within the social world as it exists for them, and it is the variety of these, the active participation within them, and the reflective nature of these relationships which heightens learning and understanding. However, whilst studies have examined the social constructionist character of experiential education in many aspects (Itin, 1999 and Joplin, 1981), a critique of these works is that they have only covered formulaic reflective strategies that are employed within traditional settings, such as debriefs following an activity or group reviews. There are many more informal reflections that take place within experiential education which must be examined.

Seed (2008) presented the results of a qualitative study on the effects of a four-day experiential teaching programme for students enrolled upon an undergraduate teacher training programme. Seed concluded two major benefits resulted from experiential education: the first was relationship building and the second was in learning more about the faculty. In short, that time together created a team like atmosphere in which students had the opportunity to explore personally meaningful concepts. The limitation of such an experience or study is cost and timing, which Seed recognised. This study is important as it highlights the ways in which the teacher-student relationship can be influenced by experiential pedagogy.

Other studies that found experiential education beneficial to groups include Cazden (1988), who found that individuals work well in team settings as a result of developing listening skills and Steven & Richards (1992) who found that participants begin to recognise strengths within other individuals with whom they are working. This goes a long way towards building successful cohorts as it offers people an opportunity to socialize, thereby decreasing feelings of isolation and the chance for individuals to learn from each other (Blankenship, 1989). Imel (2002) found that participants within group settings can increase their ability to think critically and be more motivated to learn.

In conclusion, it is held that experiential education can be socially constructed through the teachers and student-participants who are undertaking its practice. The study notes the important role that people play within experiential learning, namely that participants and their environment determine what happens in the setting, and how.

1.3.3 Experiential Education offers slow, deep knowledge through unfamiliar experiences

The following part of the paper proceeds to outline the type of learning that can sometimes occur through experiential education practice. Fox (2008) asserts that experiential learning goes beyond 'learning by doing' and further than merely 'experiencing'. Concepts and actions take on meaning through the contexts in which participants are involved (Dreyfus, 1991). Having an actual experience unmitigated by demonstrations, videos, lectures or the written word is a way of gaining what is sometimes called 'slow knowledge' (Orr, 1996), and this slow knowledge is what humans have learned for thousands of years (Knapp, 2010). In criticism of this theory, it should be noted that neither Orr nor Knapp develop their idea to show a concrete link between slow knowledge and classroom activity.

Coker et al (2016) and Finley and McNair (2013) argue that the breadth of experiential learning within which students participate is more beneficial than the depth, as breadth of learning develops soft skills, teaches students to work

effectively with others, builds strong relationships and facilitates interactions between more people from a wider range of environments. This view is supported by Takacs and Chambliss (2013) who describe the important influence of relationships within institutions. One key element to this breadth of experiential learning appears to be the preference to expose students to new, unfamiliar experiences (Ewert & Yoshino, 2011; Mackenzie et al, 2014), which drives students through more iterations of different experiences and new environments, thus causing more learning over long periods of time.

In summary, these studies, when viewed together, demonstrate that experiential education can offer deep learning. Deep learning is defined as a way in which student's extract long-lasting meaning and understanding from course materials and experiences. Deep learning can be inhibited if courses are too narrowly focused on one discipline (Warburton, 2003). Though the benefits of this are unclear from the literature, they do offer some direction as to the deep-rooted learning which experiential education can provide students with. The studies also demonstrate further advantages to students, such as the development of positive learning habits, strong relationships within the classroom and the potential development of soft skills (Coker et al, 2016).

1.3.4 Experiential Education is reflective

This sub-section moves on to describe in greater detail the vital element of reflective practice, which is an inherent part of experiential learning.

Reflection is often cited as a key element within experiential education. Moon (2004) asserts that students may have to identify the knowledge they need, acquire it themselves, and then reflect upon their learning as they go along, whilst Hutchings and Wutzdorff (1988) found it is often the "ability to step back and ponder one's own experience, to abstract from it some meaning or knowledge relevant to some other experiences" which provide the learner with the biggest benefit. Kolb (1984, p.38) provides a definition for reflection; "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". He also suggested that the 'reflection'

element of experiential learning is key and that practitioners must leave adequate time for reflection activities such as journaling or group discussion.

Reflection shares a common two-stage structure with critical thinking; 1) bringing a thought into the conscious awareness, and 2) asking and responding to searching questions about that thought (Bourner, 2003). This link is further developed within the literature on deep versus surface learning, which illustrates that learners, who are also critical, reflective thinkers, read and act in a critical way, asking searching questions as they learn and act (Bourner, 2003).

Reflection occurs in a variety of guises. Within degree apprenticeships an e-portfolio can be used as a pedagogical tool rather than as a container of information, which can enable learners to reframe their learning and understanding in a way which can develop them within their roles and prompt lifelong learning (Schedlitzki, 2019). Reflection, within university settings, can act as a bridge between coursework and community-based experiences (Barnes & Caprino, 2016), can assist learners with preparing for the workplace, succeeding in the workplace and learning from service experiences (Toole and Toole, 1995), and critical reflection can encourage students to consider how they might act in future professional settings (Barnes & Caprino, 2016).

The type of reflection oft contained within experiential learning is often not present within traditional learning experiences (Barnes & Caprino, 2016). Fink (2013) asserted that in order for students to be more prepared for the workplace, they ought to engage in significant learning experiences which enhance their personal lives, their social interactions and their position as informed citizens. One way of achieving these goals is through explicit considerations of course content, through reflection, over a period of time (Barnes & Caprino, 2016).

In summary, this study notes the important role that reflection plays within experiential learning and the duty that experiential educators hold in ensuring adequate time and space is made provision for within experiential education sessions. Reflection plays a central role to this study as reflective practice is

encapsulated within the experiential learning activities, reflective journals are one of the methods of data collection, and reflectivity is explored as a soft skill in itself.

1.4 The role of the experiential educator is different from the traditional role of the lecturer

The following sub-section considers the role of an experiential educator as being one that might differ from the role of a traditional lecturer within higher education. Knapp (2010) wonders whether teachers are missing the point of learning by only *covering* their subject matter, instead of allowing students to *un-cover* it and *dis-cover* more for themselves. Schwartz (2012) suggests that experiential teaching practitioners undertake four roles within their practice; a resource provider, to assist students with the best readings, weblinks and films for their study (Warren, 1995); a cheerleader, to build confidence, reframe difficulties, show faith and exude enthusiasm (Warren, 1995); a facilitator, to support, guide, model and verbally remind students that they are in charge of their learning experience, so that concepts are fully understood (Chapman et al, 1995); and, finally, instructors must provide closure to the process, ensure students understand what they've accomplished and how they have grown, and offer opportunities for reflection and evaluations (Warren, 1995).

The teacher, or facilitator, might be best advised not to be too dominant because if they lead the opinions then they are effectively saying they may know the best way of learning. This can often be the case, though the constructionist nature of groups who learn experientially should not be discounted in favour of a purely teacher-led learning experience (Estes, 2004). Admittedly, when teachers have a course syllabus to follow it is difficult and challenging to leave 'direction' entirely to students, but more moments where students realise what they have learnt, in effect uncovering the learning for themselves, are likely produce beneficial outcomes. This thought has seen the rise of neo-experientialism, which offers a midway point for teachers who retain focus, whilst still allowing students time and space to explore the taught topics. Brown (2002) analysed that many teachers are dominant and lead

students into a cul-de-sac of learning, almost without knowing it. Through the use of paraphrasing, re-framing and evaluating responses they could be creating a preferred version of reality from student answers. Brown (2002) also advises that being more student-centred is beneficial for the experiential process and teachers should: change from being teacher-centred to student-centred, engage in dialogue with the students to ensure a collaborative learning process, rely less on standard practice and more on creative techniques to facilitate reflection, let the students take the lead and find a robust way to assess the students' participation, learning and effectiveness of methods.

The difficulties of this approach have been stated clearly by Thomas (2010) during his study of trainee teachers in an Australian university. He noted that a teacher cannot merely facilitate because it is very difficult to be entirely neutral, due to their own natural predilections for wanting students to complete activities in a certain way. He recommends that teachers be clear on the role they are playing within the experiential learning process, try to understand the intentions behind their practice and display transparency about difficulties they are facing. He also noted, in 2008, that longer programmes are often better for research purposes when it comes to the study of experiential education. This is because long programmes provide the time and space to examine complex issues and allow the researcher to develop a supportive group which can help deep-exploration to occur. Therefore, shorter programmes must creatively design opportunities for deep reflection to occur.

A teacher must see oneself as a facilitator of learning as opposed to a figure of authority if they wish to develop classroom experiences within which participation levels are high. Whilst traditional teaching relies heavily upon teacher instructions it does not offer sufficient opportunities for students to participate (Broughton et al, 2002). Students must be afforded practical learning experiences, rather than teaching via powerpoint, which can restrict to the theoretical realm only (Qazi and Simon, 2012; Raja and Najimonnisa, 2018). Experiential education assumes a less hierarchical interpretation of authority, as learning derives from dialogue with peers, teachers and researchers, albeit informed by the application of ideas (Reynolds, 2009).

The studies in the preceding paragraph suggest that in order for students to have the opportunity to learn slowly through experiential education, teachers should not simply attempt to impart knowledge. Rather, teachers must be careful that reflective debriefs are personal to the learner, and allow students to bring together their thoughts and views, sorting information and ordering it how they wish (Joplin, 1995). Knowledge is not something that can merely be gained from reading a textbook but something which is embodied within individuals as they immerse themselves in their learning, surround themselves with other learners and mentors and inhabit landscapes of practice (Vaughan, 2017, and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). This is developed into lifelong learning skills via the meta-disposition of agility, where agile learners make judgements for themselves, about their own learning, and seek further opportunities to learn (Rooney et al, 2015). It is argued by Vaughan (2017) that lifelong learning is an important soft skill which can aide a person's development over time, thus suggesting that experiential education can ignite lifelong learning within students, which can affect their long-term soft skill development. The notion that experiential education might be linked to soft skill development is one which is central to the study within this thesis.

Live projects offer powerful opportunities by requiring students to test their learning within practice, whilst solving contemporary challenges (Sroufe and Ramos, 2011). However, as Mink and O'Sreen (2003) stated, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of these methods within traditional learning settings.

There are benefits to student-led learning. Autonomy is widely supported in the literature as being something which gives students a sense of ownership and control which can lead to heightened competence, self-esteem, creativity and understanding (Reeve, 2002). Teachers can facilitate this further within experiential settings by asking for opinions, listening to answers, allowing students to lead discussions and praising progress (Reeve, 2005). However, poorly functioning groups can prevent autonomy for some members (Sibthorp et al, 2008) if they are not supervised and this may allow disputes to go unresolved.

In summary, experiential teachers should not feel constrained by the classroom area in which they teach. It is an opportunity for them to be creative, for it is the

experience through which the learners actually learn. However, experiential educators must pay particular attention to the design of their lessons, as a variety of experiential approaches currently exist, as the following section outlines.

1.5 The varied interloping branches of experiential education

1.5.1 An introduction to the modes of experiential education

There is a wide variety of experiential education approaches represented within the literature, which I proceed to outline below. They all engage students in activities which differ, both in terms of look and by way of content, to traditional classroom-based methods such as formal lectures and seminar discussions (Thornton Moore, 2010). It is important for this study to understand the variety of approaches in order that teaching methods within the study are appropriate for higher education students. Providing teaching methods are appropriate for the student-participants, and are facilitated effectively by the teacher, then the credibility of the findings in answer to the research questions can be presented with rigour. The co-operative education and work-integrated learning association (CEWIL) offer a visual representation of how they define and categorise the taxonomy of types (figure 2.4):

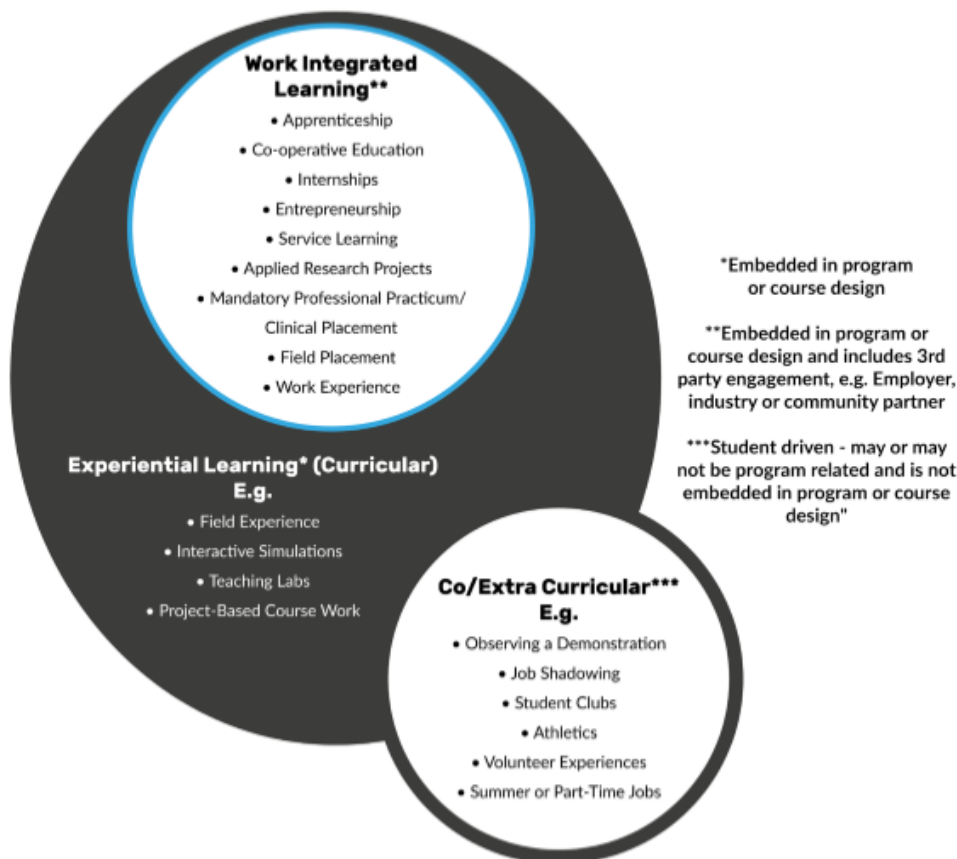


Figure 2.4: CEWIL Taxonomy of Types of Experiential Education

The graphic illustrates that work-integrated learning is something which occurs outside of the classroom setting, experiential learning is something which is embedded in programme or course design, and that experiential learning can also occur within co/extra curricula activities. Therefore, in summary, experiential education designers and researchers should consider; their setting; their links, or potential links, to outside stakeholders; and the ways in which they desire their students to engage in both their learning and with extra-curricular activities.

What follows is a summary of the major experiential learning methods which are practiced within the field.

1.5.2 Active Learning

Active learning is seen as being a radical change from traditional, didactic instruction (Prince, 2004). It is generally defined as being a method of instruction which engages students in the learning process, which requires the students to do some meaningful learning activities, to think about what they are doing and to learn in a contrasting way to the traditional lecture theatre approach, where students sit passively whilst receiving information from their lecturers (Prince, 2004).

Within Active learning students are engaged in their own learning, focused on the construction of knowledge through 'doing' rather than receiving knowledge through passive absorption, and, as a result, are analytical. Active learning can assist with the development of not only skills and knowledge but also attitudes, values and behaviours (Hanney, 2018).

Active learning often involves sustained group work, or Team-Based Learning (Sibley and Ostafichuk, 2014), requiring students to work collaboratively and intensively over periods of time within tasks that involve them solving problems.

Sub-branches of active learning include collaborative learning, co-operative learning and problem-based learning. Collaborative learning, where students work together in small groups to achieve a common goal, with the emphasis on student interactions rather than on learning as a solitary activity, Cooperative learning, which is also covered at length within the literature and should therefore be considered a major branch of experiential education. This method allows students to work in a structured group but are assessed individually (Millis & Cottell, 1998).

Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1998) assert that their model of co-operative learning incorporates five specific tenets, which can also be classified as 'soft skills', namely; individual accountability, mutual independence, face-to-face promotive interaction, appropriate practice of interpersonal skills and a regular self-assessment of team functioning. A key element of this learning method is a focus on cooperative incentives rather than competition between learners (Prince, 2004).

Problem-based learning, where problems are introduced at the start of an instruction cycle and then used as context and motivation for the learning that follows. It is

always active and usually collaborative and additionally involves significant amounts of self-directed learning from the students (Prince, 2004). Typically, the students undertaking this form of learning work in small teams to solve problems. It is evident that these models all involve activity and are all in contrast to didactic styles of learning. There is emphasis on group-work and the solving of problems, rarely through solitary activities, which leaves scope for further investigation as to the effectiveness of these teaching methods in order to ascertain any potential impact on learners and their skills, abilities, or attitudes.

Measuring the success of these learning methods can be problematic, depending on whether factual knowledge, relevant skills, student attitudes or student retention is the aim and some studies on problem-based learning suggest that a student's skills-base can be improved, despite, in some studies, exam performance decreasing (Vernon & Blake, 1993 and Albanese & Mitchell, 1993). Therefore, whether an approach 'works' or not is a matter of individual context, perception and interpretation. For instance, Qin et al (2012) assert that individuals in cooperative groups produced better solutions to problems than those working in competitive environments, but it does not necessarily follow that these students developed more permanent and more transferable problem solving skills (Prince, 2004). The Hawthorne effect should also be considered when interpreting the results of any new approach to learning or teaching instigated within the classroom or an institution, as the novel approach could create positive results on participants regardless of the merit of that intervention.

Astin (1993) reported that student involvement (in their learning) is of major importance to student success, a view backed by Hake (1998), whose study of over 6000 students concluded a significant improvement in performance within students who were taught using highly interactive and engaging learning methods as opposed to traditionally-taught courses.

In summary, whether, and to what extent, active learning effectively develops interpersonal, soft skills, is worthwhile of investigation, particularly given the research evidence which suggests that social skills tend to increase more within cooperative rather than competitive situations (Johnson & Johnson, 1989), that students report

an increase in team skills as a result of cooperative learning (Terenzini et al, 2001) and that effective teamwork can be enhanced (Panitz, 1999). These beneficial factors are mitigated by the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that problem-based learning enhances academic achievement, as measured by examination results, however there is evidence to suggest that PBL develops positive student attitudes, a deeper approach to learning, a longer retention of knowledge when compared to traditional instruction, enhanced interpersonal skills and enhanced problem-solving skills which can aide lifelong learning (Prince, 2004).

1.5.3 Work-based Learning

This approach to experiential education is becoming increasingly important in the UK as a vehicle to enable individuals to gain academic credit and qualifications whilst developing their personal and professional skills and knowledge (Rhodes & Shiel, 2007). Work-based projects are being used effectively to meet the needs of organisations, who host or employ the learners, and are seen as a beneficial method of education in order to address the skill deficit in the UK, which has been highlighted by the Dearing Report (1997). The report identified skills that were relevant for individuals throughout life, namely; communication, numeracy, IT and learning how to learn.

The innovative practice of work based learning was actively encouraged by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) through its Skills Strategy (HEFCE, 2005, HEFCE 2006 and Brennan & Little, 2006). The main principles of such an approach are set out by Boud and Solomon (2001) as being; a partnership between an organisation and a university to foster learning, learners who are employed by/contracted to an external organisation, a programme which derives from the needs of the workplace, the recognition of a learners current competencies prior to the study, a significant element of the programme being undertaken within the workplace and an assessment mechanism which sits within a university framework.

Work-based learning moves responsibility into the hands of the learner, provides the learner with an opportunity to interpret and analyse the actions they take in a work-

based skills context, rather than merely an academic one, and allows them to develop not only knowledge, but also the capabilities needed within their given work-based context (Rhodes & Shiel, 2007; Hiim, 2017).

A sub-branch of work-based learning is authentic learning. Activities which fall within this sub-branch of experiential education can be simply defined as the ordinary practices of a particular role or culture. For instance authentic activity is one that is practiced by expert professionals, apprentices and non-experts alike who are seeking to learn within a given field. Whilst classroom activity takes place within a school culture, one which is often attributed to mathematicians, historians, economists and other scholars, many of the activities that students undertake are actually that of practitioners and these activities can aide a student's understanding of what is expected when working in the field. Authentic learning can also aide the development of the required skills needed in order to become an expert practitioner (Seely Brown et al, 1989). This method is suitable for higher education as there is greater scope for experiential activities to traverse the boundaries of the classroom, meaning that student-participants might be afforded the opportunity to work on projects away from their physical classroom space. This study seeks to explore that notion.

In summary, students' work experiences do not need to be merely outside of the classroom setting. They can also be based within the education institution, with classroom activities integrating workplace experiences and reflections as a principle by which students can develop vocational knowledge (Hansen & Haaland, 2015; Hiim, 2017).

1.5.4 Service Learning

This is an approach which allows learners to combine traditional academic goals such as exams with services offered outside the classroom (and the school/college) to add value to the wider community. It often involves a two-stage approach to learning: volunteering to take part in community-based activities, followed by a reflective period within the classroom. Waldstein & Reiher (2001) concluded that

taking part in service-learning has a positive effect on students in a cognitive, civic and socially developmental way.

This form of experiential education has been widely analysed within higher education. Thornton Moore (2010, p5) offers a definition of service learning as an 'out-of-classroom community service activity combined with the study of academic concepts and theories'. However, this is practiced in a variety of ways, with some practitioners focussing on the service element and others stressing the importance of teaching the theory (Stanton, Giles and Cruz, 1999). Again, most insist on an element of reflective practice being contained within the overall pedagogy, which underpins the important missions of enhancing student learning and development and meeting social needs and promoting change (Butin, 2005). Eyler and Giles (1999) found that the intensity of the reflection process had a direct effect on the cognitive skills developed by students within a service-learning setting and a number of leading experiential pedagogic theorists have espoused the importance of reflection within the experiential methodology (Weil and McGill, 1989; Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993). Students undertaking a service-learning programme may often work on ethical and political projects within the field of social justice or a celebration of diversity (Stanton, Giles and Cruz, 1999). A student may, for example, spend three hours per week in a homeless shelter if they were on a programme studying urban poverty (Thornton Moore, 2010).

Student outcomes can be affected by service-learning experiences (Coker et al, 2016). Students involved in more than 20 hours of service learning tend to gain a strong sense of social issues and a deep commitment to community involvement than students involved in less than 20 hours (Kendrick, 1996; Markus et al, 1993).

In summary, Service learning affords participants opportunities to learn whilst offering services or benefits to others outside of their classrooms or workplace setting, such as local communities, charities or society as a whole. The literature demonstrates that this is a specific method of experiential education which is practiced far less often and appears to be very rare in university settings, particularly in combination with other elements of experiential education. Experiential education can benefit from the inclusion of a service-learning element, as students are able to

gain a deeper understanding of the make-up of society and their role within it, particularly within a business management context.

1.5.5 Co-operative Learning

Another major form of experiential education combines the school-based transmission of technical expertise with the first-hand benefits of traditional experience in an organisation (Ryder, 1987). This type of learning occurs in two distinct settings; the educational institution and the workplace. Educators must adopt curricula and pedagogy for experiential learning underpinned by theory (Eames and Cates, 2011). A core function of this method of education is to build students' career skills and knowledge (Howard, 2004) and whilst the strategies of co-op programmes vary, most entail periods of work coordinated alongside periods of study. There has been exploration in the literature on the concept of connecting direct experience and the classroom and it is evident that many institutions insist on explicit and deliberate reflection by the students on the experiences they have undertaken. Whilst much research has been undertaken on the effects of cooperative education on student outcomes in a quantitative manner - through retention, performance in examinations and starting salaries, the area of skills development within experiential education is in need of further research (Thornton Moore, 2010).

1.5.6 Internships

Whilst this term is often generically used within service-learning programmes and cooperative education for the out-of-classroom element of a students work, an internship can also be a stand-alone activity not connected to classroom study. It can aide a student to develop skills through independent means in an experiential way, in the same way as independent study in traditional teaching can develop a student's study skills. Students are often awarded credit for completing internships, where they work alongside regular employees of a host organisation in order to gain work experience. This experience can come in the form of meeting attendance, project work, interviews, observations etc. On the other hand, an internship might not be

credit-bearing but may entail direct work of the intern for the benefit of their future studies and to the organisation itself (Thornton Moore, 2010).

Such programmes explore a variety of missions such as; allowing the student to understand the link between theory and practice (Sweitzer and King, 2004), career exploration and development (Fedorko, 2006), and personal and professional development (Inkster and Ross, 1995). Other claims about enhancing critical thinking and conceptual understanding, responsible and ethical behaviour, and the capacity to work alongside a diverse range of people have also been made (Thornton Moore, 2010). The element of reflection, seen as a vital part of the experiential learning process (Kolb, 1984) is often evident within internship practices by means of learning journals, written papers, assessments and learning contracts (Sweitzer and King, 2004). One disadvantage, however, of internships as a conduit for experiential learning, is that students may use the vehicle as a foot in the door for their prospective career, rather than as a learning tool. They may care more about doing the work and less about reflecting upon it (Thornton Moore, 2010).

1.5.7 Other branches of experiential education

Other models of experiential education include community-based research, where faculty and students cooperate with local organisations in order to conduct studies which may be beneficial to the needs of the community and study-abroad, which can be taken as experiential learning due to the need for students to embrace a range of non-traditional, out-of-classroom learning experiences (Thornton Moore, 2010) such as working whilst using a second language, dealing with culturally challenging encounters and simply living in a new place.

Another branch, which is more often seen within higher education is something known as Inquiry-Based Learning. O'Steen (2008) asked whether Dewey's ideas are still alive in New Zealand undergraduate education. Whilst doing so, he defines this method of teaching as being an approach which might integrate the interests of students with experiences and content knowledge. It promotes learning through the investigation of problems and questions, is student directed, encourages reflection

on the teaching/learning process and promotes active, deep learning (Plowright and Watkins, 2004). It allows teachers to facilitate real world experiences and can give students a degree of choice when it comes to what they learn and how they learn it.

Neo-experientialism is another variation. Here, experiential concepts are taken and used within a more rigid, tightly-bound structure to offer the teacher heightened control. Time and space are more accurately adhered to by teachers and students as the normal classroom (or school) rules bind them. In this system, the 'experience' becomes secondary to the dominating ends of economy, efficiency and control, though the activities are still experiential by nature (Roberts, 2008).

1.5.8 Review of experiential teaching methodologies

As this section outlines, a variety of experiential teaching methodologies exist and whilst many overlap in terms of their basic tenets; learning through an experience and learning in an active manner, they do also have specific differences which make each method more appropriate and applicable in one setting over another. Many branches of experiential education rely on out-of-classroom activity. Therefore, the design of this study has considered the ways in which experiential teaching practices can sit, and indeed fit within and alongside a classroom setting.

As such, I have represented the branches of experiential education within figure 4, below. This offers the reader a visual representation of the major branches and the sub-branches which emanate from them:

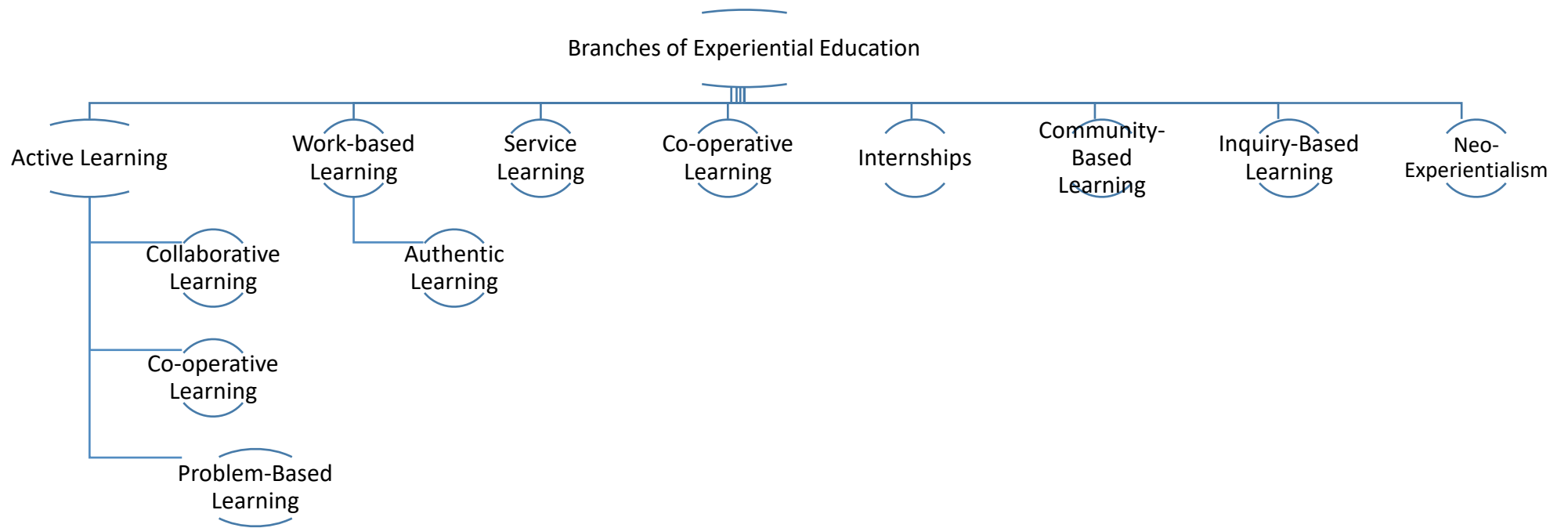


Figure 2.5: Branches of Experiential Education

Whilst the variety of experiential methods, summarised in the preceding sections, offer the field an insight into the ways in which students are taught, they do not offer a detailed analysis of the impact of those methods upon student attributes, or on the development of those student's soft skills. This study explores that notion in greater detail by combining a range of experiential methods, examining the teaching activities which fall within each of them, and exploring the findings which emerge therefrom. The following section proceeds to review the literature associated with the outcomes associated with experiential education in order to determine what gaps may exist within the field when researching student outcomes.

1.6 Benefits associated with experiential education; the outcome of prior studies

The chapter has, thus far, reviewed the literature associated with experiential education theory and the core tenets of an experiential approach. It is important to understand the benefits of experiential learning and this section examines a range of associated outcomes.

Another study (Ives and Obenchain 2006) measured HOTS (higher order thinking skills), such as; problem solving abilities, critical thinking, analytic perception, argumentation and going beyond the given information into discovery and further investigation; against LOTS (lower order thinking skills) - memorization, recall of factual information, comprehension and application. The study concluded that students in experiential education-emphasized classes demonstrated greater gains in HOTS than in four classes which were delivered via more standard, didactic method of teaching, but also asserted that teacher dispositions are a significant hurdle to implementing an experiential element to a curricula.

In contrast to the above study, Caulkins (2010) reviewed alternative experiential education, concluding that field trips were especially helpful in improving self-worth, enhancing personal responsibility and accountability, and improving physical and

emotional health. These trips bonded the class building teamwork and solidarity. Whilst this study is narrow, examining outdoor learning activities within an 'at risk' group, it offers generalizable conclusions of value to the community of experiential researchers.

Hains and Smith (2012) examined experiential education as a concept within which students could be given responsibility for course design. Students wrote a journal in which they evaluated the course, from design to completion, that highlighted uncertainty followed by ownership (over their own education). They concluded that students learned from both success and failure within individual tasks, which deepened the learning process and teachers regarded the process as a learning experience for themselves too (understanding a need to be flexible and reflective, as a practitioner). Thus, all actors are benefitting from this holistic experiential approach.

Johnston and Sator (2017) espouse that experiential teaching models have the following high impact outcomes; strong relationships and partnerships; providing access to current knowledge, skills, and equipment; a formalized educational program integrating community partners; opportunities for transformative learning. They conclude that the higher the degree of experientiality the greater the opportunity for transformation; The intentional embedding, recognizing, mediating, and supporting of transformative learning, reflection, and experiential learning in emergent contexts; Opportunities for students to take the experience where it needs to go and lead their experience/ project/ inquiry; Curriculum that facilitates (e.g., coaches and guides) iterative opportunities for learning and supports learning pre, during, and post experience; The inclusion of multiple partners in the design (e.g., students) and assessment of experiential learning; and, Strong alignment of learning outcomes with planned activities and assessment. However, the authors assert the need for further research into the value of experiential learning within traditional academic education, particularly as experience, in the eyes of the academy, is often not seen a source of knowledge itself (Munby and Russell, 1994).

In summary, a range of benefits are associated with experiential learning. However, the literature available upon the benefits associated with classroom-based experiential learning within traditional higher education settings is very sparse.

1.7 Risks associated with experiential education

The risks associated with experiential education are discussed within the following section.

Engaging in a student-directed classroom is full of risks for educators and for students (Breunig, 2005). Problems arise when students are afforded freedom and power to choose how and when to take an action, though this can lead to success if undertaken skilfully. It can also lead to disagreement with fellow students or with inexperienced teachers who do not fully understand the trust element of the teaching practice. Students might regard experiential learning as a hiding place and leave the participation to other members of the group. There is a sense of responsibility bestowed upon the students, which is why it has not always been deemed to lend itself well to some topics or situations. However, providing that the teacher retains the role of an active facilitator this should be overcome as students will be observed regularly. Some others may not want to take part in an activity and may prefer the more passive learning experience that higher education is more traditionally geared towards, such as lectures. This could be down to personal choice or cultural expectations. In these situations the teacher is faced with the need to slowly introduce new concepts to the class and increasing the boundary of the comfort zone. This allows students to then make a judgement of their own experiences. It also points to a requirement for training students to participate and build gradually to the full implementation of experiential practices.

Student-centred teaching requires considerable time and thought from teachers, which can be difficult in some research-focused institutions. Often, it is easier for teachers and lecturers to revert back to the traditional methods such as the production of lecture template slides, module planners and lecture content, without the experiential activity. They must also be without ego - Friere (1998) argues that

teachers must learn to trust the students and the process. The structure of teaching and the massification of Higher Education within the UK will often determine the style of delivery, with large scale lectures mediating against experiential activities. Additionally, teachers at research intensive institutions may not have had the benefit of training in such contemporary methods. Higgins (2009) investigated the complexity and consequences of experiential teaching. He held that this method of learning can be problematic for students if they are not given all the information they need. Furthermore, critics of experiential learning, such as Brennan (2014) argue that poorly designed activities may result in superficial learning, a lack of engagement and student frustrations.

In summary, the consequences of amending teaching practice in HE settings is of interest to the field, currently, as educators and establishments alike are striving for greater impact and effectiveness in student success and student satisfaction, both during the period of a students' registration and with regards to their employability and career progression beyond graduation. One way in which students can be perceived as being more employable is through the degree to which they have developed depth and breadth of soft skills, which is a theme central to this study.

1.8 Future research

Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) suggest a greater understanding of experiential learning practices is needed. They call for an advanced logical model for experiential practitioners and researchers to use, which will document the relative importance and influence of the structural characteristics of high-impact practices, particularly regarding student inputs and outcomes. The authors further suggest that conceptual models that exist for experiential education are ambiguous. Kolb's model (1984) cycles between activities the learner engages with, which implies a time-sensitive process but others, such as Co-Constructed Development Teaching Theory, suggest that experiential learning takes place through the repetition of iterative cycles, thereby increasing a student's learning over time (Schenck and Cruickshank, 2015). A practical model of experiential education which can be agreed upon by teachers and researchers is required.

Furthermore, whilst there are similarities between the experiential teaching methods, there are also nuanced, subtle differences between them all. In terms of the teaching approach taken by practitioners, the learning process for students and the benefits to be gained both academically and through the acquisition of wider, soft skills, the differences can be striking, and outcomes have been shown to vary widely. Past research does not indicate that the most effective elements of these methods have been blended into a hybrid experiential pedagogy, which presents a gap within the field. The teaching methods employed within this study close that gap within a UK higher education setting.

1.9 Integrated Experiential Education – towards a hybrid pedagogy

In summary, it has been shown within the preceding section that a number of experiential teaching methods exist. The initial assertion of this study, arising from this literature review, is that the potential for a new model does exist. 'Integrated experiential education' could be developed to aid teaching practitioners by fusing together many of the established benefits of experiential education into one teaching and learning methodological process. Not all of the existing experiential methods offer students a combination of academic knowledge, the development of soft skills and enhanced employability potential, and there is no model which combines elements of all seven major experiential methods listed previously. There is potential for a method which offers students a deeper learning experience, is personalised, and aims to extend the classroom beyond didactic, traditional learning. Figure 5 offers an outline of a working model, used within this study to shape the learning design and pedagogic principles of the teaching within the study.

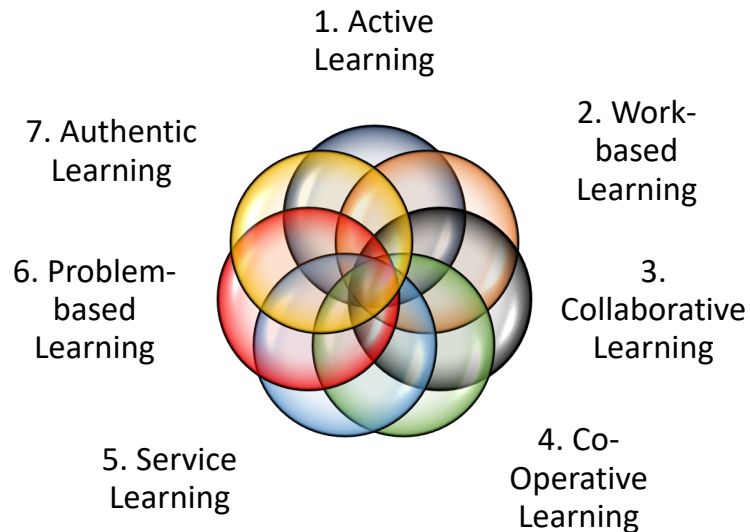


Figure 2.6 – The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel

This pedagogic model might offer experiential teaching practitioners the opportunity to combine elements of active, collaborative, co-operative, problem-based, authentic, work-based and service learning into one education project. A project which offers students a range of experiences which they would not normally encounter within a traditional classroom setting, but also the opportunity for those students to bring their studies to life through real-world, authentic learning that can not only benefit themselves, through academic knowledge, the development of soft skills and enhanced employability potential, but also be of benefit to a wider community, society or workplace. The possibility that Integrated Experiential Education might be of greater benefit to a wider audience than merely the student body itself may be a key aspect to differentiate a new method from others that currently exist. However, whilst this study does seek to offer knowledge upon the original teaching methods it has employed, this does not make the findings which arise from those methods in any way generalizable, for this case study and its results are unique to the setting and the students at the particular time of the study.

1.10 Summary of literature pertaining to experiential education

The literature within experiential education tends to focus primarily upon its use within outdoor education, external work-based learning, primary education and nursery education. The professional setting of the researcher, and the research area of this study, is higher education, specifically within the field of business

management. As this area is of particular professional and personal interest to me, the chapter will now review the literature within that context, in section 2.

2. The Pedagogic Approach of Traditional Business Schools

The following section of this thesis contains a review of the literature surrounding the pedagogic approaches of business schools. The section includes a critique of traditional teaching approaches, the lack of change within business schools over time, the need for business schools to adapt within a more contemporary educational landscape to flex with organisational needs to meet the demands sought in the form of employability and skill development.

2.1 The traditional offering of business schools

Business schools have not experienced much change, with methods of teaching and research similar to those of 30 years ago. Lectures are conducted, papers are written – both for assessment and for research (Trkman, 2019), and the role of the business school and value of it to society has come under question (Antunes and Thomas, 2007). Furthermore, it is suggested that many business leaders feel that universities are not providing graduates with the requisite knowledge or skills for the real world of business (Adler & Harzing, 2009; Farashahi & Tajeddin, 2018).

However, the traditional methods and established approaches should not be regarded as a given, but merely an expression of social norms which can be changed (Habernas, 1980). Business schools must understand their need for a professional education in order for their field to retain its relevancy. It is not a scientific discipline, and therefore it must offer a practical outcome for its learners (Awaysheh and Bonfiglio (2017).

2.2 The lack of change within business schools

Some teaching models, which aim to develop skills, knowledge and career-ready qualities are available (Silzer and Church, 2009), but this needs to be delivered in a more seamless way by most institutions (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). Additionally, many business schools rely on teaching via a case study approach. Whilst these are thought to spark discussion about realistic business scenarios (Harvard Business

School Teaching Materials Newsletter, 2004), they cannot substitute for authentic, experiential learning which provide students with direct experience, decision making, networking opportunities and valuable opportunities to apply theory to practice (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006).

2.3 Business schools need to flex with organisational needs

Students, during their first two years of study, demonstrate no improvement in a range of soft skills when taught through traditional methods (Arum & Roska, 2010), despite soft skills being key competencies for graduates to possess (Andrews & Higson, 2008).

Business schools should design a holistic education which combines hard skills, soft skills and human qualities such as judgment, wisdom and morality (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2015), whilst developing graduates with the aptitude to make ethical business decisions which consider corporate social responsibility and sustainability (Hawawini, 2005). They must incorporate more experiential learning into their courses (McHann and Frost, 2010), as many business programmes may not be routinely developing the skills needed to address the challenges of the job market which it's graduates will face (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011). Institutions should consider the pedagogic training of their learning designers, whether they be lecturers, deans or Professors, as many do not have suitable, relevant pedagogic training or experience (Klimoski and Amos, 2012).

Levant et al (2016) examined active learning within a business simulation; specifically the development of soft skills by student participants. Soft skills are defined as a social dimension of competencies, attitudes and behaviours displayed in interactions among individuals that affect the outcomes of various interpersonal encounters (Muir, 2004). It noted a significant improvement on 11 soft skills for 392 participants with no significant difference between males and females, which was consistent with other studies (Gammie et al, 2003; Jackling & Anderson, 1998; Keff & Roush, 1997). The study also concluded that previous professional experience has no significant impact upon results. In critique of the study, which the authors

themselves acknowledge, the timeframe of six half-days was short and did not allow significant time for meaningful reflection by the students, lacked the exploration of effective group work, and did not examine the effects upon metacognition. It also only superficially discusses the role of the facilitator. These points appear to require further research, as does the range of a wider set of soft skills. Limiting this range to a set number – 11 in the case of Levant et al's study – is unnecessarily restraining and does not allow for examination of the vast range of soft skills needed by graduates entering the workforce today. This study explores a far wider range of soft skills and also offers a deeper exploration into some of the limiting factors, listed above.

Simulations have their supporters; Levant et al (2016) emphasise that they facilitate enhanced self-knowledge and allow the students to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. This allows them to feel authentic anxieties, pressures and feelings that they will have to face when exposed to real business world. In critique of this view, it can be argued that simulations are not a wholly authentic experience and thus, the student does not necessarily feel that they have something to lose – which can be the reality of working within or setting up a business. Simulations may not develop skills that are relevant to careers, or employability, such as communication skills (Barker, 2014), or familiarity with social media tools (Walker, 2014). However, there is a body of literature which is supportive of simulations as being helpful in developing team-building, decision making and planning skills (Chang et al, 2003), and resulting in practical knowledge which students may require in later life (Scalzo and Turner, 2014). Canhoto and Murphy (2016) argue that educators must ensure that students are developing the right soft skills. I support this view, however, Canhoto and Murphy do not offer any recommendations or advice as to how this might be achieved or what soft skills are the 'right' ones for students to develop.

Carolis and Litzky's (2019) study examined the view of entrepreneurship education and outlined that such courses should tap into students' inner entrepreneur, nurture their abilities to think and act creatively, embrace failure, be resilient and be prepared for the challenges of the workplace. The authors assert that experiential education affords students the opportunities; to experiment, to fail, to pivot, to evaluate risk and to develop self-efficacy in a safe and secure environment. The authors suggest that

facilitators should focus learning upon the start-up process, operating decisions and personal attribute development, as fostering an entrepreneurial mind-set can contribute to the holistic development of a student (Secundo et al, 2016). Caza et al (2015) examined the effects of a holistic, experiential curriculum on business students' satisfaction and career confidence. They found that students who studied via these methods ranked significantly higher their satisfaction and career self-efficacy than students who graduated from traditional, highly structured curricula's. Furthermore, the authors support the findings which show that moving from traditional methods to active, experiential learning can improved knowledge and skills acquisition (Lengnick-Hall & Sanders, 1997; Reynolds, 2009), as experiential learning offers direct, personal experience for students (McCarthy and McCarthy, 2006).

2.4 Organisations seek job-ready and career-ready graduates with soft skills

Carolis and Litsky (2019) assert that a functional integration of experiential learning and soft skill development is crucial for a business school curricula, as communication and leadership is crucial (Klimoski and Amos, 2012). In critique of the study, the soft skills under examination were very limited with only five areas measured and only three of those areas that fall into the category of 'soft skill'; leader self-efficacy, career self-efficacy: goal clarity, and career self-efficacy: application effectiveness. Therefore, whilst this study offers useful insights into the direction of travel for soft skill development within business school students, it is limited in scope. Boggu and Sundarsingh (2019) found that experiential cycle activities fostered learner autonomy and enabled learning skills necessary for the workplace among Omani students. They defined autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's own learning (Holec, 1981; Benson, 1997).

Mahoney (1996) argued that learners are central to their learning; co-creating personal realities within which they participate and respond. Nunan (1980) identified a series of steps taken by a learner upon a pathway to autonomous learning. These steps are; 1) goals being made clear to learners; 2) learners being allowed to create

their own goals; 3) learners being encouraged to use second languages; 4) raising awareness of the learning process; 5) helping learners to identify preferences and strategies; 6) encouraging learner choice; 7) allowing learners to generate their own tasks; 8) encouraging learners to become teachers; and, 9) encouraging learners to become researchers. As an experiential education designer, these steps are important matters to consider, particularly when considering other studies which discuss the link between leadership positions with student commitment, self-consciousness, collaboration, citizenship and complex cognitive skills (Coker et al, 2016).

Communication is regarded as a vital skill for business students (Raja and Najimonnisa, 2018). With experiential learning methods tentatively proven to improve that skill more effectively than traditional methods. Critical thinking is espoused as another crucial skill for business students, which are realised when teaching methods move students towards being independent thinkers through different varieties of experiential activities. (Hasselbring et al, 1994).

Ustonloglu (2009) suggested that training is needed for teachers who aren't capable of teaching experientially. There appears to be a need for teachers to 'let go' to some extent, to pass some accountability and responsibility to their students and to act flexibly in order to transform traditional tasks into engaging, active ones, if they wish their students to act autonomously and to develop autonomy as a soft skill.

Ackerman and Hu (2011) concluded that students with high learning autonomy respond better than students with low learning autonomy to experiential learning initiatives. This may be due to the fact that experiential learning requires improvisation and flexibility (Trevisan, 2004) which more traditional types of learning do not.

In summary, soft skills are an important range of attributes for undergraduate business students to develop. It is therefore advantageous for business schools to aid this development, which may be well served by the inclusion of experiential teaching pedagogies. Student-led learning is an important consideration for business school teachers as this may facilitate the development of certain soft skills, however, exactly which soft skills and how has yet to be fully explored. Therefore, this study places its focus upon these areas.

2.5 Summary of literature pertaining to pedagogic approach of business schools

In summary, business schools predominantly offer a traditional pedagogic approach to teaching and learning. This is exercised mainly through lectures and seminars. Business schools have lacked change and because of that, there is a need for them to flex to the current needs of modern organisations in order to provide them with job-ready and career-ready graduates with appropriate skills and attributes.

The review of the literature also considers the range of courses available to business management students today. Thus, section 4 explores the emergence of degree apprenticeships within this field, the pedagogic approach of teaching them, and their link to the production of career-ready graduates.

3. Degree Apprenticeships

This section sets out to understand degree apprenticeships within the context of business management programmes. It considers the emergence and packaging of degree apprenticeships, their suitability to fulfil workplace needs and requirements, the benefits these courses can offer to three distinct groups; students, organisations and taxpayers, the global increase in apprenticeship scheme places available to participants, and the outputs and results from degree apprenticeship programmes. It is vital that the study considers the use of experiential learning within a range of pedagogic settings, particularly if the study is to consider forward-thinking approaches which could be suitable for the wider sector. Therefore, both traditional business school settings and degree apprenticeship schemes are reviewed to determine their position as a conduit for experiential education to aid the career-readiness and soft skill development of its students.

3.1 The re-packaged, re-birth of apprenticeships

What follows is an account of the recent re-emergence of apprenticeships in the educational landscape and their development in the form of degree apprenticeship programmes.

The higher education market in the UK has undergone a variety of changes in recent years; student fees were introduced in the 1990's, Degree Apprenticeships have been created, and integral to the Office for Students mission is widening participation. The university system has undergone marketization resulting in a more customer-focussed system. HE institutions are accountable for the outcomes they deliver and many are seeking to offer a variety of programmes and educational streams to increase student enrolments and market share whilst meeting regulatory requirements to widen participation. These include fully online programmes, blended programmes, foundation degrees, part-time courses, sandwich-courses, accelerated degrees and degree apprenticeships.

Successive UK governments have attempted to encourage Universities and employers to collaborate with each other in order to address workforce skills shortages (Welbourn et al, 2019). The Robbins Report (1963), Dearing Report (1997) and Wilson (2012) all called for increased partnerships between the two, though it is arguable that progress has been stunted by the lack of co-operation between either or both partners, which might be unrealistic to expect within a marketised system of both higher education and of business. However, some employers and universities have worked together to create five-year strategic plans in exemplar to long term planning (Welbourn et al, 2019). Welbourn et al (2019) asserts that universities should design and deliver courses which create job-ready graduates for the 21st century, though for this to happen both universities and businesses would need to work together, probably through a government-driven agenda, in order to agree upon graduate outcomes which were both representative of a university education and practical in terms of developing graduate employability.

A number of reviews took place in 2012 and 2013, with Doug Richard, Jason Holt and the BIS Select Committee proffering the need to expand apprenticeship offerings. This strategy was regarded as vital to: raising skills levels across the economy, enabling the delivery business-specific training, equipping people with the skills and knowledge to carry out demanding roles, boosting productivity within organisations and supporting people into fulfilling, well-paid jobs.

The ways in which universities may strive to re-purpose the education system in order to meet the challenges of diversity and flexibility might be appropriately delivered via degree apprenticeships (Husbands, 2018). Degree apprenticeships can deliver innovative programmes (Crawford-Lee & Moorwood, 2019), which offer a new way for employers and universities to engage with each other in order to deliver graduates skilled for the labour market, despite an ambiguous economic landscape (Crawford-Lee and Wall, 2018). It can, however, be argued that degree apprenticeships are serving a political agenda which is driven by neoliberal discourse, and a part of the expansion of higher education which is underpinned by employability and international competitiveness, thus framing education in terms of economic value and existing to cater for the needs of employers (Ryan & Lorinc, 2018).

In summary, apprenticeship programmes have recently emerged within higher education to offer a route which can blend on-the-job experience with subject knowledge, offering an opportunity to learn ‘from the inside’ and make a strong start to an individual career. Businesses can reap the benefits of this system by addressing skills gaps, recruiting highly-motivated employees and fostering loyalty with apprenticeship cohorts which leads to good employee retention. The following section discusses the nature and scope of degree apprenticeships.

3.2 The nature and scope of degree apprenticeships

This section explores the nature and scope of degree apprenticeships and their growth in the UK. One of the most subscribed degree apprenticeship programmes is in management, which was launched, in part, to boost a perceived lack of management skills in UK businesses (Farragher, 2016).

The emphasis, for many companies offering degree apprenticeship schemes, was to plug a skills gap. Many employers were delivering this sort of training for the first time (Farragher, 2016), and were keen to ensure that they hired, retained and trained the best candidates available, ideally those with a higher level of professional capability than standard undergraduate students. This can be challenging, as vocational education can sometimes be viewed as non-educational and looked upon disdainfully by educators, the schooling system, and parents (Billett, 2016).

Powell and Walsh (2017) assert that degree apprenticeships have the potential to disrupt the UK higher education system as employers will begin to collaborate more with universities and will therefore seek more power and ownership. The authors also argue that the opening up of higher education provision to private providers does transfer power to those with no commitment to wider public values, which could be seen as neoliberal discourse. Over time, higher education institutions may lose their dominant position with regards to determining curriculum content, particularly given that apprenticeship content is shaped by employer trailblazers. This would be

a controversial route for apprenticeships to take, given the collaborative environment which is needed for degree apprenticeships to be successfully delivered. Thus, it is the assertion of this study that suitable pedagogies must be designed to facilitate outcomes, with teachers and learning designers at the forefront of curriculum design to frame the content and attributes sought by employers.

Powell and Walsh state that degree apprenticeship standards risk homogenising the workforce and delivering a vastly different education experience between degree apprentices and traditional university students. This may not be problematic, however, as students will have a range of opportunities and pedagogic approaches with which they can engage. However, it can be argued that classroom-based experiential education which is student-centred and offers a range of pedagogic approaches, can ameliorate against both the homogenisation and the difference in approaches. Institutions could design and deliver courses which incorporate a blend of workplace and theoretical learning in order to deliver the requisite skills and knowledge to all of its graduates.

Mulkeen et al (2019) urge collaboration between all stakeholders, in order to create a flexible system to support the relevance and validity of degree apprenticeships. This has so far proven to be problematic, due to the different stakeholder expectations (Chankseliani and Relly, 2015; Lambert, 2016; Saraswat, 2016). Hogarth et al (2014) concluded that whilst employers do have aspirations for involvement and influence within and upon degree apprenticeships, they are also mindful of the administrative burdens of such, leaving universities to largely design and assess the process (Bravenboer, 2016), despite the role of apprenticeship trailblazers.

In summary, it is recognised that degree apprenticeships are of benefit to a number of stakeholders (Powell & Walsh, 2017); employers, higher education institutions, students, the government and professional bodies. Additionally, this section demonstrates the growth of academic research which has been undertaken within this area in the last three years. However, there are no comprehensive studies which offer the field conclusions as to the development of soft skills within those following business management degree apprentice programmes, which this study seeks to rectify.

The following section considers the benefit of degree apprenticeships to a variety of stakeholders.

3.3 Degree Apprenticeships are beneficial to three sectors

As discussed above, degree apprenticeship programmes have received considerable focus from the UK government since 2010. Let us now consider the ways in which they can benefit three key stakeholders: students, organisations whom employ apprentices, and the UK taxpayer.

3.3.1 Degree Apprenticeships are beneficial to students

Apprenticeships offer students the opportunity to ‘earn and learn’. Apprentices gain workplace experience whilst studying for a degree, without incurring debt. They also engage with a traditional university experience, though this may not be desirable to all school leavers (Hordern, 2015). Whilst apprenticeships were, traditionally, seen as a practical alternative to higher education, degree apprenticeships offer the practicality of workplace learning alongside academic understanding of a wide syllabus of topics. If school-leavers can expect enhanced career options from apprenticeships then this form of training becomes more attractive to them.

3.3.2 Degree Apprenticeships are beneficial to organisations

The Leitch Review on Skills, 2006, concluded there was a ‘strong argument about employer-sponsored degrees offering better productivity returns because some of the learning will be on the job.’ It went on to suggest that schemes can also combat ‘underemployment and poor skills utilisation’ which the review deemed to be ‘two significant problems in the graduate labour market.’ In the UK, which has seen growth in the business services sector of the economy, the requirement for certain skills; knowledge work, corporate behaviour, teamwork and self-management are extremely valuable in the workplace (Fincham, 2006; Reed, 1996). Businesses have

called for improvements within the work-ready skills of new entrants into the workforce, which represents a weakness in the skills-base of graduates from UK Higher Education (Saraswat, 2016)

Work-based learning can be beneficial to organisations as it develops their workforce in a way that bridges the gap between education and work (Overton & Lemanski, 2015). It meets the requirements of learners and assists in the development of an organisation (Boud & Soloman, 2001) and it adds a layer of experience onto the conceptual knowledge gained through study (Gray, 2001). The value of such schemes to employers is the offer of enhanced employee skills, creating knowledge within the individual apprentice and sharing this within an organisation, increased motivation and professionalism of employees and changes to practice (Overton & Lemanski, 2015).

In summary, one conclusion to draw from these studies could be the need to improve graduate attributes and employability levels, which can be achieved through a development of higher education programmes, notably degree apprenticeships.

3.3.3 Degree Apprenticeships are beneficial to the taxpayer

A Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) report, published in April 2016, suggested that employer-sponsored degree-apprenticeships offered excellent value for money to the taxpayer, who pay much less of the cost than traditional degrees, contributing more than £10,000 less over the duration of a course, as well as an obvious benefit to students who receive a salary from the employer, do not pay tuition fees and therefore graduate with no debt. The report argued that employer sponsored degrees should 'become more central to the future provision of higher education' given the 'positive implications for both higher education funding and for universities meeting the more explicit needs of industry.' (THE, 2016) The apprenticeship levy, a government initiative designed to assist companies with a turnover of in excess of £3 million per annum to hire degree apprentices, came into effect in April 2017 at a rate of 0.5% of an employer's pay bill. One effect of the apprenticeship levy may be that firms are more willing to engage in the degree apprenticeships through them wanting

to take sole, or lead, ownership of the design and delivery methods (Saraswat, 2016). This is likely to change the traditional pedagogic approach of business schools.

3.3.4 Review of stakeholder benefits

Improving productivity, developing skills, reducing unemployment and enabling more people to develop academically are prime drivers behind the degree apprenticeship scheme. As such, the design, development and delivery of apprenticeship schemes is important to the three stakeholders stated within this section. The following section now turns to the important aspect of pedagogic design and the relevant considerations for a learning designer and teacher within degree apprenticeships.

3.4 Pedagogic design of degree apprenticeships

This literature review considers that a variety of pedagogic approaches exist, both within traditional settings and within degree apprenticeship schemes. The following section outlines the major considerations for learning designers and teachers within degree apprenticeship programmes, and the associated outcomes of degree apprenticeships.

3.4.1 Pedagogic design and considerations

It is evident that considerable thought must be given to the design of degree-apprenticeship schemes. Billett (2016) emphasises the centrality of ‘experiences which promote students’ learning. He asserts many university courses are focused on the development of specific occupational capacities and would benefit students and industry by developing practical competency as well as merely knowledge. However, practical competency can be difficult to measure for all vocations. Measurable outcomes from observed performance is sometimes only effective in reporting certain elements of human performance, such as recounting knowledge and demonstrating specific procedures. The ability to solve problems and to adapt to novel circumstances or tasks is far harder to measure (Billett, 2016; Chi, Glaser &

Farr, 2014; Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996; Schmidt & Boshuizen, 1993). Such qualities are what Billett refers to as 'twenty-first century skills; critical thinking, effective collaboration and communication, being literate with information, use of media and technology and personal qualities of flexibility, initiative, productivity and leadership. Graduates expect their work to change within their career (Billett, 2006; Noon & Blyton, 1997) and it is therefore beneficial for apprenticeship providers to offer content which involve sets of experiences that are guiding them to think and act in this flexible way.

The design of apprenticeship courses cannot be solely 'industry-led' The competence of industry trailblazers is only partial and may not offer a full perspective (Billett, 2016). Equally, academics who may not have worked outside of academia might not be best placed to advise on the design of courses which must contain such vocational objectives. Billett (2016) argues that teachers who have been involved in industry offer a real-world perspective in addition to a knowledge of programme development, curriculum and assessment design and protocol. Overton and Lemanski (2015) explored the role of industry champions within the design stage of a degree apprenticeship. They found that when a course developer, an academic from a higher education institution, and an industry champion, from within a company or companies looking to recruit apprentices, were brought together to design programmes it bridged a gap between academia and industry.

3.4.2 A move away from traditional approaches

'Twenty-first century skills' are considered as being desirable for learners to develop. These skills are seen by Billett (2016) as skills which need to be learnt rather than taught, in order to sustain competence across a learners working life, and students need to learn their own processes, their own methods of working and their own ways in which they adapt to new types of work (Glaser, 1984). The power for students to negotiate their own meaning from an experience could be an important part of knowledge building (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and focussing on providing vocational learners a range of experiences may be beneficial as that form of learning could be

more likely to generate the flexible, adaptive learning that government policy is perceived to demand (Billett, 2016).

Noone (2009) researched the design of learning activities for professional practice in an undergraduate curriculum and stressed that there is a recent emphasis on providing opportunities to encourage professional thinking styles and to expose students to real-world, authentic experiences in the classroom (Fink, 2003; Tanner, 2006, 2007). They defined the exemplar form of apprenticeship learning to be that which provides the student to apply concepts to broader, integrated learning experiences at a wider level, rather than sporadically within courses (Huber et al, 2007).

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) recommended a move away from traditional, didactic ways of covering information in class and towards developing activities that built on the skills of each learner; for example, a simulated practice activity or a progressive case study. It is this type of integrated approach which introduces students to the full range of attributes required within professional practice (Sullivan, 2005). In order to ascertain what may have been learnt, Tanner (2006) introduced a clinical judgement model and used this to frame learning activity. Allowing students to have the opportunity to deliberately reflect on their experiences and notice parts of their own performance (within learning activities) can allow insights into their own learning, whilst actual or simulated practice can help students develop skills in areas relevant to professional practice. Noone (2009) concluded that less time might be focussed on learning through traditional content coverage methods, such as lectures, and more time through contextualised learning through activities and simulations in order that students are best placed to integrate theoretical knowledge, practice and professionalism.

Saraswat (2016) emphasised the opportunity for 'rounded-learning and employability' within degree apprenticeship study. The researcher described the on-the-job and off-the-job experience as a "two-way journey for the apprentices, offering a more rounded experience for them as students." They went on to say "combining work (relevant work experience) and studies was perceived to make students more "employment-ready" and employable after the completion of apprenticeships,

especially in contrast with recent graduates who often have little or no relevant work experience.”

Therefore, it is crucial for educators to consider the effect of experiential pedagogies within their classroom teaching in order to develop those skills, particularly within degree apprenticeship courses.

3.4.3 Experiential, work-based programmes are being introduced to improve student capabilities

A number of HEI's (Middlesex, Portsmouth, Leeds Metropolitan University, cited in Rowe et al, 2016) have used work based learning and experiential education to deliver rewarding, practical programmes, allowing students to focus on improving capabilities. These have acted as a framework for the promotion of work based and work-related learning (Wall, 2013) and have largely offered students the opportunity to engage, experientially, with their studies in the institution, whilst being told to reflect on their learning when they reach the workplace itself (Rowe et al, 2016). This appears to leave a gap in both the in-course reflection and in the application of the skills developed through real-world application during the course itself.

Billett (2016) ponders whether educators should move away from measurable performances and institutional requirements to a process focussing on learners' needs and the experiences required for graduates to excel in the workplace. This, he argues could be even more important as the job market changes; individual needs must be met and the pedagogy which drives this must be carefully considered.

Rowe (2019) concludes that there are a number of practical implications in supporting skills development within work-based learning, including the development of an innovative, collaborative curricula which is flexible and offers an effective work-based pedagogy to support the development of skills such as gradueness (Eden, 2014), whereby a whole-person approach is taken to describe a graduate's employability, including knowledge and a range of skills, and resilience (Harvey, 2003). A strength of her research is the wide-ranging literature-review, though the research is limited in not offering practical solutions which have been tested within academic institutions.

Whilst there has been evidence of pedagogic innovation within the context of work-based learning within the last twenty years (Portwood, 2001, Costley, 2011, Walsh, 2007, Boud and Solomon, 2001), there is the need to explore the development of soft skills within not only work-based learning, but also within the wider context of classroom-based experiential learning. It is evident that teachers and learning designers have resources to draw upon for inspiration, but very few tools or models to utilise within their learning design or classroom practice.

In summary, the pedagogic design and associated considerations within a degree apprenticeship scheme are the key determining factors which link the student's learning to the development of their employability skills. In order to aid skill development, specific provision must be made within the learning design. This study therefore has chosen to focus upon an exploration of experiential pedagogy and the effects those teaching and learning methods might have upon skills which are linked to employability, namely soft skills – which are explored further in section 5 of this chapter. The following sub-section gives consideration to the range of outputs which are associated with degree apprenticeship schemes.

3.4.4 Outcomes of learning through degree apprenticeships

Whilst the previous sub-section considered the pedagogic input within degree apprenticeship programmes, what follows is a critique of the associated outcomes of those programmes.

Apprenticeships can be a mode of learning which is not restricted to merely the learning of a specific occupation (Billet, 2016). Rather, it offers an opportunity for participants to develop a wider skill set which both they and their employers should benefit from. It is argued by Billet (2016) that a successful programme would be mediated by the learners themselves, rather than through the activities and interactions which others directly try to enforce upon them. The writer follows by saying that most people learn through their own personal experiences, thinking and acting whilst they are learning (Rogoff and Lave, 1984) and the students own

engagement with activities will be central to the building of skills, offering a distinct mode of learning to develop occupational capacities because as they engage with experiences and activities which are novel to them they will be learning (Billet, 2001) and, whilst they are encountering familiar experiences they will be honing skills they have previously developed. It should, however, be noted that the way an experience is viewed or reflected upon by one individual can have a completely different effect on another (Perkins et al, 1993) and whilst in some instances task-based experiential learning can assist learners to construct their own occupational practice, for many this transformation will be barely visible (Donald, 1991). Jordan (1989) asserts that a didactic mode of teaching delivery is commonplace within the west, and that it is often seen as an efficient means of transferring knowledge, but counters this by promoting the benefits of learning through observation and imitation. The generalisability of published research, such as the above, can be problematic, however, as it leads the reader to conclude that apprenticeships might offer inherent advantages over traditional learning. This should be disputed, as the cited studies by Rogoff and Rogoff & Lave demonstrate that active, reflective learning can be facilitated within traditional settings also. This study spans two groups – traditional full time learners and degree apprenticeships – in order to offer an understanding of the ways in which both sets of students develop soft skills.

Learning that is personal and based upon an apprentice's own experiences can increase their sense of self, their agency, the belief of their own ability to complete a task, their focus and direction and their introspection (Billet, 2016). They can also benefit from knowing how to act in a given situation or setting, such as the workplace (Singleton, 1989).

Billet (2016) suggests that teachers might be well placed to actively facilitate a broad range of experiences for the apprentice, before, during and after the undertaking of a work placement and the teacher ought also to facilitate the reconciliation, sharing and comparing of experiences for all apprentices on a programme (Billet, 2015a). This may provide the apprentice with a shift away from dependence on others, give them an understanding of the importance of engaging in activities and interactions and might prompt teachers to find ways of promoting, utilising and monitoring innovative pedagogical practices which support apprentices' learning. What is learnt,

and how, is of crucial importance to the future career of the apprentice and to the employer, who seeks a return on their investment.

In summary, whilst securing occupational knowledge is clearly beneficial to all parties, the capacities for an apprentice to work and learn independently, to collaborate with others and to work and learn in ways that are intentional and well directed are also advantageous, suggesting that course designers would be well-placed in creating opportunities for this to occur, through both structured activities and as a by-product of them.

3.5 Summary of literature pertaining to degree apprenticeships

This literature review has covered the way apprenticeships are designed, the way they work in practice, the benefits and pitfalls of apprenticeships versus other pedagogic models and, in a small but growing field, degree apprenticeships themselves. There is a clear synergy between experiential education and degree apprenticeships. There is also the potential for a hybrid pedagogic model of Integrated Experiential Education, to which I have previously alluded. This study places a new pedagogic model at the centre of its research, with student participants being taught through the model of Integrated Experiential Education – a fusion of overarching aspects from a range of experiential pedagogies which I believe may be suitable for both traditional students and degree apprentices. This gap in the literature has not been explored previously and acts as a justification for the shaping of this research study to uncover whether, and to what extent, degree apprenticeships might be a suitable vehicle for this type of education.

The chapter now turns to the subject of soft skills, which is one of a number of skills which are thought to be advantageous for students to develop to aid their employability.

4. Soft Skills

4.1 Introduction

The following section explores the development of soft skills and the impact of experiential teaching methods upon student outcomes. This is an important element to consider within this study as I seek to understand what, if any, links exist between experiential learning and practical, real-world skill development. Real-world, authentic experiences are central to many experiential pedagogies, such as work-based learning and degree apprenticeships. These pedagogies do, in many instances, offer students the opportunity to develop more than merely subject knowledge. The following section will introduce the concept and term 'soft skills'.

4.2 The development of the term 'Soft Skills'

The term soft skills has been defined as: 'a social dimension of competences...attitudes and behaviours displayed in interactions among individuals that affect the outcomes of various interpersonal encounters (Muir, 2004, P96); 'skills which enable us to communicate and interact with others...contributing to self-management and the control of behaviour (Goleman, 1996); related to personality traits and cognitive abilities and thus difficult to measure (Muir, 2004; Boudrias and Morin, 2011). Soft skills are a part of an individual's capital (Andreas, 2018), are character traits, attitudes and behaviours rather than technical aptitude or knowledge, and are the intangible, non-technical personality-specific skills which determines one's ability as a leader, facilitator, mediator and negotiator (Robles, 2012: 457). Ritter et al (2017) contrast soft skills with hard skills, suggesting that hard skills include knowledge that can be learnt within a classroom, with proficiency more closely linked to concepts of intelligence. The nature and scope of these studies is wide-ranging, as the term 'soft skills' can be applied to and within a variety of settings such as academia, the workplace and with regards to relationships, such as through the demonstration of emotional intelligence. None of these settings should be discounted within an exploration of soft skills, for they all have relevance and currency for higher education students today.

The fact that soft skills are seen as 'people skills' and 'interpersonal skills' highlights their importance. Therefore, developing these skills can only be advantageous to students and future employers. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the role that education can play within their development. Moon (2004) listed a number of learning areas which he advocated should be included within experiential activities. This list suggest students should learn: about work and workplace practices; how organisations work; communication skills and working with people; about personal work behaviour patterns; to evaluate their own performance; to act upon feedback from others; about their own career aspirations; to plan and complete projects; to learn from experience; about self-management; to use reflection and reflective practice; key employability skills, or skills not gained elsewhere in the curriculum; self-confidence and a willingness to take the initiative; and, to enhance their orientation towards lifelong learning. This list is very realistic, with careful planning, for an experiential learning designer to incorporate into experiential projects and it demonstrates the link between what can occur within experiential learning and what can result from experiential learning by way of outputs, such as the development of soft skills. The experiential project at the centre of this study encapsulated these learning areas.

4.2.1 Soft skills are; technical, managerial, entrepreneurial and personal

A study produced by Lichtenstein and Lyons (1996), argued that soft skills falling into four meta-categories: Technical skills, which encapsulates operations management, supplies, plant and equipment; Management skills, which encompasses planning, organising, supervising, identifying customers and distribution channels, financial management skills, administrative skills and higher-order skills relating to learning and problem solving; Entrepreneurship skills, which includes the ability to develop a concept and a business plan, environmental scanning and networking, and; Personal maturity skills, such as self-awareness, accountability, emotional coping and creativity.

Within their study the skills were developed in live projects with real-world, real-time problems (Gibb, 2002). Such projects have been shown to result in the successful

launch of new ventures (Marshall, 2006; Hermann et al, 2008 and Matlay, 2008). The projects brought together academics, business executives and entrepreneurs, offering a wider perspective to the student's learning experience (Biggs, 1996). Students working in groups on a variety of activities can prompt participants to recognise the importance of time management, negotiation, strategic thinking and persuasion (Collins et al, 2006) and experiential learning programmes based on individual accountability can result in the determination of participants to succeed (Pittaway and Cope, 2007).

In summary, it is therefore suggested that soft skills can be developed through experiential, real-world projects. However, these studies are all limited in scope given that they do not offer a comprehensive exploration of a wide range of soft skill development.

4.2.2 Soft skills include; critical thinking, problem solving and reflection

An interactive approach to learning can help to foster the development of higher order critical thinking, problem solving and reflective skills (Graham, 2004), which can be particularly effective in developing the behaviours oft-demonstrated by entrepreneurs (Laughton and Ottewill, 1998; Smith and Munro, 2002). They can be understood to be inter-personal, intra-personal and socio-emotional skills, such as communication skills and critical thinking (Vaughan, 2017). Soft skills, employability skills, life skills and non-cognitive skills often overlap and are used interchangeably (Cimatti, 2016 and Cinque, 2016). Soft skills and dispositions offer individuals a skill to do a task, such as lead a team, whilst also offering a disposition, such as the drive or willingness to take the role of leader. Therefore, the attributes are important to each individual, as is the recognition that they evolve and develop over time (Vaughan, 2017). To what extent an individual student recognises their own soft skill development is not ascertained from these studies however, and needs exploration.

In summary, the term soft skills is a wide-ranging and interchangeable one, with many soft skills proving of benefit to a graduate's employability and an employer's

organisation. The following section proceeds to review the literature regarding employer demands for soft skills.

4.3 Employers demand soft skills within the workplace

The importance of soft skills has been noted by a range of researchers and organisations. The section will subsequently explore the demand for soft skills, thus illustrating their importance to organisations, employability and the holistic development of students.

4.3.1 Employers are clear over which soft skills are needed

The Confederation for British Industry, within its Education and Skills Survey (2019) highlighted four priorities for itself and its members to work on over the next few years; to ensure the education system prepares young people for the modern world and work; to harness the power of business to improve the education and skills system; to create the rights conditions for lifelong learning; and to champion the UK's world-class education institutions, including schools, colleges and universities.

Employer respondents were clear about what they need from the education and skills systems: skills, behaviours and attributes that ensure school and college leavers, as well as graduates, are ready for the world of work. This supports the Pearson Global Learner Survey which found that learners believe soft skills will give them the advantage over automation. This advantage which human beings can hold over machines is due to skills such as creativity, originality, problem-solving and the ability to learn. They may be the hardest to teach and learn, but it is vital that the education and skill system develops ways for people to master these skills. (Rod Bristow, President, Pearson UK and Global Online Learning).

Evidence arose from the survey on what employers are looking for from the education system. They called for the development of wider character, behaviours and attributes, which employers considered to be the most important consideration when recruiting school and college leavers. Despite close to three-quarters (74%) of

employers being satisfied with the academic knowledge of young people who have applied for jobs during the past 12 months, being 'work ready' was viewed as a priority, with two in five (40%) reporting that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with wider character, behaviours, and attributes. In addition, one third (33%) were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied by the amount of relevant work experience young people have. The most critical skills to be identified by employer respondents were leadership and management skills, followed by work readiness skills and planning and organising skills, which were identified as the second and third most important priorities for workforce development over the coming year.

Furthermore McKinsey, in their discussion paper 'Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works' (2012) hinted at a shortage of people with critical job skills. Focussing on nine countries, including the UK, 43% of employers surveyed stated that they could not find enough skilled entry-level workers. The report suggests that there is a need for skill development.

A blend of soft skills and technical knowledge are needed to provide national and institutional competitiveness within industry (Cacciolatti et al, 2017). Thus, employers recruit for highly skilled people in order to give them competitive advantage. It is held that academia must respond to the needs of its employer stakeholders by focussing on the soft skills that employers need (Ritter et al, 2017).

In summary, there exists a range of important principles for employers, students and universities to consider, especially when considered alongside the projected change in the landscape of employment, highlighted within the report below.

4.3.2 As skills needs change, sectors must evolve

Career readiness and employability will continue to grow in importance as an area of curriculum design and development (Coonan, E, and Pratt-Adams, S. 2018). The UK Government's Industrial Strategy, published in November 2017, commits to "equip citizens for jobs shaped by next generation technology, whilst The World Economic Forum's in-depth 2016 report The Future of Jobs has predicted "dramatic shifts in expected skills requirements". Tholen (2018) warns that a gap has opened between

what employers need and what universities provide, arguing that “new graduate occupations have emerged in which the skills demanded by employers and to perform the work are not necessarily aligned with the skills and knowledge HE imparts”

The discussion paper ‘Skills shift - Automation and the future of the workforce’ commissioned by the McKinsey Global Institute in May 2018 explains that skills shifts in the workplace are ongoing, that companies around the world complain of the troubles they have in recruiting skilled talent, that workers complain of being either overqualified or underqualified to do their jobs and that skill shortages have negative implications for the labour market and the economy worldwide. Conversely, they assert that economic growth can be boosted by appropriate skills development for those in, and entering, the workforce. The report references the OECD research ‘Getting skills right: Assessing and anticipating changing skills needs’ (2016) which states there is evidence of a mismatch between the skills the workforce currently has and the skills that employers are looking for and will need in the future.

Another McKinsey study, the ‘Global Institute Workforce Skills Executive Survey’ (March 2018) examined the skills used in the workforce today in comparison to the skills which will be needed in the future. The study noted a number of skills which will grow in terms of their perceived importance amongst employers and their expected future need. Significantly, those skills mentioned in the important and needed category, were; leadership, basic digital skills, communication and negotiation, critical thinking, advanced IT skills, interpersonal/empathy, creativity, project management, entrepreneurship, adaptability and advanced data analysis.

If employer demands and the neoliberal discourse of government are to be satisfied, then universities will need to respond to an agenda which prioritises student-centred learning, innovation and an amalgamation of civic and employability competences (Centre for Research on Problem-oriented Project Learning, 2019), with an emphasis upon developing competencies such as critical thinking, creative processes and collaboration. The Centre concludes, the view that pedagogic effects may extend to and within a wider community through this method of learning is underrepresented in the field and does demand further research.

In summary, it is evident that the sector, consisting of employees, higher education institutions and students consider the development of soft skills to be a necessity in order to aide employability in a rapidly changing workplace.

4.4 The development of soft skills within higher education

Universities have an important role to play in shaping student's employability skills and behaviours. They are also desired to find ways, through classroom pedagogy, work experience placements and internships, of developing and practicing these essential skills. These can be learned within a social context, where the notion that human capital skills can be honed is one asserted by social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977; Kolb, 2015; Wenger, 1998). Knowing and observing other people, along with building relationships with individuals and strengthening connections between individuals and within communities can all aide an individual with their soft skill development (Becker, 1996; Coleman, 1988, 2000, Putnam, 2000). 'Bridging' social capital by being inclusive of outsiders and connecting people across different networks, can offer greater tolerance of diversity, can allow for more individuality within groups and can encourage connections with disparate groups of people (Granovetter, 1973; Onyx and Bullen, Putnam, 2000). This bridging can occur face to face, which, when dealing with difficult individuals, can demand a great level of soft skill (Kolb, 2015; Penard and Poussing, 2010, Wenger, 1998), or online, which allows people who have formed a bond or a bridge to continue to work collaboratively despite logistical difficulties or distance (Putnam, 2000; Salahuddin et al, 2016).

Within the Advance HE report, Building Higher Education Curricula Fit for the Future (Coonan, E, and Pratt-Adams, S. 2018), a number of university Vice-Chancellors agree that a skills shortage exists within graduate skills and employer demands and that universities have not done enough to close that gap. The report highlights that a move from traditional, didactic teaching approaches, such as lecturing, towards a more experiential and collaborative approach may aide the development of skills within students.

Whether or not universities are the right place for developing soft skills in people has been questioned (Cacciolatti et al, 2017). Some universities are focused on prioritising the successful management of resources and cost-effective delivery (Holman, 2000; Trowler, 2001) due to the neoliberal demands of successive government agenda, driving higher educational providers into a competitive, marketised landscape. Such efficiencies can be more obviously achieved through larger class sizes and a lecture-style delivery, thus preventing small-group, experiential learning. This, therefore, might be prohibitive to the development of soft skills and whilst this study does not explore the problem from the viewpoint of traditional teaching, it is committed to explore it through the lens of experiential learning.

Educators should explain why students are required to work together and how this practice will benefit them following graduation, stressing the importance of experiential learning to an individual's success in the outside, business setting (Coleman, 1988; Kolb, 2015; Roberts, 2013).

Tavanti and Wilp (2018) present models to strategically integrate experiential learning into teaching, learning, theory and practice. They espouse that the distinction between experienced and less experienced students is a great one, with a widening divide, and that properly designed experiential activities are crucial for aiding professional capacity of future leaders (Cacciamani, 2017; Fenton and Gallant, 2016). Tavanti and Wilp (2018) argue that service learning can aid student learning, whilst advancing community engagement values and diversity inclusion (Hickey, 2016). They also draw on a wide range of literature to assert that lectures are less effective than project-based teamwork activities (Aldas et al, 2010; Coker and Porter, 2016; Tracy et al, 2014), with employers preferring students who have experience of working on authentic, real-world projects (Herman and Renz, 2007).

It is advantageous for students to act as co-producers, where they are responsible for the learning which takes place (Lengnick-Hall and Sanders, 1997). The students make more effective and efficient efforts to produce good work (Pierce et al, 1991) and customise their learning to reflect their interests and competencies (Manz and

Sims, 1980). In critique of the Lengnick-Hall and Sanders (1997) study, the likely improvement of soft skills is alluded to, but there is only a limited number of skills outlined within the paper, with little or no indication of how they will be improved. However, the study did, importantly, suggest that if teachers empower students to make informed choices over their own actions within their learning, then those students' accomplishments, skills and satisfaction levels can be enhanced. Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that students are legitimate peripheral participants, who learn through participation in activities, social interactions and their own workplace community of practice. This indicates that pedagogy should be designed in such a way that it assists students in becoming a more central part of their learning – something this study has sought to establish.

Paradoxically, the government push towards vocational training and apprenticeships has pushed universities to consider the ways in which they develop soft skills within graduates (Onar et al, 2013; Sohal, 2013).

4.5 Students need soft skills

It is important for students to be aware of the importance to them of soft skill development, so that they embrace opportunities to hone these skills (Kolb, 2015; Wenger, 1998). Whether students have reservations about working in teams, collaborating with others whom they do not like or working with people whom they believe are not academically strong, they must be equipped with the tools to mitigate against some of the challenges faced (Ritter et al, 2017) and be engaged, physically or mentally, with a process which is relevant to their lives and their learning (Carver, 1996). They must learn from failure, tolerate ambiguity, and universities must invest into experiential teaching skills so that experiential curricula can be effectively implemented (Ritter et al, 2017). This view is challenged by Trkman (2019) who supports an outdated view of Spence (1973) that university level teaching should remain sufficiently hard in order that students can build their brain whilst putting effort into learning, which may aide them in becoming a 'business person'.

Cho et al (2017) assert that soft skills can be developed through multi-disciplinary co-operative and situated learning, which offers students a range of activities and

approaches to experience. However, higher education institutions might be well placed to consider how they can contain experiential learning, whether it be through service learning or another form, within their teaching practice, in order that current students can master the soft skills that many recent graduates may lack (Andreas, 2018). Miller-Millesen and Mould (2004) suggest that students want practical, relevant courses which will build on their prior experiences and provide them with the necessary skills with which to navigate their careers. Therefore, higher education institutions have sound reasons for designing such programmes.

Mason et al (2009) suggest that structured work experience has positive effects upon the ability of graduates to find jobs soon after graduation, but there is no evidence that this is affected by the positive effect of teaching, learning, or assessing, within the university setting, nor can it be evidenced that employability, or soft skills, are measured in relation to this positive outcome. Mason et al further suggest that initiatives to design and develop soft skills within higher education need to be explored in order to ascertain what gaps exist and how they might be eradicated. It is important, the authors suggest, for universities to develop soft skills within students that need to be developed at undergraduate level, rather than those skills which will not require development until later in one's career or those that will be developed within the early stages of a career.

In summary, whilst it is important for students to be aware of the term 'soft skills' in order that they might appreciate the need to develop them, the onus is upon universities and colleges to provide learning experiences which will aid their development in order to meet the demands and expectations which organisations appear to place upon graduates.

4.6 A definition of the term *Soft Skill Development*

Skills development has a range of definitions, including: an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and

adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills) (IGI Global, 2021); the acquisition of practical competencies, know-how and attitudes necessary to perform a trade or occupation in the labour market (EU Commission, 2012 in UNEVOC, 2021), and; the development of work-related skills or competencies through vocational education and training (NCVER, 2013 in UNEVOC, 2021). Furthermore, the Society for International Development (2021) argues that development is visible and useful, though not necessarily immediately.

SIDA (2013) define skills development as the productive capabilities acquired through all levels of learning and training, occurring in formal, non-formal, informal and on-the-job settings. It enables individuals to become fully and productively engaged in livelihoods, and to have the opportunity to adapt these capabilities to meet the changing demands and opportunities of economy and labour market. The acquisition of such capabilities depends on many factors, including a quality lifelong learning system and a supportive learning environment.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, my amalgamated definition of the term soft skill development is proposed as the following:

The movement, advancement, growth, acquisition or demonstration of a soft skill which: occurs within a learning or training environment; is dependent upon many factors, and; develops work-related skills or competencies.

4.7 The measurement of soft skill development

There are no universally set or agreed way(s) to measure soft skill development despite the range of measures and emerging research within the field (OECD, 2013; Devedzic et al, 2018; Pratt and Richards, 2014; Ginting, 2016; Cimatti, 2016, Pasha, 2016).

There are many ways to measure the ‘development’ of soft skills (Murray et al, 2018), though those metrics are often accused of being implicit and vague (Devedzic et al, 2018). Such measures include: checklists and questionnaires (Tem et al, 2020; Devadason et al, 2010); rating systems (Devedzic et al, 2018; Zheng et al, 2015); narrative accounts of progress, scoring systems and scales (Dewson et al, 2000);

appraisal sessions (Succi and Wieandt, 2019); qualitative examination of e-portfolios, internal and external observations, narratives about real-world experiences, blogs and the consensus about the estimation of the level of a skill has been developed by a person (Cimatti, 2016); role-plays, group interactions and presentations (Cook, 2016; Johns et al, 2007), and; sharing through recorded or observed group discussions (Pasha, 2016). Different measurement tools are advisable for the measurement of different soft skills (Murray et al, 2018). Therefore, for studies such as the one at the subject of this research, which does not seek to limit the number of soft skills explored, it is necessary to utilise a range of more open data collection methods (Murray et al, 2018). Pasha (2016) advocated the use of: real-life activities; hands-on tasks; opportunities for interpersonal communication; experiencing through observing, comparing, feeling, listening and talking; understanding through planning, explaining and applying; and socialising through developing relationships with other participants and teachers. Pasha (2016) also observed that these activities are not part of traditional classrooms and, as such, the experiential projects at the centre of this study sought to embed them via non-conventional means – an experiential project.

The measurement of 'distance travelled' through quantifiable measurements following the establishment of an initial baseline of soft skills is possible (Dewson et al, 2000), and whilst I did know the participants from previous term's teaching activities, I did not conduct any formal measurements of their baseline level of soft skills. Furthermore, despite having many years' experience of teaching first year Business Management students, this was not a part of this study.

There are limitations to those measurements listed above. For instance, Participants may have literacy or learning difficulties, which may preclude them from entering into written assessments effectively (Dewson et al, 2000). This can be mediated against through the use of verbal data collection, or by way of observations. Furthermore, difficulties arise within the use of questionnaires; the scoring systems utilised and the precise wording of questions chosen (Dewson et al, 2000). Also, items within questionnaires may be too general or too unclear for participants, thus making the data collected less reliable (Ginting, 2016).

Soft skills are difficult to define but also complex to assess, as selection methods can cover a wide range of different constructs and elements related to soft skills (Cook, 2016). Many studies seek to understand or measure the development of only a limited number of soft skills (Tem et al, 2020). This presupposes that researchers are satisfied with only studying the development of a finite number of skills and knowing those in advance of the study; rather than allowing the soft skills to emerge, as this study sought to do. Furthermore, the utilisation of quantifiable metrics to measure soft skill development tends to support the assessment of students' soft skills in specific instances, rather than across a wide range of skills which may be developed (Devedzic, 2018). This study has been designed to explore the development of the widest possible number of soft skills and to ascertain the extent of their development to the maximum potential, in order to maximise coverage within findings. It was important for the study to remain emergent and for data and findings to emanate from the activities, reflections, observations and focus group discussions. Furthermore, if ratings systems are utilised within assessments or course evaluations, initial and final gradings would be susceptible to reference bias (Duckworth and Yeager, 2015; Devedzic, 2018) by students who are actively trying to demonstrate competency in a limited but assessed number of soft skills (Zheng et al, 2015). The likelihood that students might inflate their ratings or perception of their soft skill development is mediated against by using emergent, qualitative data collection methods, in comparison to quantitative, metric-based systems (Devedzic, 2018). Additionally, many studies measure behaviour change as a proxy for soft skill development (Pratt and Richards, 2014). This is easy to conduct as it can be linked to classroom or workplace activities, but it is arguably only beneficial when considering easily observable behaviours such as punctuality, attendance and verbal communication.

Using a variety of measurements which consider the views of different parties can be beneficial when exploring the development of soft skills (Pratt and Richards, 2014). Suitable measures include: In-depth interviews, which can explore perspectives on particular ideas and developments and can provide detailed information about participants' thoughts (Tem et al, 2020). Interviews can also provide context to other data generated by a study (Boyce and Neale, 2006), offering a more complete picture of what has happened. How students perceive and value their soft skills, as

practiced within a project, is an important factor of their overall project experience. Therefore, individual reflection is a useful tool for ascertaining how and to what extent soft skills have been developed (Zheng et al, 2015). It is also noted that the assessment of soft skill development can realistically and usefully be undertaken by teacher educators through classroom observation (Ngang et al, 2015). Dewson et al (2000) advocate a range of data collection methods for measuring soft skills: a daily diary or personal journal; in-depth reflection during and/or after the project; observations of group or individual activities; and a presentation of materials within a portfolio. The study in question utilises a combination of all of the measurements contained within this paragraph.

This study is not one of assessment, nor is it the measuring of distance travelled or of learning. Rather, it is one of exploring development; a qualitative change, movement or acquisition, rather than a quantitative one.

4.8 How people develop

Vast literature exists to describe the ways in which people learn and develop. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow 1978; 1991; 1995; 2000) describes the ways adults learn and develop; interpreting and re-interpreting their experiences in order that they can make meaning and, hence, learn and develop. The theory asserts that learners must learn independently, making their own judgments rather than merely acting on the beliefs and judgments of others, such as teachers. The author viewed transformative learning as a development aid for autonomous thinking – something which is demonstrated within the personal reflections of student participants in this study. Schon (1983) positively espoused the benefits of reflection to demonstrate and solidify an individual's learning and development. His theory of critical reflection (1983) argued for the importance of reflecting-on-action in order for a learner to know how their actions may have contributed to unexpected outcomes. Finally, Lave and Wenger (1991) asserted that novices within learning groups begin learning by observing those around them – the members of their community. Those novices then slowly move from the periphery of the community to the centre; learning and developing as they are subjected to the influence of those around them. These three theories are core tenets of the ways in which this study views the act of

‘development’ arising from student participants via their actions, reflections and discussions ‘in-action’ and, latterly, ‘on-action’. This is demonstrated throughout the excerpts contained within the findings chapter.

4.9. A review of soft skill development: The intersection between student needs, employer demands and higher educational offerings

The need for soft skills within the workplace today has been noted. However, the chapter now explores the growing and greater need for their development in the future.

It has been noted that there is an increasing need for companies to employ graduates who are workplace-ready, who can ‘hit the ground running’ and demonstrate the ability to work in teams, to solve problems and to have the social and emotional intelligence and competency to undertake a wide range of tasks that today’s workplace requires. Employers have demonstrated their high expectations of graduates by questioning the abilities and competencies of their graduate recruits in recent years.

The importance of soft skills is prominent. However, university responses to these calls have thus far focused upon making minor modifications to existing course content, introducing new courses and expanding some provision for work experience. Some universities have also designed and delivered stand-alone skills courses, though their effectiveness is questionable (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998).

Experiential, active, work-based learning, with their combination of experience and reflection, can be transformative for society and can produce more rounded graduates with a range of soft skills which can meet the needs and demands of the workforce of the future. Curricula which solves real-world problems as opposed to artificial scenarios should be employed so that students go beyond set boundaries of discipline knowledge in order to view problems from wider perspectives (Coonan and Pratt-Adams, 2018).

However, the higher education sector is not consistently applying methods which will develop student soft skills, with many institutions focussing upon competing demands of research, evaluations, rankings, the teaching excellence framework, the National Student Survey and commercial partnerships rather than teaching and learning. However, the area of soft skills development is one which will need continual and progressive development in order to assist industry to close the current, and growing, gap that exists.

In summary, a gap in the literature exists; whilst a number of articles exist which describe singular activities or assessments related to the development of singular, related skills, the literature which relates to holistic curricula design is lacking, when examining a wider range of soft skills (Ritter et al, 2017; Kemery and Stickney, 2014; Loughry et al, 2014). This study aims to fill that gap by exploring whether and how a holistic, experiential curricula might be implemented to potentially aid students' soft skill development, through higher education courses, in order to meet the growing demands of employers. This intersection is graphically illustrated within figure 2.7, overleaf:

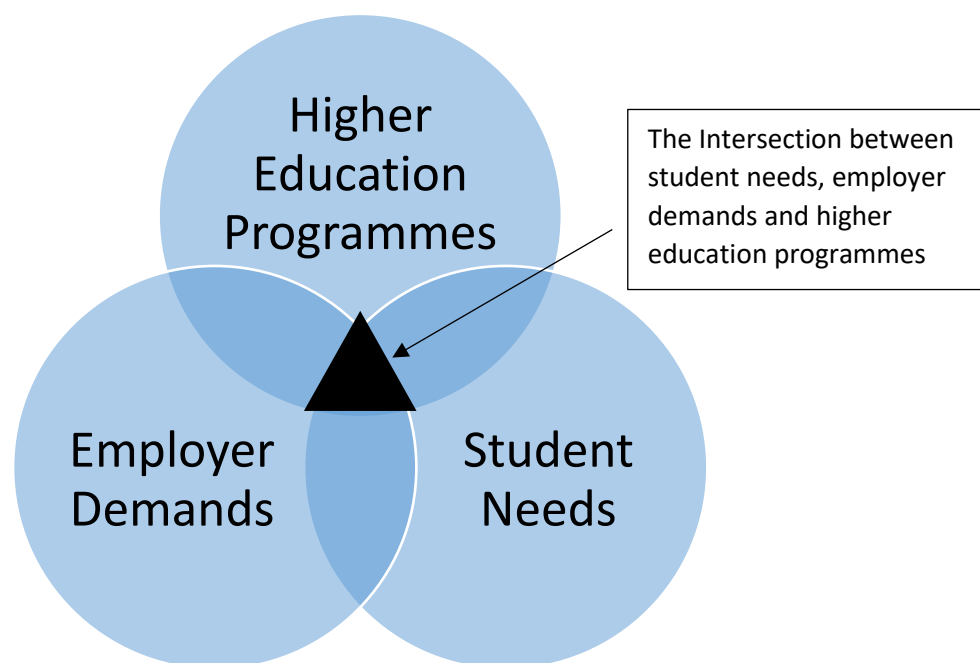


Figure 2.7 – The Intersection between Student Needs, Employer Demands and Higher Education Programmes

5. Experiential Education within degree apprenticeships and business schools: A potential vehicle for the development of soft skills

The study and this literature review is focused upon the use of experiential education. This pedagogy is available for teachers to implement within traditional settings, though this is not widely utilised, and within modern degree apprenticeship programmes. In order that a deeper investigation be undertaken, the literature review, and indeed overall study, explores the use of experiential learning within both contexts, by way of offering the reader comparisons and contrasting findings.

Björck and Johansson (2018) note there is a belief within the higher education sector that theory means campus-based training, and practice means work placements. This, they believe, might be created by a divergence between university classrooms and applied workplaces, within which only one form of learning can be accommodated. The writers argue that theory and practice are equally valid components of higher education which enrich each other and a model which fuse together the two as effectively as possible should be created. This would give students the opportunity to learn and practise theories at the same location.

Coonan and Pratt-Adams (2018) highlight the need to embrace a culture change around supporting skills development, and whilst it is recognised that apprenticeships have the capacity to develop skills and to enhance participant dispositions through ongoing development and via the critical support of mentors and teachers (Vaughan, 2017), more careful consideration must be given to the development of skills within not only apprenticeships, but traditional degree courses also. This study explores skill development within each of these student cohorts.

Soft skills developed within live projects include communication, teamwork, leadership, research, presentation, confidence and problem solving skills (Campbell et al, 2001; Eddleston et al, 2006; Scharf and Bell, 2002; Thomas and Busby, 2003). Soft skills which emerge as practical skills students can learn and demonstrates through experiential learning include the ability to write short reports, to meet deadlines, to organise meetings and conferences or to work in teams. Participants

within experiential learning commonly cite writing skills, research skills, computer skills, analytical skills, team work, communication, time management and independent work skills as being important to them (Tiessen, 2017). Those participants also link skills development to future employability prospects and express great enthusiasm for experiential projects, which ought to be met with the same enthusiasm, facilitation and instructional support from faculty members (Tiessen, 2017).

Chang and Rieple (2013) presented a study of the development of students' entrepreneurial skills over time when undertaking a series of live, experiential projects designed to develop real business ideas. Learning experientially has been shown, through some small scale projects, to be beneficial to student soft skill development, and a variety of skills were noted to be demonstrated by students within the Chang and Rieple study (2013). Hermann et al (2008) advocate the need for higher education institutions to produce more entrepreneurial graduates. This can, in part, be achieved by moving classroom learning to experiential learning and testing academic knowledge gained by students within real scenarios (Hynes and Richardson, 2007). Such programmes are important to educators as they highlight areas of importance to organisations - and thus aide curriculum design for future cohorts (Chang and Rieple, 2013) and are beneficial to businesses who engage with educational institutions as they have the opportunity to recruit more competent and knowledgeable graduates (Collins et al, 2006; Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006). The study used a hybrid approach to combine these two methods, with traditional teaching being delivered in collaboration with real business people, all underpinned by Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984) placing emphasis on observation, the formation of abstract concept and testing new situations. The researchers admitted a weakness of entrepreneurship teaching was that it did not make enough provision for concrete experiences, in addition to noting that only a few studies have documented hybrid approaches such as theirs. This study aims to address that gap.

In summary, the researchers found that students became acutely aware of the shortfall in their range and level of skills. The study at the centre of my research aims to explore this further, by considering how, when and why students develop their soft skills throughout an experiential project.

6. Summary of chapter 2 – the literature review

In conclusion it is evident that experiential education is a widely practiced pedagogical methodology, though that practice mainly exists in certain fields; nursery schools, outdoor education and specialised vocational courses. Within higher education and university courses the use of experiential education is limited, with traditional, didactic lectures and seminars still commonplace among most institutions.

There is a growing body of literature which surrounds active learning and problem-based learning, though these studies and practices do seem to offer students a range of case studies and simulations as opposed to authentic, genuine, real-world learning experiences (Kennedy, 2017), with simulations seen as a sub-tool of experiential learning. However, it is argued that experiential learning should go beyond case studies and simulations to include more direct-community projects within the experiences they offer to their students (Tavanti and Wilp, 2018; Awaysheh and Bonfiglio, 2017; David and Clive, 2012; Eckhaus et al, 2017; Evans, 2016; Holtham and Rich, 2012).

Degree Apprenticeships may offer the potential to promote the development of soft skills through experiential education, due to their specific place in the field of higher education and their position as a model which offers students both a traditional learning experience within a classroom-setting and a vocational placement which builds professional skills, soft skills and the opportunity to embed the offerings from both settings into the work they deliver in the other. Specifically, this setting might allow their professional skills to develop through experiential education in the classroom and for their academic knowledge to increase through experientially reflecting upon their previous experiences in the workplace setting. In addition, traditional students may also benefit from undertaking a form of experiential education which combines the seven branches of experiential learning indicated earlier in the review.

The overall structure of experiential education has been re-examined and evaluated against its contemporary needs, within this literature review. It exposes the fact that further research into the way experiential education works and how it can foster the development of soft skills within undergraduate students is needed, particularly within higher education classroom settings. Furthermore, it is evident that experiential education theory needs to be brought into a practical context, specifically for learning designers, teachers and students alike, all of whom might benefit from implementing experiential education into their practice, particularly within the current employment landscape, where soft skills are in need of development and enhancement to aid employability. This study sets out to address that gap by exploring the ways in which experiential learning can be practically implemented into two higher education programmes – a traditional degree programme and a degree apprenticeship. Furthermore, the study specifically explores the development of soft skills which may result from the experiential pedagogy within this setting.

The literature review exposes a gap in knowledge, hence I propose to investigate the effect that a new hybrid pedagogical method 'Integrated Experiential Education' could have upon the development of soft skills across a range of students; degree apprentices and traditional undergraduate students who have applied for a university course through the UCAS (University Central Admissions Service) route. This method will teach undergraduate Business Management students at level 4 through a range of experiential approaches that embody the seven experiential approaches above, merged into one hybrid model. Specifically, this study has the following research statement as its foci:

An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The following chapter describes the procedures and methods used in the exploration at the centre of this study. It contains: the research agenda; a summary of the epistemology; the theoretical perspective; methodology; methods and tools for data collection. Furthermore, the chapter outlines: the sampling strategy for the study; ethical considerations made; the position of myself, the researcher; and the reliability and credibility of the research. Finally, the chapter outlines the timeframe for the study and describes the framework for analysis of the findings which arise.

1. The Research Agenda

1.1 Unpacking the Research Statement and Sub-Questions

The focus of this research is the use of experiential education within an undergraduate business management programme at a private higher education institution (HEI). The literature review has identified a gap within the field; namely, the effect of experiential teaching upon the development of soft skills within business management undergraduates.

1.2 Research Statement and Sub-Questions

Based on this gap in knowledge, the thesis title and overarching research aim which this study explores is as follows;

Research Statement 1 – RS1 - An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

Chapter one presented the practical challenges of fostering undergraduates' soft skill development. In response, the literature review critically evaluated several notions of experiential education. Building on this foundation, the current study identifies the following four sub-questions:

Research Question 1 – RQ1 - In what ways do students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ2 - In what ways are experiential learning activities supported by teachers?

RQ3 - What soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ4 - What are the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes?

The following sections will present the epistemological and theoretical foundations for the study, with a justification for the case study methodology and a description of the study itself; participants, ethics and the research methods employed.

2. Epistemology

2.1 Constructionism

The following section outlines the epistemological stance of the study, which is one of constructionism. It considers the theoretical knowledge that is known and understood within the field, as demonstrated through the literature review, and seeks to explore the research statement and answer the sub-questions through the use of symbolic interactionism in order to make further meaning from the case study in question.

The literature leads this study towards taking a constructionist approach because ‘soft skills’ is the unit being changed or developed. Soft skills are not something that one can learn, rather they are developed, changed over time and affected by ones environment and experiences. This differs from a social constructivist approach, where individual actors are constructing their own meaning in a social context, though this approach does also resonate with experiential learning.

However, it should be noted that the study is not seeking to uncover a definitive *truth*. Such *truth* can only come into existence through the way in which participants make sense of their actions and the world around them, and with how the researcher, myself, engages with the realities of the world in which I am researching (Crotty, 1998). This does not mean to say that *meaning* will not be constructed within this study, though. Whilst meaning can be constructed in a variety of different ways, it is through that variety that a more generalisable understanding of reality might begin to emerge.

Crotty (1998, p42) defines constructionism as “...*the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context.*” Effectively, in the constructionist view, meaning is constructed, not discovered. Thus, whilst different situations might be pregnant with the possibility of meaning, such meaning only emerges when people, and their consciousness, engage with it.

Blaikie (1993) asserted that people construct their social worlds and reproduce the culture that develops through their continuing activities. The writer also believed that people are continually involved in interpreting the world around them and that they develop meanings for their activities together. This shows a clear link to symbolic interactionism - where the culture and meanings that develop are the sum of all parts, rather than being simply from an individual perspective. Meaning-making activity of an individual mind is more accurately described as constructivism (Crotty, 1998). The writer further distinguishes between the two by stating that constructivism describes the unique experiences of each individual, whereas constructionism emphasises the important role that culture plays in shaping the way we see things and what our definitive view of the world is like. That culture has been shaped by groups before us and we also shape cultures that surround us as we seek meaning from how we are affected by experiences, people and activities which we undertake.

The holistic positioning of this study - that the case has to be understood as a whole rather than a set of variables which interrelate - has roots in Gestalt psychology. The

fact that the case will look to make patterns or sense out of the data which is generated, rather than breaking participants and data sets down into a multitude of variables shows the commitment to analyse the case as a whole and in totality (Thomas, 2016). Contrasting but relevant views arise from Popper (1977), who proposed that humans have an inherent mechanism which searches for regularities, and Barrow (1997), who pointed out that the human brain has a tendency to over-see patterns even when they might not exist. Something this case study research is aware of and has mitigated against through the triangulation (Alvesson, 2003) of a vast breadth and depth of data.

The study worked within a relevant context – namely two classroom settings in which students learnt experientially - to examine its people, their actions and the development of their soft skills. It explores; how they acted and reacted, how they shaped definitions and concepts and how they might have formulated the self-proclaimed benefits of their learning experience. These explorations are all conducive to a constructionist approach. The analysis of these actions and words considers descriptions and labels that have already been allocated to certain behaviours and actions, such as the term ‘soft skills’ and the accompanying list of such skills. It should be noted that the participants and I have our own versions of reality, based on our own experiences, which will lead participants to offer a variety of descriptions and *meanings* from the study. This is a strong reason for the study taking a *constructionist* approach rather than a *constructivist* approach as the study of a number of participants within a group offers the potential for some consistent meaning to appear, so that future researchers might make meaning from the results and analysis.

The research framework has been designed in order that subjective meanings can develop from the experiences within the study. The meanings may be varied and the analysis considers their complexity rather than simply narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The participants’ view is crucial as the research relies on them for data. The research statement and sub-questions have started broad and general so that the findings might emerge from the study in a naturalistic fashion. The study asked open ended questions of student-participants and did not pre-judge any results, observations or answers. The interactions between participants were

examined and I recognise that my own background has shaped my interpretation. My intent is to interpret meanings that I and student participants have about the world and therefore, rather than starting with a theory (or post positivist approach), the research generated or inductively developed the emerging findings, patterns, meanings and theories.

Crotty (1998) identified several assumptions on constructionism; one, that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, often by using open-ended questions through qualitative research; two, that sense of that world is made through historical and social lenses - thus the context of a given setting must be fully understood and explained by the qualitative researcher; and three, that the process of qualitative research is largely inductive and meaning will be generated through interactions and data gathered within the field. The data analysis and *meaning-making* that this research has undertaken keeps these assumptions at the core of the study.

In summary, a constructionist approach has been considered as the appropriate epistemological stance for the study. The following section explores the theoretical perspective of the research.

3. Theoretical Perspective

3.1 Symbolic interactionism

The current study adopts a symbolic interactionist perspective because it is, in part, an exploration of a group of students working towards individual goals, such as passing a module and graduating successfully. However, those individuals are also often working within team or societal frameworks, particularly given that they are learning experientially. The study sought to understand and explain a set of processes and how those processes might create meaning - both for individual students and for entire group(s) of students. Thus it informs the case study methodological approach.

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective that addresses the ways in which face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions are created by individuals to maintain the society they live, work or play within (Carter and Fuller, 2015).

Blumer (1969) and Denzin (1992) emphasised that through the interactive process of joint action, the self emerges. Blumer also asserted social habits arose within groups of people who found themselves in specific situations that are common to those in the group. His contention was that patterns of behaviour ought to be studied in terms of actions and outputs which people demonstrate and that group life should be studied in units, taking those individual actions into account.

This, within a classroom context, could be perceived to mean that the actions that are undertaken by individuals within a class might be founded in, and continually influenced by, the class 'society' as a whole.

Furthermore, Blumer (1969, p. 2) stated three symbolic interactionist assumptions; 'That human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them'; 'That the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows', and; 'That these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters'.

These are helpful to the study because they clearly indicate the important role that humans have in deriving meaning, both for themselves and for future generations. As such, it is important to consider other definitions of social behaviourism. These include Mead's (1934), who saw humans as constantly being engaged in mindful action, manipulating and negotiating situations to, presumably, benefit themselves. However, it has also been noted by House (1977) that each individual places meaning upon the interactions that they have, as opposed to inherent meaning already residing within a group or an object. Mead also asserted that the world of the symbolic interactionist is a world filled with interaction, inter-subjectivity, communication and community and it is from those that we come to be the people that we are.

An alternative view on symbolic interactionism was given by Geertz (1973) who points out that human beings tend to depend upon culture to form behaviours and to make sense of experiences. He asserts that culture should be seen not as the result of human thoughts and behaviours, but as the source of it. This would imply that people demonstrate certain behaviours based on what they have seen before, or have gleaned from the actions and opinions of others, rather than being something that they create afresh, when they join a new group. He sets out a framework which describes culture as “a set of control mechanisms - plans, recipes, rules and instructions - which govern behaviour” (p.44).

Therefore this study views symbolic interactionism as a social construct, whereby people seek meaning and understanding from the observation of group and individual behaviours. Those behaviours are unpredictable and are unique to each and every social encounter, therefore the meaning derived, and actions taken, by each individual or group arise from the society around them. The views of Geertz (1973) and Mead (1934) direct the study towards looking for and at significant symbols such as consistent words or phrases, gestures, or objects - the combination of which will allow a thorough exploration of the research statement and for the sub-questions to be answered. There are limitations of such an approach, however, as asserted by Goffman (1974) and Manis and Meltzer (1978): it excludes the outside influence of other social structures, ignores socioeconomic categories and class structures. Additionally, the meanings can be difficult to test, due to them arising from subjective interpretations. This study has ameliorated against these limitations by ensuring that a constructionist approach is taken – thereby interpreting findings from a wide range of participants. The study also triangulates its findings through a multi-method approach to data collection, ensuring that student participants have a range of opportunities and methods through which they can demonstrate and reflect upon the effect experiential education might have upon their soft skill development. Finally, due to the large volume of data collected, and the extensive thematic analysis that occurred within the study, the validity and rigour of its interpretations is upheld.

The research statement and sub-questions within this study - An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in

contrasting business management undergraduate courses - is pertinent to symbolic interactionism as the behaviour and attributes that students might gain or develop through experiential learning are largely formed through group work and interaction. Thus, through these interactions, students may, consciously or unconsciously, seek to work well with others, to understand what they need to do to 'fit in' and may be driven to develop their skills to outperform their peers.

In summary, therefore, the relevance of symbolic interactionism to this study is that learners might be subject not only to the teachers' guidance but also to the ways in which they work together, engage with materials and seek to achieve certain objectives. For instance, it might be deduced that students put into a group setting, with the aim of achieving an outcome as a team would learn to harmoniously work together to reach their goal.

Having defined the research topic and questions, the epistemological approach and the theoretical perspective of the study, it is now important for us to consider the methodology which is central to the research. This is stated within the following section.

4. Methodology

This section outlines the methodology of the study and explores the reasoning behind using a naturalistic enquiry approach within a nested case study.

4.1 Naturalistic

The study has undertaken a naturalistic inquiry through a case study approach, as it offers the potential for a high degree of internal validity for an insider-outsider researcher within their own setting. However, this does not mean the results are transferable to other settings and other practitioners as it cannot be replicated and therefore cannot be wholly validated.

Due to the naturalistic approach of this study, certain findings from the research design have been emergent. I anticipated that my experiences in the field might affect my plans on an ongoing basis and therefore built a research methodology to take this into consideration (Gall et al, 2007). The study undertook a naturalistic inquiry as it is highly appropriate within natural (Guba, 1981) and human settings (Erlandson et al, 1993) though, through the analysis of the data, I did not expect to find a concrete, mechanistic reality that would be transferable in its entirety. However, the study did gather information with rich qualitative data, to help inform its findings and the field.

A case study is the most appropriate methodology for this study as it explores the effect of a variety of classroom learning activities, their outcomes and the impact of experiential learning upon the soft skills development of students (Young et al, 2010). This method allowed the study to focus on the problems faced by an experiential educator in addition to the benefits of teaching in an experiential way. I have investigated my own current practice (Macintyre, 1991), fed back directly into my practice (Somekh, 1995), discussed with others - members of staff at my institution and students - and generated further important questions (Baumfield et al, 2008). A case study methodology is suitable for me as a practitioner, researcher and potential educational informer. It also focused the enquiry on the 'professional doctorate triangle' of; my profession - developing a greater, deeper understanding of this educational practice through thoughts and actions, to produce heightened self-awareness amongst practitioners, Scholarly knowledge - providing this through full participation and sharing of findings with all who are affected by the research – participants and colleagues, and my own personal professional development - the expectations of an EdD student engaging in continual improvement as a form of staff development and sharing findings with colleagues and seeking to legitimize my role as a researcher/producer of knowledge within the field.

I have a personal interest in the study, which is important to research-engaged professionals as it encourages one to seek meaning from the activities one plans and implements (Baumfield et al 2008). It has been designed and implemented solely by myself, within my own domain and exploring an area that I have developed a curiosity in (Wilkinson, 2014).

I planned the steps of the teaching strategy, through classroom activities, learning objectives and assessment procedures, prior to the semester (which formed the timeframe for much of my data collection). This allowed the course to meet all the necessary learning outcomes, but with enough flexibility to allow for genuine changes to be made through the naturalistic approach the research took. This naturalistic approach meant I could make necessary adjustments and alterations to classroom activities in order to best facilitate experiential learning and to meet the objectives of the study by generating data which best explores the research statement and answers the research sub-questions. I created a teaching plan, outlining the types of activities that I wished to incorporate into the classroom and a justification for these. The nature of this research; emergent, practical, through purposive research methods in order to improve practice; gave appropriate scope for a case study methodology (Gall et al, 2007).

Having introduced the concept of the case study approach, it is important to consider why this is an appropriate approach for this study to take. I offer a more detailed account of this subject within the following section.

5. Case study

5.1 A nested case study approach

The current study adopts a case study approach because there are easily identifiable characteristics and boundaries of the group of students through which the development of soft skills are able to be observed. The study meets Thomas' (2016) desired routes for choosing a case study methodology; that I (the researcher) know a great deal about the case in question and want to understand a specific aspect of it, that it provides a particularly good example of something, and that it reveals something interesting because it is different to the norm.

The study is instrumental - acting as a tool to serve a particular purpose; to understand the ways in which experiential learning can aide soft skill development; rather than being intrinsic, which is often the case within studies which lack focus. It

will explore a sample of the field in order to ascertain what the shape of the issue is and how it might best be explored. The study identifies a number of core themes from the literature on experiential learning and several of these have been used to create classroom activities and, in essence, a theoretical framework for the study. However, the process goes beyond merely testing a theory. Rather, the study seeks to build a theory, or a framework of ideas, upon the pre-existing knowledge that I had as a practitioner-researcher and seeks to offer new interpretations suggested by the data (Thomas, 2016).

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) consider that case studies have several hallmarks; a rich and vivid description of relevant events, a chronological narrative of events, a blend of description and analysis, a focus on important, relevant participants, specific and important events being effectively highlighted and a richness of reporting. The writers go on to say that certain boundaries ought to be drawn around the case, such as; temporal characteristics that will help to define the nature of the study, boundaries which can be defined, easily identifiable characteristics of the group and organisational or institutional arrangements. The study used these hallmarks as a guide throughout its design and processing.

Case studies have a number of advantages, which this study benefits from: direct observation and interviews which strive to portray 'what it is like' to be in a particular situation; a thick description of participants' lived experiences (Geertz, 1973); a descriptive and detailed study with a narrow focus (Dyer, 1995); and for the events that transpire and unfold to be allowed to speak for themselves, rather than to over-interpret (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

The whole of the study is more important than the sum of its parts (Nisbet and Watt, 1984), thus it is important to ensure that a wide-angled look at the entire context of the study is kept in mind throughout. This ensured that the study understood the complex and dynamic, real-life, unfolding interactions that the events took (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995) and the actions of the participants within them.

Finally, the study is using Yin's methodology (2009) of examining real people in real situations. As a case study it sought to explain, describe, illustrate and enlighten the

readers (Yin, 2009). The approach also allowed me the opportunity to develop initial relationships with those students (Bailey, 1994), thereby enabling a trusting and natural accord to arise. I endeavoured to ensure that all observations were faithful to real life and that they reflected the holistic nature of such a case study (Verschuren, 2003).

Therefore this study views case study as an opportunity to examine real people in real situations, a way to explain, describe, illustrate and inform the field and a way to develop initial relationships with and between students whilst reflecting the holistic nature of real life within such a setting.

In this research the 'people' are the two groups of students undertaking a level 4 Business Management degree and studying a ring-fenced, six-week long, experiential learning project on a Principle of Business module. The relevance of demonstrating the effects of such interventions within a classroom context are important to enable a wider audience to understand the effect of actions taken within an experiential context, upon soft skills development. Further analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of case study methodology has been undertaken by Nisbet and Watt (1984) which concludes that case study results are; more easily understood by a wide audience; that those results speak for themselves; that unique features of the data are less easily lost than some other methodologies; strong on reality; able to be undertaken by a single researcher without a full research team; and are able to build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables. They do, however, mitigate against these strengths by stating a number of weaknesses, including; results not being easily generalizable; and, case studies not being easily open to cross-checking; thus making them open to bias and personal subjectivity unless attempts are made to address reflexivity. The study ameliorates against these factors as much as is possible through sense-checking and triangulation of data.

Therefore, the need for this study to transparently address any issues of bias that can arise from an insider-outsider researcher approach, is vital. Thus, a range of methods were employed to ensure the study is a descriptive one, providing narrative accounts (Yin, 1984). It also followed Merriam's identification of case studies (1988) to be evaluative - explaining and judging; and interpretive - developing conceptual

categories. Adelman et al (1980) offer other positive reasons for a case study as suitable for this particular piece of research; a strength in reality - making the study down to earth and providing a natural basis for generalization; an understanding of the complexity of social truths - well researched case studies offer support for alternative interpretations; and, a step to action - beginning in a world of action and contributing to it, with any insights gained being published for other researchers, teaching practitioners and organisations to use, should they wish to.

Due to the sample size and the sheer volume of data that was generated by the study, it was important to enter the research with a broad outline of exactly what type of case study this would be. I did want to retain focus upon a limited number of questions and topic areas and to do this some limiting of the participant sample was necessary. Robson (2002) suggests there is a number of case study types; an individual case study, a set of individual case studies, a social group study and studies of organisations and institutions.

Alternatively, Yin (2009) identifies four main case study designs; a single case design - where one case or setting is used; an embedded single case design - where more than one unit of analysis is used within one case study, possibly requiring different data collection instruments; a multiple case design - for example, one where two comparable groups are studied to consider any variance in outcome; and an embedded multiple case study, where different sub-units of data might be involved in the different cases, again with different data collection instruments likely to be used.

Verschuren (2003) argues that only a small number of case studies might be needed for generalization to be secure, providing that the range of variables within the case is embraced, citing the fact that complex issues have a much lower variability than separate variables - meaning that a researcher can generalize from a small number of case studies that represent the complex issues in general.

The *embedded* case study (Yin, 2009) or *nested* case study (Thomas, 2016) – where groups of participants may form part of a wider overall group alongside a smaller sub-group - is distinct from a *multiple* case study as it gains integrity from the wider case, rather than merely the comparison between clear, different examples

which emerge from the data - though it should be noted that those are also important in forming the 'wider' case. To explain further, the wider case of this study is that of level 4, undergraduate Business Management students who are all studying the same module, Principles of Business. A multiple case study, as illustrated within Figure 3.1, might seek to compare the individual participants, offering a contrast between their actions and thoughts. This, however, would be best suited to a constructivist approach, making meaning from an individual. The approach taken within this study, however, has nested the participants firstly into the group in which they were taught - a degree apprentice or a 'UCAS' student and then places each participant into their own individual nest within the group nest, as indicated within figure 3.2.

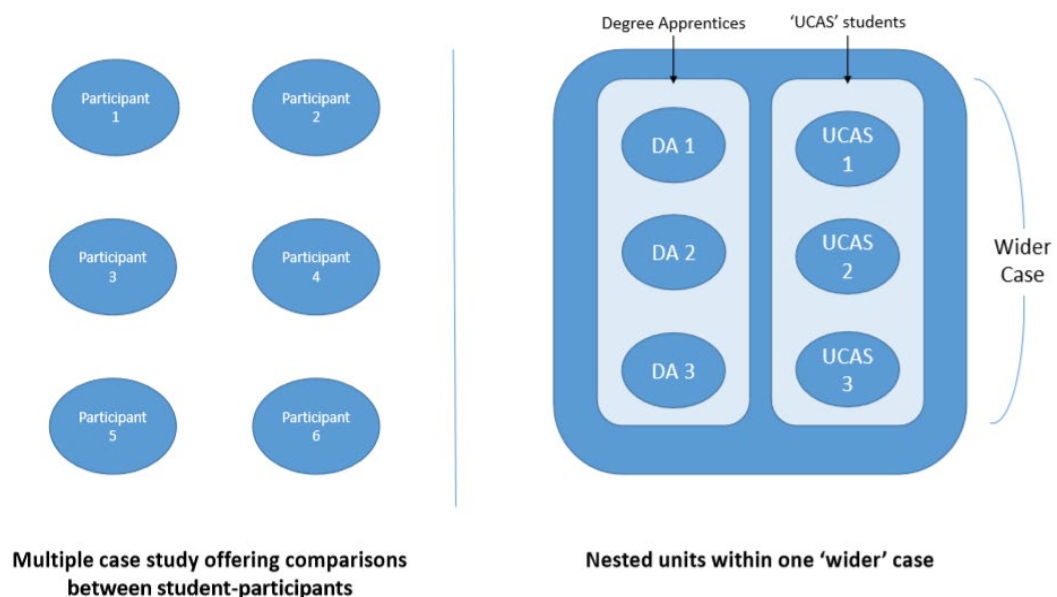


Figure 3.1: A comparison between a multiple case study approach and a nested case study

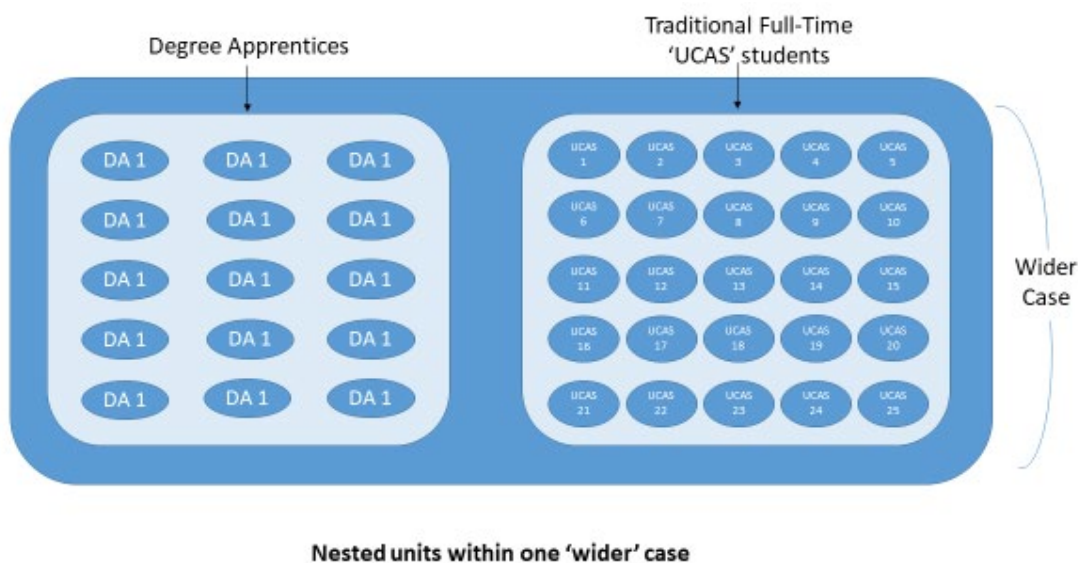


Figure 3.2: The nested case study approach used within this study

In summary, a nested case study was considered the most appropriate approach for this research, in order that the single case could be considered with analysis able to be conducted across two contrasting programmes.

Having defined the methodological approach, it is now apt for me to state the methods and tools used for the collection of data.

6. Methods and tools for Data Collection

This section outlines the set of research methods which were chosen to allow for a thorough analysis of a range of data sets. In order to best explore the research statement and answer the research sub-questions within the study, a range of methods were considered appropriate in order to uncover a comprehensive analysis which offered reliable and valid conclusions.

6.1 Methods

This section outlines the considerations made within the design stage of the research with regards to the methods utilised and the justification for such approaches to data collection.

Data has been gathered for this naturalistic case study through a variety of methods – often referred to as triangulation (Alvesson, 2003) – which were used in order to create a richer picture (Denzin, 1994). These included: the observations of naturally occurring events - to reduce the dependence on participant accounts through reflective journal excerpts; spontaneous discussions between researcher and participants – in order to qualify observations; and the reflective accounts of participants – to ensure knowledge of the meanings and ideas guiding individual student behaviours and practices (Alvesson, 2003).

This multi-method approach gives the findings and results credibility, as various sources are analysed with, where necessary, member checks in order to ascertain meaning. This method of data collection allowed the research to seek further explanation where necessary as I was in the advantageous position of being close to the participants to best facilitate this.

Within educational case studies data often comes from; observations (note taking, logs, checklists, anecdotal records, photos), interviews (surveys, questionnaires, focus groups) and artefacts (student work, internet posts, portfolios, assessments, attendance records). This made a naturalistic case study approach and a variety of data collection instruments suitable for the study as it developed understanding of a variety of perspectives in order to inform the findings. The data collection methods are outlined in detail in the subsequent pages, below.

6.1.1 Preliminary Field notes

Preliminary field notes are a series of notes or statements which are made prior to the study beginning. They assist a researcher with identifying issues of bias and also allow them an opportunity to amend their approach based upon their own reflexive practice. It assisted me with identifying the precise exploration statement and research sub-questions that the study should focus on and addressed the practical mechanisms surrounding the collection of data through other methods.

One problem with this method is that an inherent view, expectation or bias might already exist within a researcher. In the case of insider-outsider research case study, this is very difficult to entirely ameliorate against, but I recorded my views, beliefs and expected findings prior to the start of the academic year, before having met or taught the participants so as not to be influenced by them. These form a part and the start of the teacher field notes and set down what my thoughts were prior to collecting any data. These notes allowed me to set down my expectations of the activities, the teaching methods employed and the likely responses and levels of engagement from the students, which, in turn, might allow me to make a comparison with findings I collect throughout the data collection period to see which results were expected and which were a surprise.

This method also allowed me to address ethical challenges by offering me the opportunity to state conscious bias's that I feel I have and raise the questions of unconscious bias with regards to my teaching and effect of this and the activities upon the students in question.

In summary, the inclusion of this data collection method is beneficial to the study for the reasons stated above, and also adds a level of rigour and strength to the study by demonstrating that I conducted the research whilst making every attempt to ameliorate against any potential bias I may have had prior to the commencement of the study.

6.1.2 Observations and Field Notes

Observations and field notes, allow the researcher to note down anything of interest and importance which may be of relevance to the study. It offers the researcher the opportunity to gather a large amount of timely data which is raw and which feels, subjectively to the researcher, relevant.

A problem with this method is that observations and field notes can be affected by the passing of time. I guarded against this by attempting to make observations of student activity as soon as possible after the event and by making field notes as soon as possible after the class had concluded. I arranged the teaching timetable so

that I had free time immediately after the class had taken place to make this easier. They were a descriptive, reflective and personal account of what I had witnessed within the lessons, the behaviours students had exhibited, and any observed. I aimed to capture data by observing the participants in the classroom through a real-life naturalistic observation (Sechrest, 1979), recording their behaviours and noting down interesting actions in a manner that did not prompt the participant to give what they may deem to be a 'desired' response. I observed this behaviour over the course of the six-week experiential teaching period, throughout all workshops and seminars. The purpose of these observations was to capture behaviours and actions of participants and also to determine whether (and to what extent) their behaviours and actions derived from the actions of me as the teacher.

I did consider using an amended version of Flanders (1970) interaction analysis system which captures both teacher and student behaviours and the time spent interacting with certain activities in the classroom, as this may have offered some insight into the utilisation and development of certain soft skills or behaviours. However, I believed this may have distracted students from my teaching, might have affected student participation to make them behave in an unnatural way and also could have affected the flow of the activities (Oliver, 2003). Interval recording, through video capture was also a method worth considering in order to ascertain behaviours and soft skill development. This would have indicated how long they are displayed by participants but, again, I felt this might have been distracting from the learning taking place. My teacher-researcher observations were conducted as soon as possible after the end of each lesson taught and at appropriate times throughout the lesson itself as and when something significant occurred, making for a mixture of interval-contingent and event-contingent approaches.

The approach taken was one of unstructured observation (Maxwell, 2005), where I, the teacher-researcher, immersed myself in the situation to see what was going on. I was not actually a participant in the research but instead was standing back to consider the implications of the student-participant's actions within the classroom and upon the study. Following Burgess' (1982) definition of the term participant-observation, I was talking to people, watching, reading documents and keeping

notes, enabling me to better understand the situation – highly appropriate for a naturalistic study (Cohen et al, 2011).

In summary, these in-class observations and field notes, written straight after the conclusion of a lesson, are a vital source of data to this naturalistic study.

6.1.3 Focus group interviews

The exploration statement and research sub-questions required the study to capture data from students to view their actions, feelings and behaviours. Part of this involved collecting data through focus group interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 1993; Oppenheim, 1992). I asked participants questions about their experiences, their feelings and their attitudes towards experiential education, the degree to which it has or has not aided their learning and the extent to which it may aide them in future studies or their career. I held three focus groups which contained between six and nine students per group, as replicated from their experiential project groups. These students were mixed purposively with other students they have worked with during group presentations in order to generate more discussion and to build upon rapport that is likely to exist within the group. I recognised that some groups may not have worked together successfully and might feel uncomfortable with offering their true beliefs in front of certain group members but these students did also have an opportunity to speak openly about problematic group members or other concerns within their learning journals.

As the interviewer, I directed the questions asked and general discussion points but as I wanted to explore student views and experiences the interview was semi-structured – as the study needed to have the opportunity to probe appropriately and to go down routes that I felt might be information-rich. The areas for discussion within the focus group interview emerged throughout the research and experiential learning activities. They followed Patton's (2002) informal conversational interview technique, using six basic kinds of question as a starting point. These question topics included: the behaviours and experiences of the participant, their opinions and values, their feelings and emotions, what level of knowledge or development they felt they had gained, sensory experiences, and their own backgrounds, where this was

appropriate to probe. I also took advantage of naturally occurring spontaneous conversation emanating from the participants.

Participants were invited to an interview at a scheduled date following the end of the six-week experiential activity (post their group presentation assessment). However, the interview date was prior to students knowing their assessment results so as not to prejudice their views on the perceived benefits or disadvantages of the method of learning. All interviews were audio-recorded to enable me to keep conversation natural and flowing. The recordings were transcribed and analysed for findings. They were held on a password-protected device, owned by myself, in a locked cupboard, in order to protect anonymity of student participants in the institution at which they studied at that time.

To improve credibility I used member checks, where participants checked the transcripts once transcription had taken place (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These member checks allowed the student participants an opportunity to retract any statements, rephrase anything they feel is inaccurate or even decide to remove themselves from the study, should they wish to do so.

In summary, focus group interviews were held so as to further triangulate the information gathered from student participants during their individual reflections. It allowed me, the researcher, the opportunity to compare attitudes between groups, to judge the power of certain group members, to see whether a group has 'safety in numbers' and says things that an individual might not have done in their individual reflective journals (Thomas, 2016) and to dovetail with the naturalistic approach of the study itself.

6.1.4 Student reflective journals

As noted within the literature review, reflection is often cited as an important part of experiential learning and a major part of the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Reflection allows practitioners and participants a chance to step back from the events of the classroom in order to explore, ponder and gain new insights.

Reflective learning journals lend themselves nicely to case study research as it provides an opportunity to make sense of experiences had and to tell the story of one's personal journey (Hobson, 2001). My own personal reflective learning journal was completed within 48 hours after a class has taken place. This enabled me to digest field notes and to give thought to events, considering whether my perceptions of them have changed in the intervening period. The reflective learning journals in this study were given to the student participants within each seminar group. Students were given the opportunity to reflect without me grading their work or passing judgement on the quality of their reflections. I did not assess their reflections as I feel this may have led to them writing for me (Moon, 1996) but I did make time available at the end of each seminar session so that students felt this is a worthwhile and important activity within their experiential learning. I offered the traditional UCAS-entry students the option to reflect within a ten minute period at the end of each seminar, immediately after the experiential classroom activity had taken place, whilst the class of degree-apprentices were given the opportunity to reflect on an online google document, shared between each individual student and myself, at any time during the week. Participating students completed their journals and received responses from me in order to encourage their reflections (De Laine, 2000; Maxwell, 2005)

In summary, these reflective learning journals provided the study with data which was analysed thematically. Student participants reported on their experiences at regular intervals making this an interval-contingent approach (Thomas, 2016).

6.1.5 Artefacts and Textual Analysis

Texts of a wide variety can be important in making meaning within qualitative research studies (Crotty, 1998). The study examined interactions which took place within a variety of texts so that an analysis could be made upon their relevance. The study conducted an examination of artefacts and a textual analysis in order to make further meaning from the discoveries. I monitored the material culture of the groups within the cohort by examining work produced on a weekly basis. It was of some interest to note which artefacts and materials were brought to class, worked on by members individually or within a group, or whether cultural practices were indicative

of behaviours and engagement within students in the experiential setting (Hodder, 2000). Students did, on occasion, choose to bring outside materials to aide their group projects and a naturalistic case study collecting data through observation left this possibility open for exploration. In summary, the use of certain materials provided insights into how these groups constructed meaning with the subject and how they interacted with each other (Boston, 2008; Francis, 2010). I included these observations within my field notes.

6.1.6 Methods summary

It was crucial that these records were unobtrusive, so participants acted genuinely and naturally in order for valid data to be collected. Collecting objective evidence is not always easy for insider-outsider researchers because they know the participants so well (Macintyre, 2000 & Cohen et al, 2011). However, this study ameliorated against this as the following sections will illustrate. Every step possible was taken to be aware of these and to uphold research ethics.

It must be noted that any changes or improvements which may occur within a classroom might be due to a number of influences, however tempting it could be for an insider-outsider researcher to conclude that their interventions and actions could have been the cause.

The case study keeps the purpose of the research, and the best interests of the students pedagogically, in mind as it progresses. This continued throughout the data collection, analysis and write-up. The research was designed in this way in order that the researcher's teaching could be enhanced and the learning experiences for the student participants could be as beneficial as possible. The study monitors the effects of experiential education and produces evidence of its effectiveness. This helps to explain whether, and in what ways, the actions have or have not helped students to develop soft skills and in what ways the students may have responded to the teaching methods implemented.

As a naturalistic case study it did not look to place the participants within structured performance situations. Instead, it looked to see natural occurrences in natural situations. The use of self-report methods was contemplated, which might measure learning to some degree, however these methods were rejected due to the high number of variables in play, making such a test less reliable and meaningful (Gall et al, 2007). Whilst the study does not use a wholly technical positivist scientific approach, it still achieves reliability and validity, through an appropriate audit trail. However that does not mean to say that consistency is being sought between participants. Rather, it looks to gain responses from participants which are personal to them at a specific time in a particular place. The position of this study can never be exactly replicated and interpretations made will be subjective (Finlay, 2006). Trustworthiness, through a rigorous process and a relevant end product is important to me as a researcher, who aims to inform other practitioners of the impact of experiential education.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) recommend using a semi-structured approach to observations and focus group interviews in order to develop the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. This might involve taking the following steps: prolonged engagement with the participants, persistent observation, triangulation through a mixed methods approach (Alvesson, 2003), collecting a variety of materials, carrying out member checks. I am not aiming for generalisability as it is for future readers to generalise where necessary and possible. I do, however, aim for deep description and trustworthiness through a dependability audit (Erlandson et al, 1993). The approach was two-fold; in-site and away from site with collection and analysis going hand-in-hand to provide revisions and fine-tuning along the process.

Having outlined the justifications for the use of a range of methods, the following sub-section outlines, in tabular form, the methods used to explore and answer the research topic and questions.

6.2 Methods Table

The research at the centre of this study is based upon one exploration topic;

RS1) An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

and four sub-questions, as follows:

RQ1) In what ways do students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ2) In what ways are experiential learning activities supported by teachers?

RQ3) What soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ4) What are the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes?

The over-arching research statement and sub-questions listed above (numbered RS1, RQ1-RQ4) will be answered through the following methods;	
Preliminary Field notes	will address questions RS1 RQ1-4
Observations	questions RS1 RQ1-4
Focus Group Interviews	questions RS1 RQ1-3
Student Reflective Journals	questions RS1 RQ1-4
Artefacts such as documents and computer files	questions RS1 & RQ1

Table 3.1: Methods pertaining to research questions table

7. Sampling strategy

The following section outlines the manner in which participants were selected. It considers the programmes being taught, the number of participants within the sample, the setting and the rationale for such selections.

7.1 Selecting a sample

The study selected a sample of level 4 degree students, studying undergraduate business management at a private college in London. Two classes of participants formed the initial data collection – 40 students in total. The degree apprentice class contained 15 students, whilst the traditional class had 25 students. The nested case study has analysed data from all of the participants initially, but the findings are representative of the group rather than holistically offering coverage of each and every student individually. These are represented within the following table:

Number of participants who derive from traditional UCAS application route	25
Number of participants who derive from degree apprentice route	15
Total number of student-participants within study	40

Table 3.2: Volume of Student Participants

The sample does not aim to be representative of all universities or colleges. The target population within the study would, ideally, cover all degree level students. However, the study recognises the impracticality of this, due to the large numbers of students concerned and the issues with accessing the field at other institutions. I have therefore narrowed down to an accessible population of students within my own teaching practice at the institution at which I taught. Two seminar groups, which were taught by the researcher, were identified as being a suitable sample of the cohort studying the course at level 4 in order to achieve representativeness (Cohen et al, 2011). In addition, this enabled the study to span across two student cohorts; traditional full-time students; and non-traditional degree apprentices. The sampling frame was within two seminar groups studying an undergraduate Business Management module entitled Principles of Business in the summer term of 2017. This was not a random sample of the entire target population as I limited my findings to be relevant to this particular cohort on this particular course at this particular

institution. Twenty-five traditional students were selected for the purpose of convenience - preventing the need to run multiple studies across seminar groups, yet also to represent a fair proportion of the participants afforded to me. The number of student participants in one seminar group would have provided enough data and information for the purposes of this study (Patton, 2002). However, in order to more fully explore the impact of experiential learning within undergraduate degree level study the research was also undertaken within one seminar group of rotational degree apprenticeship students. This group of 15 degree apprentices study the same module but only attend university for one day each week. The other four days of their week is spent at their place of employment for the apprenticeship. This accounts for the 40 students who formed the sample within the study, noted in figure 3.2. Appendix 3.i highlights the structure of the Principles of Business module and the experiential activities which students participated in within their learning.

Having two full classes of student participants meant that I was able to observe all the class, record actions taken by all of them and not censor anything that happened. I needed to ensure my approach to them was ethically sound and would not compromise them or the research. This is explored in more detail in my ethics in pages 119-123. The research study consists of two different groups of students; traditional UCAS students and degree apprentices. This allowed the study to achieve a better spread of data and responses and allowed the findings to demonstrate any areas of interest that one or both groups that might be deemed as important or as adding new developments to the field(s) of research.

There was no exclusion or inclusion criteria other than those students who are being taught within the aforementioned seminar groups on this module. The students were full-time students on the programme, over 18 years of age and of mixed gender and race. However, it is worth noting some typical attributes of the students at the institution, which is a fee-paying, private, higher education institution teaching degrees that are validated by a public university. The institution was small, with a level 4, first year cohort of 180 students and an overall student population of approximately 450 students at that time. The age of students was generally 18-22, however there were several of the student participants that fell outside this range and were older. None were younger though as the minimum age for study at the

institution was 18. Most students were UK nationals, though some overseas students, EU Nationals, were part of the two seminar groups. All had a good standard of oral and written English, as this is a pre-requisite of study upon the course. Gender was mixed and of approximately 50/50 balance. The study chose not to compare between control groups (in essence with one seminar group being taught experientially and one being taught didactically) as this may have given one group an unfair advantage with regards to their learning and student experience (Gall et al, 2007). This was due to practicality, as designing and implementing two different methods of teaching would have caused time constraints which may have negatively affected the study and my ability to collect and collate data in-between lessons.

I offered each student that enrolled onto the course, within the two seminar groups, the opportunity to participate. This was done through a verbal and written briefing sheet to the students indicating to them what would happen: observations, reflective journals, focus-group interviews and thesis write-up. It outlined the positive effects and potential negative effects to those who participate. I originally wanted to give a 'deadline' by which date students must have opted-out if they did not wish to participate, however, upon discussion with my supervisor and the Anglia Ruskin University ethics panel I decided to have an opt-in procedure instead, in order to better ameliorate against the power I may have over those who feel they are required to take part. The teaching methods adopted were replicated in seminar groups. They were also still used for those few students who chose not to participate, meaning those who did not take part did not miss out on this experiential method of teaching. However, those who chose not to participate do not form a part of the study. Their reflective journals and any observations of them were not used in this write-up and I did not interview them, but they still used their learning journals as part of the teaching and learning activities.

The rationale for asking students to reflect upon their own feelings, actions and observations; and to make observations myself; is to evidence the student development throughout the period of the research study within these research methods. The most ethical and efficient way to determine whether or not a student has developed their soft skills is by asking them to reflect, observe and articulate their thoughts on the matter. This gives the study credibility and reliability as students

informed me, without bias, of the areas in which they did and did not develop. They did this both directly, through comments and written reflections; and indirectly, through observations that they and I made about their actions throughout the process.

In summary, an appropriate selection of participants were invited to form the sample within this nested case study, in order for the research to be reliable and valid. Whilst the sample is not aiming to be representative of all universities, it is a valid sample which offers findings for this group of students, at this point in time, at this setting.

This chapter has, thus far, considered the methodological approaches and methods used. It is now appropriate to demonstrate the ethical considerations which were given due care and attention within this study.

8. Ethics

8.1 BERA Guidelines

This study has ensured that the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) have been upheld at all times. These guidelines are intended to assist anyone involved in educational research and those based in educational institutions of any kind.

This study considers the ethical issues of; responsibilities to participants, including; consent, transparency, the right to withdraw, incentives, harm and privacy of data; responsibilities to the community of educational researchers; responsibilities for publication and dissemination and responsibilities for my own wellbeing and development, in the role of researcher. BERA guidelines (2018) have been noted and followed throughout the design of the study, the collection of data, the gaining of student-participant, notably through appendix 3.ii and 3.iii, which are outlined later within the section. Participants were fully informed of what is involved in the study, what will happen with information gathered and to whom it will be reported. Additionally, gatekeepers approval within the setting, were sought and gained. My

dual role of teacher and researcher was made clear to students, who were excited to be part of an innovative teaching approach and a formal doctoral study, though they were also frequently reminded that non-participation within the study was perfectly acceptable.

BERA (2018) encourage researchers to uphold the integrity and reputation of educational research, to contribute to the community of critical analysis and constructive criticism and to communicate research findings in a clear and straightforward fashion. These have always been driving principles of this study.

8.2 Ethical Issues: Power and Influence

The study has considered my power over the participants – I was their teacher. They listened to me, were influenced by me and acted upon my recommendations, they may also have sought to please me in order to build relationships or to improve their standing amongst their peers. (Cohen et al, 2011) Additionally they may have assumed that I was likely to be the assessor for their work and therefore may have wanted me to view them highly - despite the fact that work is marked anonymously. I have attempted to ameliorate this by confirming the assessment process in place for their assessments at the institution; that they are first marked by one of a number of assessors – not only myself – and that they are marked anonymously. In addition, a sample of assessments for this module was second marked and a further sample was sent to external markers at the validating, partner institution. The nature of this case study required a close-working relationship between me, as the researcher, and the participants (Gall et al, 2007). It also required some open-ended discussion and questioning (Howe & Dougherty, 1993).

This piece of research was one that I was personally able to address and implement. I was in a position where I could consult with colleagues for feedback on my competence to carry out the study and plan on holding regular meetings with my manager, Dean of the Business School in order that student needs are placed first and foremost at the heart of the study (Kocher & Keith-Spiegel, 1990).

The position of the teacher-researcher, undertaking research within a classroom setting, raises ethical issues of power. The student participants are enmeshed in an ongoing relationship with the researcher, their teacher, and therefore the study took

account of the position of power that may be held, taking care to avoid, minimize or misuse that power (Gall et al, 2007) Participant have been verbally informed, throughout the study, on the processes and purpose behind them. Similarly, when designing the process of student reflection it was important for the study to consider the fact that self-disclosure can be threatening for some individuals (Fremer et al, 1989). This was ameliorated against by ensuring that all student participants knew they could undertake reflections as and when they wished to, that their reflections could be handed to me anonymously if they wished and that they could discuss any incidents or issues that occurred within the classroom setting and request that they be removed from my observations, and therefore the study itself. The advantage of collecting data anonymously might be increased validity. However, private, anonymous blogs, where students make entries into an online document without disclosing their name, might be considered one-way, thus detracting from the learning experience of the student due to a lack of rapport (Gall et al, 2007). I therefore used learning journals which are 'two-way' between the participant and me, the researcher-practitioner, in order that more understanding of the relationship between us could be gained and built upon.

In summary, appropriate ethical considerations were made in order to ameliorate against any influence or power I may have had in my role as a teacher of the student-participants. This was strengthened by the gaining of consent from the sample, which I explore in the following section.

8.3 Consent

When explaining the research the student-participants were handed a letter of explanation - a Participant Information Sheet – Appendix 3.ii, which they could take away with them from the class. Gall et al (2007) assert that participants should receive an explanation of the test and exploration procedures to be used and that it should point out the advantages and disadvantages to the participants in taking part and that they can withdraw from participation at any time. The offer of payments, rewards or financial incentives to participants was not made, in order to avoid coercion, where students may feel a duty to respond positively to teaching methods and to report advantages within focus group interviews. However, students were

informed that those who participate would be part of the research and therefore part of the debrief process, meaning they might get some insight into the process of research that non-participants may not be party to. The students received not only a Participant Information Sheet but also a Participant Consent Form - Appendix 3.iii - with an invitation to opt in, so those students who did not want to participate in the study simply needed to do nothing in order to have their wishes respected. The study sought to inform participants of the potential benefits of taking part in the study; to them and to the study itself; and to keep as many students as possible within the study ring-fenced to maximise the potential for data collection. However, following BERA guidelines (2018) it was important that the balance between gaining consent, through opt-in procedures, and ensuring a suitable participant sample group was actioned.

The study has endeavoured to protect anonymity, in order that outsiders will not be able to recognise the institution that pseudonyms will be used for participants and that confidentiality or anonymity will not be compromised, both within the study and within the institution also (Macintyre, 1991).

8.4 Bias

Bias, Macintyre (1991) believes, is something which can affect practitioner-researchers as they are so immersed in the field of study. This study, however, has utilised data collection methods which ensure a higher degree of reliability than if the study were simply looking at one set of records from a class activity, which could be highly subjective. The study recognises my influence within the classroom and upon the participants and the design of the data collection methods has taken care not to dictate the actions of the participants, thus enabling genuine and reliable data to be produced.

Because case studies are often criticised for not having a high degree of control on a number of variables (Shaughnessy et al, 2003), some claim it is difficult for researchers to draw inference from cause and effect conclusions, inferring that bias is very possible.

In summary, the range of methods utilised within the study ensure that self-reporting and observations within the study are as free from bias as possible and that field notes and observations are full, frank and made straight away so that memory lapses are less likely (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

8.5 Review of ethical considerations

This approach to ethical considerations has been through a range of formal and informal modes; through internal Anglia Ruskin University ethics application and approval, through formal discussion and approval mechanisms at the institution setting, through informal discussions with my doctoral research supervision team and through ensuring BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) have been continually upheld.

9. Positioning of the insider-outsider researcher

The hermeneutic nature of this study, in which I argue that there is no objective or single-knowledge reality that can be attained, means that I, as researcher, was an integral part of the research process rather than remaining separate from it (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

My position as the head of two programmes at the centre of this study, the learning designer, teacher and researcher meant it was necessary to ensure that the reliability and validity of the arising data was continually checked, alongside the appropriateness of the chosen methods. I paid due deference to my own biases within the study of my own classroom and teaching; I probed for information rather than assuming I already knew it. I also looked for alternative ways to reframe situations in order to consider the findings which arose from a wide perspective, and I rigorously introspected, integrated findings and reflected upon experiences in order to expose underlying assumptions (Argyris et al, 1985).

This study does not fit the classic definition of insider research (Merton, 1972) or of deep-insider research (Edwards, 2002), as I cannot qualify as a member of the community within which I researched. I was not a student undertaking the course

alongside the student-participants, nor was I researching the organisation for whom I worked. Furthermore, I was not researching the actions of colleagues, despite their teaching frequently being commented upon by student participants (Hellowell, 2006). Neither, however, am I to be considered a stranger (Burgess, 1984) who is from outside the setting. I was not a native of the student body and did not assume that there was only one reality to be observed (Lewis, 1973). Hammersley's (1993) assertion that 'the chances of findings being valid can be enhanced by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement' are indicative of the approach taken throughout this study, and whilst there is no position which guarantees valid knowledge; no position prevents it either. As a partial stranger to the group – known to the student-participants, but not intimately entangled within them – I had a freedom from their party interests; one which gave my perceptions and judgments a level of objectivity not usually granted to an insider (Simmel, 1950). Furthermore, my unique position as a researcher who retained both empathy – beneficial to the study to understand the participants and their behaviours; and alienation – advantageous to ameliorate against bias and to ensure objectivity; afforded me a stance which was both inside and outside the perceptions of the researched (Hellowell, 2006; Hammersley, 1993). My position cannot be described as meeting one of Adler and Adler's (1987) three types of membership within research: the peripheral member, active member or complete member; nor does it meet the definition for Alvesson's (2003) participant observer or observing participant. Rather, my role bifurcated that of a participant; though not a subject – in that I interacted with student-participants and formed relationships with them; and a researcher who gathered and analysed data (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

The research attempted to get close to the meanings, ideas and social practices of two groups of student participants, whilst ensuring an adequate distance was maintained for the purpose of ensuring an objective study. The advantages of researching within a familiar setting: knowledge concerning the history operating within an organisation (Kincheloe, 1991); lack of culture shock; enhanced rapport with student participants; ability to gauge the honesty and accuracy of responses; and the likelihood that participants would reveal more intimate details of their thoughts and feelings (Hockey, 1993) meant that I was positioned, at times, as an insider-researcher, upon the insider-outsider research continuum (Hellowell, 2006),

whilst at others I was more akin to an observer and, hence, found myself more closely towards the outsider-researcher end of the continuum. This supports the views that a researcher can simultaneously be, to some extent, an insider, and to some extent, an outsider (Labaree, 2002). This was evidently the case within this study.

A realistic picture of events was uncovered through a natural, real, conversational style of semi-structured focus group interviews (Fontana and Frey, 1994), though it should be noted that findings and analysis are the subjective views of the researcher and may be represented in a variety of ways depending on the arbitrariness of the analyst (Alvesson, 2003).

As an insider-outsider researcher, my role within the classroom changed. I had to consider a level of authority not ascribed to the role of a mere lecturer or programme manager (Walker, 1981). Problems that students may fear by having a researcher within the classroom were ameliorated against by enhancing rapport and trust with students – something that insider-outsider researchers should not take for granted, but something I attempted to ensure (Glesne, 1989). The literature largely focuses on insider research as being the research of one's own institution and/or colleagues, and is thus littered with disadvantages and dangers. However, given that I did not meet the classic definition of an insider researcher, nor of an outsider researcher, this study filled a space whereby I, as an educational practitioner, can reveal what is real from my classroom (Smyth, 1998), and where; as an insider-outsider researcher and not an insider-researcher; I was privy to both inside information and closeness with participants (Humphrey, 1995) but also distance and objectivity which are deemed to be necessary for qualitative case studies (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

I have been working interpretively throughout the study. The findings and conclusions are subjective based on the way in which I have triangulated and then analysed the evidence. There is an obvious relationship between the researcher and the participant within this study; namely that of myself, the teacher and the students within my class. This cannot be ignored. Nor can my background, teaching philosophies, or any expectations that I held prior to conducting the research. These matters have been outlined in the introduction and I have shown how they have been

ameliorated against within this chapter and throughout the detailed description of the methods utilised within Appendix 3.i. My unique positioning within this case study allows me the opportunity to get inside the problem, to think about it in detail, to adapt my approaches and questioning within the classroom, naturalistically, and to connect with the participants (Thomas, 2016). I anticipate that readers of the study will use their own experiences and knowledge to make sense and meaning which might answer the questions they have about experiential learning and the development of soft skills.

Key ethical aims of the study included: protecting the participants from psychological harm and building positive relationships with participants and stakeholders (Gall et al, 2007). As an insider-outsider researcher, I have a sincere interest in the problems faced by my peers and a desire to improve teaching standards within my institution for the benefit of students. I, as the researcher, was a non-participant observer and stood aside from group activities as much as possible (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

This was a challenge for a teacher, particularly within an experiential learning context, but I set clearly-framed activities for students to work through, so that they and their actions were independently observed and led, by myself, only when it was necessary for their learning and for them to understanding what was required of them.

I wanted the study to be as free from bias as possible, and did all I could to ameliorate against that, but I concede that part of my role as the teacher of the participants was to ensure their skills, knowledge and behaviours were all positively enhanced.

Burke (2013) believed that research studies can (and indeed should) be designed to fit to the teacher-researcher's needs and to the timetable and schedule of the curriculum. This allows for interventions to be made at appropriate times; avoiding the most busy, intense periods, or embracing them; and gaining on-site, hands-on experience during which innovative teaching can be practiced and studied.

Transformation, either of my practice or my setting is also important for me as I seek

to take on more responsibilities within my workplace in terms of influencing teaching practices across the institution.

Researching within my own institution also drew upon the work of Congdon and Congdon (2016) and Hart and Bond (1995) by creating aims for the project, namely; to develop a framework of teaching practice and potentially a learning and teaching strategy for the institution at which I worked, to enhance learning and teaching, and to apply a continual improvement model to curriculum development. It was anticipated that the study would allow me to inform other lecturers within my institution through staff development sessions.

In summary, there were a number of advantages and disadvantages to inside research which this study has considered, in order to ensure the research was ethical. It is crucial to ensure a reliable and credible study also, and I consider this within the following section.

10. Reliability and credibility

The following section outlines the ways in which the reliability and credibility of the study have been upheld, whilst also considering the need for a reflexive approach to this insider-outsider research.

Whilst it is difficult to generalise from a case study, it is still advantageous and perhaps even necessary to: use your ability as a researcher to draw from one's own experiences; to put things together; to make informed judgements about cause and effect; and to seek meaning. I cannot infer that the same results from this study would happen again, whatever the conditions they were carried out within. (Thomas, 2016) This is a particular study of particular people within a particular setting at a particular moment in time. Generalisation is not possible. Abduction - inference to the best explanation (Thomas, 2016) - or making a judgement concerning the best explanation for the facts collected (Houser et al, 1992) - is certainly in evidence in this study, however. The research unfolds to offer the development of an explanation and a theoretical idea, upon close examination of the particular case (Hammersley, 2005).

10.1 Reliability

Within a case study approach, the issue of reliability is less easy to guarantee. This study is considering two groups of students within one institution, therefore there can be no assumption that similar findings would result should the same inquiry be repeated at another institution. This is a study which, in exploring the research statement and answering the research sub-questions, highlights a range of thoughts, feelings, meanings and activities and many of these have been judged subjectively by me, the researcher. Other academics would, I presume, seek to judge them based on their own viewpoint and their own world views, so the guarantee that this study would offer similar findings from one academic to another cannot be made. (Crotty, 1998)

In summary, the findings and conclusions drawn have been through a rigorous analysis and have been triangulated through a variety of methods in order to ensure reliability.

10.2 Credibility

In order for the study to be deemed reliable and to strengthen its validity, it was essential for it to embrace robust methods to check and balance the data. I ensured internal validity through seeking agreement between different elements of the data: matching patterns and results; triangulating across different data sets; ensuring that interpretations derive from the data; and that causal explanations are supported by evidence. Additionally, any alternative explanations must be considered and weighed up within my analysis. The research sought concurrent validity using a variety of sources, perspectives and instruments and avoided bias by ensuring reflexivity throughout (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The singleness, uniqueness and peculiarity of the subject within the case study is significant. How the data has been interpreted and analysed to create findings was at the forefront of this study (Crotty, 1998).

It is important to note that the methodology and methods have been selected to specifically address the needs of the research statement and questions. It is a study

of soft skill development and therefore, by asking students to reflect and make observations, the study is allowing space for them to evidence their own views of their development. The study rigorously triangulates evidence of students' soft skill development by encouraging them to make their own observations and reflections, through journal entries and focus group interviews, alongside observations from myself as the teacher-researcher. The most ethical and efficient way for the study to gather data on students' soft skill development is by allowing an uninhibited space for them to explore and document their thoughts and views on this area and the processes involved in their development, which the study successfully achieves.

The efficacy of the methods and methodology is in existence throughout the emergent data, which highlights the ways in which soft skills were developed. The study also highlights students who viewed the teaching approach unfavourably, which adds weight to the ethical rigour of the study. It can be shown within the data that students did not merely write what they thought I may wish to read. Rather, they were moved from an initial position of reluctance to reflect at length, to a position of full and frank honesty as each week progressed. Several students offered critiques of the teaching methods and voicing their displeasure in being taught in ways they were not previously accustomed to.

The credibility of the study is enhanced by the framework used – a nested case study. Utilising other methods, such as a pre and post project questionnaires, might have been more appropriate had the study been looking to understand how much students had learnt throughout the project period. However, there was no baseline testing of student participants as this study is about development, rather than learning. It examines the qualitative changes, rather than the quantitative changes, and therefore follows a specific design with the data analysis in mind. In order to successfully answer the research statement and sub-questions, sufficient data had to be generated and it was felt that a constructionist, symbolic interactionist, naturalistic case study was the most ethical and efficient way to achieve the aims of the study.

In summary, the range of qualitative data collection tools employed, alongside the thorough process of thematic analysis, has resulted in a study which is fully triangulated in order to meet its objectives.

10.3 Reflexivity

When forming the research design it was imperative that I considered the role that I would play within the research, that I examine my position as a researcher within the context of the study, the power that I have over participants and my professional stance within the workplace setting. As researchers acquire new knowledge it is crucial that we scrutinise the research, work, actions and ourselves.

Reflexive researchers are known for being creative, introspective and experimental. They believe that many research methods have their place, and that a researcher should be prepared to change/switch methods when necessary. It is not merely a process of trying to prove themselves right in a nomothetic, fixed view of the world (Weber, 2003). This view has aided the research by forming a robust set of methods within a naturalistic case study, in order to most suitably triangulate my findings.

Reflexivity (and the need for it) has been defined in a variety of ways, across a number of different fields. Hand (2003) describes it as a method of signposting to the reader what is going on within the research process. The researcher and the research process that is being undertaken cannot be entirely separated, which makes neutrality difficult if not impossible. I had expectations of being influenced by the research I undertook and, due to the nature of a professional doctorate, also of using it to influence the world around me; my teaching practices, the practices of my colleagues and the teaching staff that I managed and the learning outcomes of my students – both those who were active participants in the classroom study and also those who I taught at other times on differing modules. Weatherall et al (2001) describes this as akin to a loop within which the researcher acts on the world and the world acts on the researcher. It has also been stated that reflexivity is the critical gaze towards the self, examining the personal position, identity and self in an ongoing process (Koch and Harrington, 1998). In practical terms this means critically examining the assumptions that underlie our actions and the wider implications of

those actions (Cunliffe, 2004). If we examine Argyris' (1982, 1991) double-loop learning model we would see many of the attributes implicit within effective reflexivity (critical thinking, the questioning of assumptions and theories, disconfirming models and evaluating new theories) which highlights the learning and growth such reflexivity can prompt.

In order to be consciously critical (necessary to ensure transparency and objectivity) many things need to be acknowledged – the position I held professionally when undertaking the research, my preferences for teaching practice and natural bias', my values, assumptions and prejudices. Many of these things did change throughout the duration of doctoral study, but it was vital that I acknowledged them at each stage of the research process, with any decisions taken being the subject of rigorous self-critique (Hand, 2003). Decision-making based on the reflexivity of oneself in a social context, with known colleagues, many of which I also consider to be friends, can be fallible (Archer, 2007). Therefore it was important that I stood outside of myself so that I was well placed to reflect upon my actions and findings in relation to all circumstances. Reflexivity had not always been a natural part of my research activity, despite my professional position in the classroom demanding such an attitude. However, I have made reflexivity a very conscious part of both my research and practice (Hellawell, 2006), which is demonstrated through the methods I have chosen to employ within the study.

The role I have taken within the study has moved between teacher, lecturer, programme leader, colleague, friend and researcher and the appreciation and understanding of my differing roles and stances (Fook & Gardner, 2007) have been crucial when developing views and looking at the bigger picture (Malthouse et al, 2014).

In summary, the life of a researcher can change throughout the course of any study, as was the case within this study, meaning a necessary, continual examination of views and beliefs, even if this means a silencing of natural, initial views and working life becoming influenced by the research and the process (Hastings, 2010).

The next section outlines the timeframe within which this study was conducted.

11. Timeframe

The study was designed between October 2014 and January 2016. Participants were identified and consent subsequently gained. The data was gathered between February 2016 and June 2016. The reason for this period was that the researcher taught the relevant module to a group of students during this time, thus allowing for convenience. Once the data was gathered a period of analysis was undertaken between September 2016 and September 2019 prior to write up of the study which was undertaken between October 2019 and October 2020. The study was submitted for doctoral submission on 16th October 2020.

12. Analysis

Let us turn now to the way in which the data was analysed in order to generate findings and discussion. This section considers the framework for analysis and the data analysis tools used.

12.1 A Framework for Analysis

The selection of information used within case study methodology is a key issue and this study needed the analysis to show due deference to both typical, representative occurrences and infrequent, unrepresentative occurrences which are critical to understanding the nature of the case. Whilst a subject might only demonstrate a particular behaviour infrequently, that behaviour, or action, might be so important that it cannot be ruled out within the interpretation of events. Quantity can, where relevant, be replaced with quality and the significant few occurrences can be separated from the insignificant many (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Any theoretical statements made will need to be supported with evidence presented and any generalization must be clarified, for instance, from a single instance to multiple instances, from single features to the whole of the case and from a single case to a theoretical extension. I planned on using a computer-assisted software tool, such as NVivo, to group, retrieve and organise the data so that analysis and presentation can be conducted through groups such as patterns, themes, narratives, relationship

networks, chronologies, causal sequences, key issues and explanations (Miles and Huberman, 1984). This software was trialled by myself initially, but discarded in favour of a manual categorisation and thematic analysis of the data which emerged. Whilst this method might have been more time consuming it allowed me to forge an ongoing and greater understanding of the data, to see patterns emerging and to cross reference them with other patterns to create macro and micro themes.

Conducting a variable analysis was rejected by the researcher due to the concerns that it might not address the process of interpretation and meaning-making that goes on in human groups (Blumer, 1939). It would be difficult to get a complete understanding of the many variables which exist in the lives of the participants; their upbringing, demographic backgrounds, salary of their parents, current job commitments, relationships out of college and mental health, for instance.

In summary, therefore, the study is not looking to make strong causal claims about the conclusions offered. Rather it seeks to analyse relevant and interesting themes which will explore the research statement and answer the research sub-questions set.

12.2 Data analysis and interpretation: a thematic analysis

The study analysed and interpreted the data through the use of thematic analysis, which is discussed within this sub-section.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined the theory, application, and evaluation of thematic analysis as a research tool, describing it as a foundational method for analysis. Ryan and Bernard (2000) identified that thematic coding is a process performed within other qualitative analysis methods, such as grounded theory but Braun and Clarke argue for it to be considered as a method in its own right, stating its flexibility as a major benefit to researchers, which can offer rich, detailed, yet complex accounts of data.

As thematic analysis is not bound by any pre-existing theoretical framework it can work flexibly to report experiences, meanings of events and data and the reality of

participants' views and actions. It can also work within a constructionist method, examining the ways events, meanings, realities and experiences are the products of their environments within society. The method can be one which works both to reflect reality and to unravel a reality.

A thematic analysis involves many choices which need to be made before analysis of the data begins. For instance, an ongoing reflexive dialogue was incorporated within the design of the study, which is vital for an insider-outsider researcher, particularly within a case study research context, in order that amendments could be made to the research where appropriate and also so that biases are taken into account and ameliorated against.

Deciding what counts as a theme within any study is a vital part of the process. Braun and Clarke assert that there is no definitive answer to this, but that a researcher's own judgement is necessary to decide upon themes. The themes, they recommend, ought to capture something important in relation to the overall research statement and sub-questions. Their paper also considers the differences between an inductive approach and a theoretical one; the inductive approach identifying themes which are strongly linked to the data itself, where the data has been specifically collected for the research. An example of this within my study is the collection of student reflections, as the students within my study are reflecting upon their own experiences within the classroom in a way which does not take the study, its exploration or the research sub-questions into account. Conversely, I also undertook a theoretical analysis, where the driver of data was the exploration statement and the research sub-questions themselves. For instance, I interviewed students within a semi-structured interview format with the overriding research statement and sub-questions in mind and made field notes after lessons with knowledge of the exploration and research sub-questions, meaning the overall aims of the study were always at the forefront of my mind as an insider-outsider researcher. Subsequently, I coded with an open mind, initially, and looked for patterns and themes to emerge through the coding process. I analysed more deeply than merely through a semantic approach and progressed from description to interpretation of the data, so as to examine, at a latent level, underlying ideas, assumptions and concepts. In summary, this thematic analysis searched across a number of data sets: semi-structured focus

group interviews; student reflections; teacher observations/field notes - to find patterns of meaning.

The process that I followed is outlined by Braun and Clarke, who describe thematic analysis as a constant moving back and forth between the entire data sets with writing as an integral and continual part of the analysis, rather than being something which takes place at the end. This writing starts in phase one, with the jotting down of potential ideas and coding schemes and continues throughout until reporting stage. For ease of use, they recommend a six-phase guide to completing thematic analysis, which, organises and describes data in detail whilst also interpreting aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). This instrument was utilised within the study and further detail on the instrument, is contained within Appendix 3.iv.

This method of analysis is considered entirely appropriate for this naturalistic, nested case study.

13. Summary of chapter 3 - methodology

The aim of my methodological approach was to explore whether experiential education has an impact upon soft skill development within business management undergraduate students. The study has been designed to explore an overarching research statement and to answer several research sub-questions which closely align. The case study is multi-method and follows a naturalistic approach with the student participants. It was important to observe the students in their natural setting so that the research could make sense of their reactions, to interpret their behaviours and to give meaning to their actions (Gall et al, 2007).

There are certain limitations which have been placed upon the study for pragmatic and efficiency reasons. Notably, the data within the study is limited to what is contained within this methodology section. It examined what happens within the classroom and, should students wish to comment more widely, on what students do outside of the classroom which relates to their experiential learning project. Whilst the study does contain degree apprentices it does not seek to gather data from their workplace, nor does it ask them to comment upon their workplace activities. In

parallel, the traditional full-time students are not asked to comment on any work which they undertake either, so as to provide consistency across both contrasting groups. Further research on the link between workplace activities and soft skill development is both possible and encouraged, but is not within the realms of this study.

The study selected students from seminar groups which were taught by me, an insider-outsider researcher – thus allowing me easy access to them in class to complete observations (Patton, 2002). This raised ethical concerns, which I have attempted to ameliorate through a series of actions; explaining my actions to the class at all times, offering students the opportunity to opt-in to the study as opposed to requiring them to opt-out and by performing member checks, and asking questions of students regularly both in-class and following lessons. The two seminar groups I observed were both from the same academic year, studying the same module through the same teaching methods and the same in-class activities. However, one seminar group contained traditional full-time students, whilst the other group contained degree apprentices. The traditional full-time students studied at the institution for three to five days per week, whilst the degree apprentices worked with an employer, away from the institution, for four days per week and studied for one day. Collecting data from these two groups offered the study an opportunity to contrast and compare findings, to ascertain whether there were any differences between the development of soft skills within traditional students and within degree apprentices, and what they might be.

The significance of this study is that it may offer me, my institution and other educators in higher education settings opportunities to see the effect of experiential education upon the development of soft skills within undergraduate students. However, as stated previously, this is a particular group of students, within a particular setting at a particular point in time, so it should not be assumed that any of the conclusions drawn from the study would be mirrored if the study were to be repeated. It may also offer some insights into the learning practices of degree apprentices – a growing field of students within higher education. The findings and analysis, in the forthcoming chapters, will explore these thoughts and begin to explore the research statement alongside answering the research sub-questions.

Samples of the data, following collection, classification and thematic analysis can be found within Appendices 3.v to 3.x.

Chapter 4: Findings

1. Introduction

Based on the gap in current understanding outlined in chapter two, the following title, research aim and sub-questions were developed:

RS1 - An exploration of the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses.

RQ1 - In what ways do students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ2 - In what ways are experiential learning activities supported by teachers?

RQ3 - What soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ4 - What are the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes?

These questions were addressed through the research design detailed in chapter three. The current chapter presents the results of the thematic analysis process. Samples of raw and themed data is contained within Appendix 3.v to 3.vx. The images of raw data illustrate a samples of student reflections – both paper-based and online, personal observations and focus group transcripts. Additionally, the appendices illustrate the manual process of data analysis which was undertaken For practical purposes only a selection of data excerpts which best illustrate the emergent themes were chosen to feature within this thesis. Several themes have emerged from the data and these themes fall into eleven main categories which answer the sub-questions (above).

Together, these address the over-arching exploration statement and answer the research sub-questions within the thesis. Within the eleven main categories are thirty-nine sub-themes. These are illustrated in Appendix 4.i.

This chapter offers a thematic analysis of the data generated, through a range of methods; reflective journals, observations, focus group interviews and artefacts, has been displayed as figures within appropriate text boxes. This is in order that the reader will not be inconvenienced by having to decipher what sort of data is being referred to and from where it may originate. The data modes are thus delineated between, thus demonstrating the real-life noise and feeling which each voice and observation illustrates.

The data methods are grouped as indicated within Figure 4.1;

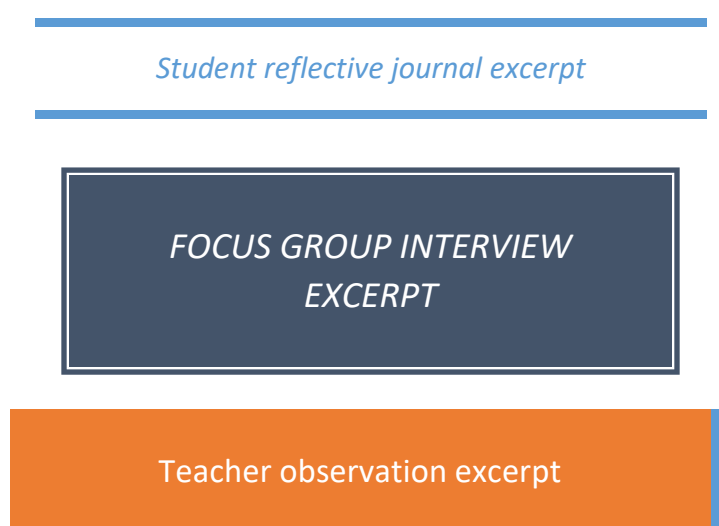


Figure 4.1 – Format of data presentation

Artefacts are included in the form of material presented by students, either in-class, via presentations or through their assessment portfolio. These are referred to throughout the chapter and are contained within the appendices.

The following section presents findings, in the form of data, which address the first sub-question of this research.

2. Students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom in a variety of ways

2.1 Creativity and idea generation

Main theme number 1 was entitled creativity and idea generation and is defined as the ability of students to design creative solutions to the problems they faced, and to generate ideas which would make the project a success in terms of raising awareness, or funds, for the charity which they linked themselves to. The initial ideas generated varied considerably, from a bowling night with 100 attendees, a charity football match with celebrity players participating, a quiz night within the college and an educational establishment which visited schools to offer business training to teenagers. Students appeared to relish the creative aspect of the project and wholeheartedly participated in this element, as can be demonstrated in the following quote;

I enjoyed the chance to talk and to discuss ideas with my group. It gave us a broad range of ideas to consider. Simon, UCAS student

Figure 4.2: Creativity and Idea Generation

From this excerpt I understand that students hit the ground running and saw that they were free to be creative and to consider taking their business forward in any direction they saw fit. Some groups bypassed this initial brainstorming phase, however, and were possibly left to rue that mistake;

We sort of bypassed the idea of brainstorming our ideas to find a charity and ended up picking one that someone in the group already knew about. I think we were possibly too quick to choose a charity, more so than other groups?! Amelia, DA

Figure 4.3 – Groups bypass initial brainstorming phase

This quote leads me to understand that the student found the brainstorming phase an important one for the creative process and that without it, the group was hamstrung into working for a charity that they did not necessarily believe was correct for them. Other groups did indicate that the idea generation phase was not a swift one;

"I think the one thing you'd get with us repeating the process is more innovative ideas because I remember in our group we were pressured into getting an idea sorted, possibly because we didn't start to brainstorm quickly enough. Then, when we eventually got the whole group together, it took a while to get our idea because there was a lot of stuff (ideas) being thrown about. It was all good stuff, but it took a while to get to the main idea and we spent a lot of time doing that, which meant that we had to quickly put things together towards the end." Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.4 – The idea generation phase is not swift

This excerpt emphasises the importance of immediate brainstorming when time is limited. It also shows how highly the students placed importance upon the idea-generation phase and the reflective ability of the student to recognise this necessary soft skill when working on a start-up project.

However, once students worked collectively through this brain-storming phase, many groups produced strong foundations for their charity organisations which afforded them a focus which guided their actions from that point onwards. This can be demonstrated through the artefact in Appendix 4.ii which exemplifies that groups saw a benefit in outlining a mission and vision for their work – something that emanated directly from the creative brainstorming phase of the project.

In conclusion the ability of the students to reflect upon the importance of creativity and brainstorming within experiential 'start-up' projects shows the development of soft skills in this area. It also demonstrated a need to provide students with a framework for approaching the task.

2.2 Teamwork

Theme number 2 was called teamwork and is defined as the ability for students to work productively, harmoniously and collaboratively with other members of their group in order to meet group objectives.

2.2.1 Collaboration

Sub-theme number 1 was called teamwork-collaboration and can be defined as the ways in which team members worked together to achieve a common goal. It was evident throughout the project that teams who worked together effectively were more likely to produce quality work and to raise more funds and awareness for their chosen charities. Those who understood the need for high levels of collaboration from the offset appeared to be at an advantage.

Some groups gave thought to their need to work collaboratively, which linked to the need for strong communication within teams, which I shall refer back to later.

Today's session was really good and productive...the team seems to get on well but I think we are a bit fearful of offending each other's ideas etc. That should sort itself out over time. I did like the fact that we were left to collaborate together and to get on with it after having a brief intro from you. It was a bit annoying with some members of the team not being here but it didn't hinder us too much and I suppose that's how it is in the real world. Peter, DA

Figure 4.6 – Groups were wary of conflict initially

The above statement suggests that some groups were, initially, wary about not upsetting one another. People were generally respectful of others' ideas and viewpoints, even if they differed from their own. Additionally, this student felt that collaboration and team formation was aided by the laissez-faire approach taken by the teacher, who allowed time and space for teams to form naturally and without outside influence.

Collaboration was, on occasion, called for and led by certain individuals within groups;

After our meeting I really emphasised the need for everyone to complete their actions and everyone has really started to pull together now. I think this refocused us. Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.7 – Individuals often led collaboration

From this quote I can see that some teams did need to be reminded of their duties and responsibilities. Leadership was sometimes necessary as some individuals could become quite insular and worked to their own regime;

Sometimes I find it hard to work with Dean as I find that when we are trying to collaborate as a team he is often just doing something else on his own and not contributing to the team discussion. This is also hard because he doesn't always consult the team when making decisions. For example, he just went ahead and bought five products without informing us! Milly, DA

Figure 4.8 – Team members could drift from group

From this statement it is suggested that some team members could come adrift from the main group at times, causing problems for the team. It was deemed important for people to collaborate, as the following excerpt shows;

"We helped each other as a team, or if someone was struggling, so that we could all achieve our best work and not leave anyone struggling or not understanding their roles and responsibilities." Helena, DA

Figure 4.9 – Importance of collaboration

This illustrated the way in which some teams worked together to assist each other.

Some students were a little resentful of having to produce higher levels of work-rate than others in their team were. This led to some teams becoming fractured and tasks

tending to be completed by individuals, rather than by the team collaboratively. Some students were aware of this fact;

"I wanted to be a big part of the group on the six week project, but I know that some people were just about participating (doing the bare minimum). They weren't really part of the group, part of the community. They weren't working together. This is the difference between education and real life. In education people don't necessarily want to do it, but they just feel that they have to, which for me isn't good enough when you are working together as a team." Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.10 – Teams need to work collaboratively

This particular student appeared to recognise the importance for team members to work collaboratively and to go above and beyond the mere basic expectations. Others described the sense of community that they felt;

"When you are working with a group of people for a long period of time you become a team. You become a little community. You communicate all the time and you're working together. You're working on the same level – it is equality." Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.11 – Sense of community

This quote suggests that teams and their likely success was, in part, down to the teamwork that was prompted by close community collaboration.

In conclusion, it was evident that students participated in their group work and the experiential project in various ways, but those who collaborated as a team and sought out ways to solve problems together were more successful. Student's collaborative efforts appeared to develop and enhance over time, leading to stronger teams and a sense of community.

2.2.2 Relationships

Sub-theme number 2 was called teamwork – relationships and is defined as the ability for students to form relationships with other members of their team. It is

noteworthy that the relationships which developed within the project teams had both a positive and a negative influence upon the harmony and output of the groups. Also, it is important to state that inter-personal relationships within the groups was one of the most commented upon topics, both within the reflective journals and in the focus groups.

Some students were very happy with the groups in which they found themselves;

I think the mixture of the teams is really good. Obviously, because it's good, you not only build friendships, but you learn your team's skills and their weaknesses, so you're able to co-operate better even when there are teething issues. I think it's really good to get a wide mixture. Jasmine, UCAS

Figure 4.12 – Groups aid the development of friendships and co-operation

This statement was indicative of the general reflections that emerged; that teams generally worked well together with very little friction, that friendships developed and that the groups' became more solid and reliant upon each other as the project progressed. It is, however, important to note the outliers to this theme, as those individuals did seem to be affected to a greater extent than those who were happy with their team members. One relationship, in particular, did not seem to work. This was evidenced by the comments made by two people;

I don't necessarily feel out of the group. I think the role I was given was one that nobody else wanted though as so they gave it to me because I wasn't there. Also, if I'm being completely honest, I don't like G, so that's probably a factor on how involved I am in the project. I feel like this is something worth exploring more. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.13 – Formative stages of group work are crucial for student belonging

This statement, which was an early reflection made by one of the degree apprentices, illustrates that not only did certain individuals feel a little outside of the team if they were not present in the early formative stages of the group work – the

forming stage – but that they also felt a knock-on effect of being given tasks and roles that they may not have volunteered for. Additionally, importantly, it evidences the early seed of a personal conflict. One which was explored further in a later reflection;

I think me not liking G makes me less lenient with her. For example, when she doesn't do her share of work on time or to a good enough standard, or if she criticizes something I've done, I probably take it more personally than if it were coming from someone else. I am quite aware of my dislike for her and trying to subdue my feelings in order to remain professional and I know the work is more important than my personal relationship with her, so I don't think it is having an impact on our work or on the group. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.14 – Difficult intra-group relationships must be worked through

From this, much later excerpt from a reflective journal, I can see that the inter-personal difficulties that Amelia was having did not dissipate and, whilst she states that it is not having a personal effect upon them or the group work, it is clearly something which features on her mind throughout the project. It evidences the difficulties that can emerge within groups or teams and the attitude that people must take in order to work through such difficult relationships for the benefit of those around them.

Grace, too, had reflected upon this intra-group personal conflict;

I feel like everyone's pulling their weight except one person, which isn't fair on the rest of the group. It has also become very hostile with said person making personal comments, leaving the group chat (on WhatsApp) and refusing to communicate with the group unless it is through one individual friend of theirs. This has OBVIOUSLY made it ridiculously difficult to get on with the project as it is dragging out the decision-making process, making everyone feel uncomfortable and frankly and immature behaviour is stressing me out as we have so much to do in so little time. I really can't wait for this to be over because working in this hostile environment is not something that I really want to do and it's not what I came to uni for. Sorry for the rant, but it's upsetting me that what started as something nice with good intentions has turned into something horrible that means I'm taking stress home with me each night. Grace, DA.

Figure 4.15 – Inter-personal conflict affects teams

This excerpt from Grace is markedly different from those from Amelia. Grace appears to be adamant that the inter-personal conflict, which she appears to largely blame on Amelia, is having an effect on the team and its productivity and that it is also affecting her personally, by reducing her enjoyment of the project and by making her feel stressed. The relationships that were built within the groups are, perhaps, more important than the work-rate or productivity of individuals as harmony within groups seemed to affect the way in which they worked together and their output also.

One group, which appeared to be happy with the make-up of their team, seem to place some weight of this onto the fact that they were an all-female group;

Overall our team is getting along well, with no conflict arising so far. I feel really happy working with my team members and the fact that we are all girls gives us the advantage that we have similar interests and emotions about certain subjects. We also came up with a team name – Team Minerva – who is the goddess of education, the city, wisdom and war. We felt this was a powerful way to bond us and to have a bit of female power, as we are an all-female team. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.16 – Single-gender groups can aid student morale

Another group member reflected thus;

Possibly, with male input, our ideas would have been different. They may have been things like a boat party or a casino night, but as we don't have any in our group, we didn't have any of that potential conflict. Helena, DA

Figure 4.17 – Mixed gender groups may lead to conflict

And, on the same topic, the leader of the group said;

With regards to the all-female team, there are of course advantages and disadvantages. I think, subconsciously, it made us want to work with a charity which had more female connotations (infant mortality and its effects upon families). Although men experience this loss too, I think it's the media view that it affects women more, so I'm sure this had an impact upon our decisions. We also don't have a male input into our decisions too, so the focus is more on trying to do things that appeal to women. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.18 – Single-gender groups create limitations

The above statements, which revolve around the gender (in)balance within their team, leaves many conclusions; that having a one-gender team might help, initially, to bond groups together and to allow them to generate a more narrow range of ideas. The effect of this is that decisions can be made more quickly, which led this group to progress more quickly than other groups. From the final quote, however, I deduce some limiting factors which can have a negative effect upon a team. Namely, that the group were concentrating on female views only. This action may have limited the appeal of their event to females only, thereby alienating prospective attendees who were male. Overall, however, from the student views, they were cohesive and productive, though whether this was down to the high levels of drive and motivation from two key individuals within the group or the fact that they were an all-female team is certainly a point of contention.

Overall, students appeared to forge positive and productive working relationships and friendships with their team members. This was very evident throughout the reflective journals, my observations and the focus groups. One student noted the following;

"I think it taught us a lot about team dynamics and dealing with people and working with people. You can't really get that from theory very well – we had to learn it as we went. For that, I think the project was very useful." George, DA

Figure 4.19 – Experiential learning teaches team dynamics

This quote is indicative of the views that were largely held by the student participants – that the experiential project facilitated the learning and development of ways to cultivate and nurture productive relationships with colleagues.

In conclusion I note the importance that can be placed upon individual relationships within experiential projects. Students are susceptible to relationship break-downs and inter-personal conflicts which can have a detrimental effect upon their team's harmony and productivity levels and, as such, teams and individuals must work hard to ensure that strong, positive relationships are upheld within the group setting.

2.3 Communication

Theme number 3 was called communication and can be defined as the ability for a student or students to impart information through a variety of mediums, pertinently, in the case of this study, through written, oral, presentational and electronic means.

2.3.1 Written and oral skills

Sub theme number 3 was called written and oral communication skills which can be defined as the ability to impart information to peers, external partners and teachers through written and oral means.

It was evident that the students used a variety of methods to communicate with each other and that communication was an important part of the project for many of the groups, as the following quote shows;

Our constant communication, whether it be through a WhatsApp group chat, being cc'd into emails or having meetings when possible, we all know what's going on. Overall, where someone is lacking or finding things difficult, they'll communicate this to the group and someone will always support them to get the task done. Rhiannon, UCAS

Figure 4.20 – Students used varied means of communication

From this excerpt it can be seen that communication levels were high, they were varied and they were used for positive means – to aid the completion of tasks and to support team members. Those who were out of the communication loop in their teams, albeit for short periods of time on occasion, did feel a negative consequence of that;

I was on holiday on the Friday so I missed the seminar. This is extremely frustrating due to the lack of communication we have in the working week. I feel like communication is getting slightly better overall now but we need to find ways to get in touch with people who do not have access to emails. Grace, DA

Figure 4.21 – Those outside of communication loops felt negative consequences

This quote shows a number of things. Firstly, it is clear that some students missed parts of their project due to external matters (in this instance a holiday) and could not rely on communication of the group to ensure their involvement. Secondly, it appears that if a student was not part of the decision-making process during the week – in essence, present within the classroom – then they might be excluded from that week's activities, and finally, that some groups appeared not to make the best use of electronic means of communication. This final point is surprising, given the range of communication tools the students had at their disposal.

The same student went on to comment further;

I think my group has found it hard to make decisions without the two of us there (herself and a fellow apprentice from the same external employer). Because of this I arranged a meeting with Emma and George so that we could catch up on the work. Tess, DA

Figure 4.22 – Some individuals on outside of communication loop became pro-active

From this excerpt I can see that the student, who was aware that she was outside the main communication loop of the group, became pro-active in arranging a meeting. I conclude the reason for this as her understanding of the importance of

being an active member of the team who is contributing towards its success and that she recognised the need for strong communication within the group to facilitate this.

In conclusion, examples of this student work, arising via a series of artefacts and displayed within figure 4.22, offer findings which can be interpreted as illustrating the importance of communication within students. They offer evidence that students collaborated together in order to produce strong levels of written communication which pertained to their project and, as such, was a soft skill which students demonstrated.

2.3.2 Electronic communications

Sub-theme number 4 was called electronic communications and can be defined as the ability for the students to communicate through varied electronic means. These include, but are not limited to; emails, WhatsApp, google hangout, skype and conference calls.

Appendix 4.vi shows an email created by Team Minerva. These emails were purposed to aid communication with external stakeholders and to generate interest in their charity, whilst having the dual effect of inviting the external companies to donate raffle prizes to the summer fete which they were holding or to encourage them to attend and pay for a stall. The artefact shows a modern, non-intrusive approach to generating leads for a business, which was developed experientially through trial and error.

The range and importance of electronic communications was extremely prevalent throughout the reflective journal excerpts. This was especially the case with the degree apprentices, who relied on these methods for communication within the working week, given that they were only present in college for one day per week. One commented as follows;

I think the fact that we catch up on Tuesday evenings on a joint phone call is really useful as it helps to just keep everyone up to date on progress made. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.23 – Electronic communications are important

This quote suggests that groups were creating suitable methods for them to be able to communicate and that this happened at any point during the week, dependent on team member availability. Other students saw the difficulties of not being in the electronic communication loop;

This week I've been away, however I have had access to the internet so I can be in contact with my group although it's been difficult as certain meetings have taken place without the rest of the group being informed. This was particularly difficult as the meeting concerned my role and I wasn't even informed that it was taking place, so I found that a bit irritating. It made me feel quite detached, but as I know my name will be put against this task then I'll be putting in as much effort as usual because I like everything to be perfect. Grace, DA

Figure 4.24 – Absence can negatively affect participation

From this statement it can be seen that absence can have a negative effect upon participation, whether electronic means of communication exists or not. It also evidences the need for clear communication to ensure that people are involved and invited to meetings, particularly when an individual's work or work to be completed by the group overall is to be discussed. The student in this case appears to be quite self-motivated, but my assumption is that if she were not then she may have drifted away from the group, thereby affecting the overall chance of success for that project. This leads me to conclude that electronic means of communication is an effective tool for communicating when students are not present in college, but only if used correctly and in a manner which does not exclude anyone. There were some good examples of this, as can be seen within the following three journal excerpts;

We made a new group chat on WhatsApp and made everyone admin to ensure that everyone has access, even if they change phone numbers. It also means that people can use WhatsApp web at work, to make things easier.

We had a google hangout this week. It meant that we could see each other, talk 'face to face' and split tasks.

Paul has now set up a shared google drive, which will be helpful for us to share documents that we are working on. Kelly, DA

Figure 4.25 – electronic means of communicating aids remote work

As previously mentioned, groups were asked to present their findings for their group assessment. The groups did this wholly through the use of Microsoft PowerPoint, despite having other tools and methods at their disposal. PowerPoint presentations were utilised to make key points, to outline the work of many individuals within a team and to link knowledge learnt with results generated – though that was very different for each group. Developing the PowerPoint presentation was an important element for many of the groups and, due to their focus upon this assessment, it was something which many decided to work on progressively over a number of weeks.

In conclusion, the above quotes illustrate the range of communication platforms that were used by the groups and the variety of justifications for using them. They also evidence the fact that electronic means of communication is an important method for project members who are working remotely or are not based in the same location as each other.

2.4 Review of section 2

In summary, students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within these activities both inside and outside of the classroom in a variety of ways. They are creative when generating ideas, build strong relationships and collaborate together on team projects and communicate through a variety of mediums.

The following section proceeds to address the second research sub-question.

3. Experiential learning activities are widely supported and facilitated by teachers

3.1 Effect of teaching methods – lectures

Theme number 5 was called Education Methods and within that theme, sub-theme number 5 was entitled effect of teaching methods-lectures and is defined as the ways in which traditional lecture-style teaching impacted upon students.

Despite the largely experiential method of teaching employed within the process, there was a traditional, didactic element preserved. This was, in part, to ensure consistency with timetables and to meet operational requirements in terms of hours taught per student, but also to ensure that students saw a delineation between being pre-loaded with knowledge that was necessary for not only the project but other elements of learning within the course and to expose all groups to experts from a variety of business-related fields. Not surprisingly, student opinions of lectures, lecturers, and the level of learning that they achieved from those sessions and lectures which they had viewed previously, differed a great deal. Two lecturers were particularly popular with students, as the following quotes, with their real names replaced with aliases, demonstrate;

Loved Paul MacIntyre!! He was super knowledgeable and I found him really interesting to listen to. I found his lectures engaging because he elaborated from what was written on the slides and explained things in more detail. I found that I learnt a lot. Helena, DA

Figure 4.26 – Lectures within experiential education can be engaging

And;

Richard Peterson was fantastic. He outlined many key areas in a motivating and informative way, sometimes drawing on theory but more often than not drawing on his own experiences in the business world. He really demonstrated how important it is to write objectives and to stick to them. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.27 – Interactive delivery of lectures prompts engagement amongst students

In conclusion, these statements outline the benefits of having some lecture content within an experiential project – with one caveat – that they will aid engagement of students if they are delivered in an interactive way and with content which replicates actual lived experiences and real-world problems that students may face within their own employment.

3.2 Experiential education methods

Sub-theme number 6 was entitled ‘Experiential education methods’ and is defined as the ways in which experiential teaching impacted upon students.

I tried to be conscious over the way in which I taught the experiential classes and my observations contained lots of notes on this. In particular, it was evident that I was conscious about my body language and positioning within the room, with particular care being taken to not become too involved in the groups’ work for fear of becoming too influential over the way they ran their projects. The following quote demonstrates this theme;

I took a position at the side of the room today and worked on my laptop at certain times. Of course, I helped students when they asked me to, and was quietly observing and listening to their actions throughout, but I deliberately wanted to allow them space and time to work independently. Teacher observation

Figure 4.28 – The room position and body language of an experiential educator is important

At times though, I did feel the need to become more involved;

Two groups only had two people in at the start of the session. I allowed them to merge to prevent them from being on their own. As this week was a brainstorm week it was important that students got off to a good start. I need to have a contingency plan in place for other seminars that I run in this way and move groups around where it is needed. Teacher observation

Figure 4.29 – Flexibility is needed over group formations

This statement outlines how torn I was, in the position of an experiential educator, between allowing students to find their own way and in directing them towards a successful outcome.

Other problems with the experiential, group approach did surface, particularly early on in the project, as can be seen thus;

I tried to coach some potential solutions out of one team member who could not see a way forward for his project – I asked questions, moved around different groups and came back to check for progress and gave him tools to break down the problem that he faced, which seemed to help him see that success would be possible. Teacher observation

Figure 4.30 – Coaching can be a beneficial element of experiential learning

The quote reinforces the view that I held throughout the process; that flexibility is required from teachers who wish to teach in an experiential way. Asking students to stick rigidly to pre-set groups could be counter-productive.

Students appeared to notice benefits and differences between their experientially taught seminars and traditional seminars and lectures, as can be seen in the following quote;

"These seminars were more interactive and more engaging for the students. In lectures you just see everyone with their laptops open and heads down. They might go off track easily and the presentations are often to a wide range of people, so they're not specific. In our seminars people were engaged more. We were also left alone, then we would present our ideas and ask for guidance and then we'd have Rod's assistance." Ellie, UCAS

Figure 4.31 – Students gauge difference between experiential and traditional approaches

From this statement I conclude that students were more engaged with the new method of teaching and were happy to be left to figure their projects out for themselves, knowing that I was in the background to help when it was needed. They also seemed to enjoy the range of approaches used in the classes;

I really enjoyed today. You delivered the session in a fun and engaging way and it was nice to have a variety in terms of what we were being asked to do and not just be theory, theory and more theory. Leo, DA

Figure 4.32 – Students enjoy a variety of approaches

So, whilst students did enjoy the experiential nature of the project, some also liked a loose structure around the activities;

"When we did the seminars and you said to us to find some information, explain it and then write the detail for our project we all did this because you set a deadline and even if that deadline was tight it made us focused. If there were even more deadlines in the project, ones that people felt obliged to keep, then that might have convinced people not to leave it to the last minute." Amelia, DA

Figure 4.33 – Some students benefitted from neo-experientialism

In conclusion, this emphasises the need for experiential educators to understand that deadlines do focus people and that some student prefer to have a structured, signposted letter. From my observations, the sessions that I ran in this way did seem to be more successful.

3.3 Experiential education – real world learning

Sub-theme number 7 was entitled Experiential education – real world learning and is defined as the ability of students within the project to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical, real world knowledge and the methods of learning which aided their development of this.

Students within the project demonstrated an understanding of the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical, real world knowledge and the methods of learning which aided the development of this – often termed as authentic learning. One student cited this as one of the attractions of the programme for them;

“I actually really liked the idea of experiential learning. When I was first looking into the university it emphasised that they were looking to learn by doing. So, when they told us to go out and make our own business, financial plan and our own market research, the fact that it wasn’t any ordinary case study but our own idea and we were developing it in the real world...I thought that was very cool.” Edward, UCAS

Figure 4.34 – Experiential learning can attract students to a programme

This demonstrates the student view that learning experientially was different and a method which would appeal to them. Some students were even more specific with regards to the benefit of being taught experientially;

“Essentially, they say that business can’t be learnt in the classroom. You can learn the main concepts and theories and so on in the classroom, but when it comes to applying it in the real world, then this project works. It’s beneficial for the students and the tutor in that sense.” Edward, UCAS

Figure 4.35 – Practical learning can be transferable

From this statement I understand that students felt that a more practical learning was taking place within the project – one that was transferable into their own business practices – and that that might not have been replicated were the course to have been taught using traditional methods.

Students also understood where the course fitted into their plans for the future;

“Ideally you want your education to replicate the industry you are going into. Whether that is to take a lot of risk for some institutions then who knows, but if you can incorporate that into the teaching without it affecting grades then it’s beneficial.” Winston, UCAS

Figure 4.36 – Experiential courses can marry with future plans

In conclusion, students understood the benefits of the experiential approach to their soft skill development – i.e. those skills that would need to be demonstrated in the real world – but that facilitators and course designers should take care that this does not come at the expense of good grades in final assessments.

3.4 Learning derived/Impact from experiential education

Sub-theme number 8 was entitled Learning derived from experiential education and is defined as the ways in which experiential education led to learning for the students.

The impact of the experiential project was demonstrated throughout the data. Levels of engagement and enjoyment were varied, as shown by one student;

I won’t lie, I haven’t enjoyed it. I mean, I can see it being somewhat helpful, however it’s not actually like real life because if I were to start a business in real life then I would only do it with people I chose to work with. Grace, DA

Figure 4.37 – Levels of engagement and enjoyment varied

This quote alludes to some of the personal issues that students faced within their teams, particularly with reference to those they were asked to work with. Another student had a contrasting view;

I have really enjoyed the process so far as I like the element of teamwork, which, from my experience, is necessary in the workplace. Also, the element of applying what we learnt earlier in our course, into our project, that's been good. Ricky, DA

Figure 4.38 – Some students holistically enjoyed experiential learning

The two quotes, when viewed together, indicate the ways in which students determined their own perception of the project and the impact that it could have upon them because, on the one hand, some were displeased with having to work with those they would not go into business with, others saw the benefits of working with those that they might be tasked, randomly, with working with in an employment context.

These contrasting views were prevalent throughout. For instance, one student reflected thus;

At first I did not like this type of learning as all through school I was used to a more hands on approach, which I felt suited me really well. However, as the weeks have gone by I have found the method of learning is growing on me and that I am starting to see the benefits. Milly, DA

Figure 4.39 – Some student views of experiential learning approaches changed over time

Whilst another indicated the benefits of the approach;

I have found that learning in this experiential way is really beneficial, as is the apprenticeship. It helps to put theory into practice and helps me to remember the theory better. It reinforces everything I have learned. Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.40 – Experiential learning helps put theory into practice

The impact that degree apprentices felt upon their learning and their soft skill development seemed to be enhanced in comparison to the UCAS students. That is not to say that UCAS students did not develop soft skills, but degree apprentices seemed to be more appreciative of the impact that the experiential project had on them;

Me and Sally have a different experience to many of the others because we come from a small company and we can go back and say 'look at what we've learnt'. We can make changes based on the theories that we've learnt or the experiences that we've had, whereas when you're in a big company, whilst the student is getting education of the theories out of it, it might be harder for them to make changes, so I think we've used it to make a bigger impact. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.41 – Degree apprenticeships appreciated the impact of experiential learning

This quote outlines the ways in which even the degree apprentices saw themselves as having different experiences, based on their host employer. One student wrote in detail on the impact the experiential project had on her;

"I have changed my mind about this project. I really didn't want to do it at first and was really dreading it, but I definitely surprised myself and would like to learn in this way in the future. I have felt out of my comfort zone quite a few times, making big decisions, doing something like the video (where I did not feel at all qualified to make something like that) and just having so much pressure on organising something to make as much money as possible. However it has been good to have a different kind of learning instead of more theory and writing. Although we have learnt the theory, it has been in a much more practical sense. I hope that we get to learn this way in years 2 and 3. I also really liked the brief as it helped you to think creatively but offered a guiding framework." Leanne, DA

Figure 4.42 – Degree apprenticeships were happy to be challenged by the experiential project

From this excerpt, I understand that the student felt happy to be challenged by the project, that they believed their learning was positively impacted by the practicality of the experiential activities and that they were stretched out of their comfort zone, which saw them increase their range of skills.

Further quotes evidenced the positive impact that students perceived the experiential project to have had on them, such as;

Learning in this way has been particularly useful for group work and learning team dynamics. I have actually undertaken a lot of research in order to improve my ability to manage a group and I feel that that has been very beneficial for my personal development. George, DA

Figure 4.43 – Experiential learning made a holistic, positive impact

This quote underlines the positive impact that experiential learning had on the students – not only through teaching them theory and skills directly, but also in terms of engaging and motivating them to undertake their own research and self-development.

The final quote I have chosen to demonstrate the impact of experiential teaching methods within the project is thus;

“I’d like to see it (experiential teaching) more, especially as business is so experiential by nature. I set up a business at the age of fourteen. I had no clue about any of this stuff. You find things out as you go along, you find what you’re doing and you find out where you are going. I think it’s the best way to get an understanding and a real hands on approach and then you can figure out your mistakes as you go along. Knowing the theory is important, which is why the lecture aspect was good, but having the teaching experiential and understanding how you do it and how you feel, well you learn from the outcome. I think we should have this method of teaching more often.” Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.44 – Experiential learning can be deep and long-lasting

From this excerpt I understand the impact of experiential learning to be deep and long-lasting.

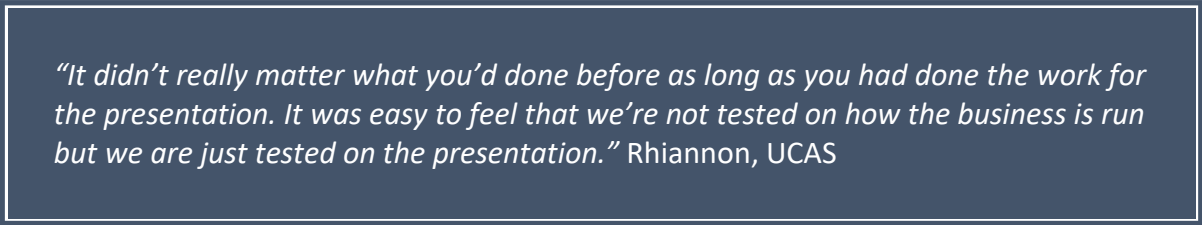
In conclusion, students within the project admitted that they were making mistakes and did not have all the answers, but being able to take a practical approach to the project gave them an understanding of how to approach the problems they faced and might face in future roles.

3.5 Assessment focus

Sub-theme number 9 was entitled Assessment focus and is defined as the ways in which students focused on their summative, end of term assessment instead of, or alongside, their learning activities within lectures or experiential seminars.

Appendix 4.vii exhibits the assessment which students were required to submit. Part C and D assessed the learning derived from the experiential project, whilst Part A and B assessed other elements of the module throughout the year. Part C, the presentation element, contained five compulsory elements which students needed to collaborate on.

Groups generally tried to raise as much awareness and funds for their charities as possible. However, throughout the student reflections it was obvious that many of them were more focused on their end of project assessment, a presentation, than they were the project itself, and some of them seemed to spend more of their time thinking and planning this, as demonstrated by the following quote;



"It didn't really matter what you'd done before as long as you had done the work for the presentation. It was easy to feel that we're not tested on how the business is run but we are just tested on the presentation." Rhiannon, UCAS

Figure 4.45 – Many students were assessment, not project, focussed

I understand this quote to mean that some students could not see the benefits of learning experientially, holistically. Because they were focused on attaining a good final grade, rather than on entering into the spirit of the project fully, they may have missed an opportunity to develop soft skills.

In conclusion, students who fully immersed themselves into the experiential project were more likely to have a wider range of skills supported and developed by the teaching method than those who focused solely on the final assessed presentation.

3.6 Role of the teacher

Sub-theme number 10 was entitled Role of the teacher and is defined as the ways in which the teachers conducted their teaching practice within lessons.

The experiential project was team taught across the entire level 4 cohort. This meant six different experts delivering lectures across the six-week period with seminar groups allocated between three different teachers. As module leader it was my responsibility to ensure that the other teachers knew the aims of the project, that weekly activities were designed and communicated and that a continual dialogue occurred between myself and them in order to gather feedback, to support their concerns and questions and to guide, where necessary. It was evident that team teaching did lead to some inconsistent approaches and whilst these do not impact upon the student participants within this study (as those were all taught by me) it is worth noting some themes that emerged from my observations with regards to the role of the teacher. One of my observations stated;

I spoke to Marcus about this week's seminar activities. He seemed to be a bit negative about them generally and I'm worried that he isn't grasping the point of them and the learning methodology behind them. This is one drawback of team teaching on this module in that it is very hard to ensure consistency across the teaching. He had re-arranged some seminars without informing me and that meant that some students had double seminars within one week, meaning they didn't have time to work on their projects collaboratively in-between, whereas other students had a full week to produce the required project work. Some students also told me that Rob had asked them to reflect in their own time, 'if they want to', rather than in an allotted 15 minutes at the end of the session. This creates a problem in that some students within my class might be getting extra support with the experiential project through the reflective journals.
Personal observation

Figure 4.46 – Team teaching can be difficult due to inconsistent experiential experiences amongst teachers

This statement outlines the difficulties of team teaching and made clear to me that some tutors might not consider experiential teaching and the reflective element within it, to be a necessary part of a learning experience. I also had to assist teachers with supporting students who were showing signs of anxiety about the project;

Marcus told me that some students were complaining about having to pay money out of their own pockets to get the project off the ground. I told him to go back to them and refer back to one of the previous lectures, which covered fundraising and advised them to keep things simple and practical and to do something on a small scale. I also highlighted that finding their way around problems like this is part of their learning. Marcus was concerned that some people's outputs might be better than others because they had spent money on things but I assured him that they're not being marked on who produces the most, but on their learning which they will reflectively present upon to show what worked, what didn't work and the reasons for that. Personal observation

Figure 4.47 – Teachers need a clear understanding of experiential education

This quote illustrates that some teachers might not be pro-active in prompting students to work independently and that teachers need to have a clear and consistent understanding of the reasons behind experiential learning and the way the students will be assessed.

I was very conscious that in-class activities needed to be carefully facilitated by me, as is evident from the following observation that I made within the project period;

It's fine to have open, experiential activities for the students to complete, but if they are quiet then they often need some direction to get things going. I wanted to get some sort of response from them prior to starting the activities today so I began by asking them how they were feeling, what they learnt from the lectures and what challenges they are facing in their projects at the moment. Personal observation

Figure 4.48 – In-class activities need careful consideration

This quote demonstrated the awareness I had of the need to link the lecture content to the experiential activities of the day. It also shows how keen I was to ensure participation and open dialogue between students and for them to highlight challenges so that they could work collaboratively and constructively to solve them.

The students made frequent comments, particularly in the end of project focus groups, about the role of the teacher and the style of approach;

“The teacher had a great paternalistic approach. He was like a fatherly CEO, he would really guide us in the proper direction. In certain scenarios if he saw us going wrong he often allowed us to go a little wrong, providing it wasn’t damaging to the project overall. However, he would, when necessary, show us the right path by stepping in.” Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.49 – Students can feel supported and driven by experiential teachers

This was supported by another student, who said;

“When we were working on the project, I saw the teacher as a CEO. We were a little team and would come up with ideas, then we’d run it past him for his input and he had a lot of ideas due to his experiences. He was very encouraging and he really pushed our group to achieve better than we would have otherwise.” Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.50 – Experiential teachers can input their previous experiences

From this statement I understand that student felt supported and driven to achieve more and whilst their project group came up with ideas and led the project the teacher was always available to offer advice and support.

Some students felt that independence had been forced upon them through the experiential nature of the project. As demonstrated thus;

"It wasn't an easy thing for us to ask the teacher 'what would you recommend?' because we knew that answer we'd get back was 'well, what do you think is best?' I didn't feel like we won with the teacher style." Harvey, UCAS

Figure 4.51 – Some students desired greater teacher-led direction

This excerpt suggests that some students wanted more direction with their work, which contrasts with the experiential aims of the project. Other students were, however, happy with the approach taken;

"I saw the role of the teacher as being to facilitate the groups getting along...and having the tools they need to be able to work together. Whether they needed to have a bit of understanding when it came to the way a certain individual might work or whether you needed to take a step back occasionally in order to better function. I saw the teacher as a facilitator and, yes, a mentor." Amelia, DA

Figure 4.52 – Experiential teachers are facilitators and mentors

More groups tended to invite me into their discussions when I was perched on a window ledge at the back of the room - maybe because I was physically nearer, maybe because they wanted to ask me a question and saw me as more available/approachable and maybe because they were keen to get me to answer their questions so I could move on to another group! Personal observation

Figure 4.53 – Experiential facilitators must be available and approachable

The data within Figure 4.53 evidenced the supportive element of experiential teaching – facilitating group harmony at one moment, switching from being involved and taking a back seat and then mentoring people when they need it.

In conclusion, there appears to be an element of flexibility and timing which is important in the successful facilitation of experiential learning.

3.7 Freedom

Sub-theme number 11 was entitled Freedom and is defined as the ways in which students were free to act, think or speak in any way they chose and the ability for them to control the destiny of their project.

The experiential approach certainly allowed and facilitated freedom for students to explore, to carry out and to determine their learning activities. Generally speaking, whilst they were given a brief framework of seminar activities, they were not bound to undertake any or all of them providing they could justify the ways in which they were making progress within the project and were on course to demonstrate meeting the learning objectives in the end of project assessment. This can be seen within the following quote;

I think that guided learning within the project works really well. It enables us to develop our decision-making and team dynamics, ready for when the project really picks up.
Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.54 – Guided learning aids decision making and team dynamics

The student went on to say;

The freedom to completely choose what we are doing and how we are doing it is also motivating. I feel like we are learning a lot from the experience. The input of Rod has been effective – he's let us get on with it and picked us up on our mistakes which has highlighted them to us. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.55 – Freedom of choice is motivating for students

Students enjoyed having the freedom to manager their time and priorities. It can also be deduced that students were happy to be notified of mistakes they might be making and that the realisation of those mistakes might prevent them from taking a similar course of action (which would see a repeat of the mistake) in the future. This is evidence in practice of the Kolb cycle, with amendments to practice being made.

In conclusion, students benefitted from having the freedom to direct their own projects, to manage their own time and to prioritise their workload. This allowed them to take ownership of their projects and learn how improvements might be made to their practice in future.

3.8 Student-led learning

Sub-theme number 12 was entitled Student-led learning and is defined as the demonstration of learner autonomy and independence with students having the responsibility of their learning placed in their hands.

Students had the opportunity to base their project around any charity they wished. Project teams were also able to run any method of project in order to raise funds and awareness for the respective charity. This could be in the form of an event, a service, or the selling of a product. Students also had the opportunity to give feedback to the teacher upon the activities they were undertaking, which did impact upon the way seminars were run. This was evidence of a successful two-way reflexive approach. One particular student took this a step further and pro-actively suggested a hackathon, as can be seen from one of my early observations;

Natalie came up with the idea of running a hackathon, which she had previously mentioned in her reflections. I thought it would be a good addition to the seminar in order to share ideas and check the progress of the groups, so I asked her to present this idea to the class, which she did confidently. What a great idea of hers! I'm very happy to build on any student voice initiatives and student-led learning. Personal observation

Figure 4.56 – Student initiatives and student-led learning should be built upon

Other students were appreciative of the hackathon activity. This was evidenced through the engagement and participation levels demonstrated in class, within flipcharts containing post-it notes with student feedback on, and also within the student reflections. To illustrate this, one student commented;

I thought the hackathon that we completed was a really unique and productive idea. I found it very helpful to see what the other teams had done and I got a lot of inspiration out of it, such as creating a viral video on social media. Milly, DA

Figure 4.57 – Students appreciate peer-led initiatives

The student who had approached me with the idea was delighted that it had been incorporated into the seminars also;

Thankyou for taking my hackathon idea on! I think it went very well and there was a lot of valuable feedback given. Awareness also boosted everyone's projects – and extra orders for us too! Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.58 – Students are grateful for opportunities to lead their own learning

This shows the effect of student-led learning, which was a by-product of the experiential methods shown.

In conclusion, the reflections and two-way communication between teacher and student helped to generate new activities and ideas, the flexible nature of the seminars meant that new activities could be incorporated and the students benefitted not only by participating in the hackathon but also by becoming aware that they had a role to play in shaping their own learning experiences.

3.9 Review of section 3

In summary, it is evident from the findings that there are a range of educational methods at the disposal of an experiential teacher-facilitator. Student participation can come via active, experiential, class-based learning, through autonomous

learning outside of the classroom; and even through lectures, which, when delivered appropriately, can offer insights to students embarking upon authentic, experiential learning.

The following section addresses the third research sub-question and contains a presentation of appropriate data and thematic analysis.

4. A multitude of soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom

Due to the nature of the exploration statement and research sub-questions within the study, I have chosen to focus the data analysis on a combination of the themes identified within the soft skills section of my literature review, largely deriving from the following studies; Billett (2016), McKinsey (2012), CBI, Collins et al (2006), Friere (1970), Prince (2004), Thornton Moore (2010), Ives and Obenchain (2006), Reeve (2002), Chang and Rieple (2013), World Economic Forum; New Vision for Education; Unlocking the Potential of Technology, (2015); and also have identified themes which have emerged from the data generated by the research methods; through the observations, student reflections and semi-structured focus group interviews.

4.1 Decision making

Main theme number 6 was called Decision Making and is defined as the way students undertook a variety of methods to make decisions within their project; through critical thinking, through strategic thinking and through problem solving. Students faced a number of decisions that needed to be made on a weekly basis, both individually and within the project teams. This decision making skill is one that was honed throughout the period of the project and developed through a structured approach within the use of the business model canvas in Appendix 4.viii.

4.1.1 Critical thinking

Sub-theme number 13 was entitled Critical thinking and is defined as the ways in which students objectively analyse and evaluate an issue in order to form a judgement.

Students understood the need to think critically about their decisions and the actions they chose to take within the course of the project, as demonstrated thus;

Today we had a very good discussion where we were both analytical and critical. We took our research a stage further by contrasting our actions with academic theory and they seemed to disagree with each other. We even came up with our own findings which disproved a theory from our research. Helena, DA

Figure 4.59 – Students showed advanced levels of critical thinking

This quote shows quite advanced levels of critical thinking. The students not only considered the meaning of a theoretical model, but also examined how their group had acted and compared the two, finding that the model that had researched did not actually fit with their practical understanding of how business worked for them.

Students were also enlightened with models and theoretical knowledge throughout the course of the project, as can be seen within the following statement;

The exercises we were involved in today were extremely useful. They helped us to think about how we can make our businesses more credible. Also, we were able to reinforce and back up our work with theories and evidence, which enabled the team and I to think more critically about the business and how we portray and present our brand. I really enjoyed the fact that you allowed us to analyse and critically evaluate the exercises and the purpose of them along with how we can apply certain theories to our businesses. Leo, DA

Figure 4.60 – Students also learn from theories and models within experiential learning

I understand this quote to demonstrate the abstract conceptualisation element of Kolb's cycle. Namely, that when a student is offered an opportunity to consolidate theoretical knowledge alongside practical experiences they are having, then it begins to make sense for them in their own context – in this case, it prompted the development and demonstration of critical thinking skills.

In conclusion, students thought critically about their decisions and the actions they were taking alongside their understanding of theory which demonstrated advanced perception of their reasoning and judgement.

4.1.2 Problem solving

Sub-theme number 14 was entitled Problem solving and is defined as the ways in which students undertook a process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues.

Students faced all manner of problems on a daily and weekly basis. These varied from interpersonal problems, individual problems, operational problems and self-imposed problems. It was evident to me that many teams faced what I called a 'brick wall'. This appeared to emerge when the team had a barrier which would take a lot of work to overcome. Some of the groups worked hard to overcome those and this appeared to largely amount to success, whereas other groups could not overcome them and their project either did not get off the ground or was very limited in its success.

One student, who was part of a team that delivered one of, if not the most, successful projects, did comment upon the need to solve problems in their reflective journal;

The only thing that we could have done differently that could have made our decision making better would be to research all the charities first before contacting them. This is because it felt like we were committing to someone as soon as we contacted them to ask if they'd like us to help. We found two great causes and had many fundraising ideas for both but once we contacted charity A we understood our commitment to them despite not being able to relate to the individuals because they'd been through something that none of us had experienced. That is what I take away from this – think things through and brainstorm together before making any commitment. Helena, DA

Figure 4.61 – Experiential projects need problem solving skills

This is evidence of the development of the soft skills known as decision making and problem solving. The student outlined the way in which the group undertook its task and how, by rushing in to contact the charity, they felt committed to them. However, the reflective nature of the quote outlines the need to be wary of such an approach in the future.

In conclusion the development of the soft skills known as decision making and problem solving was evidenced, leading to appropriate solutions being actioned by many of the project teams.

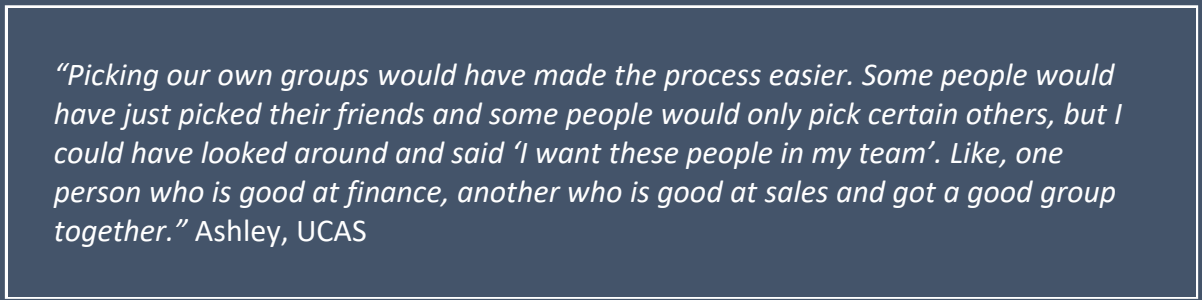
4.2 People Management skills

Main theme number 7 was called People Management Skills and is defined as the way in which students managed themselves, their team members, the project and their time. Many students appeared to buy in to the authenticity of the project and what was needed from them in order to manage it to a successful conclusion, though, in some cases, poor management – self-management, in particular, led to negative consequences, as this section explores.

4.2.1 People Management

Sub-theme number 15 was called People Management and is defined as the way in which students managed those around them, with particular pertinence to those within their project group.

The nature of the workplace is that people cannot, by and large, choose whom they work with. Groups of people are frequently merged together, having joined organisations at different points in time, with a common goal to work towards. In order to replicate this, students within the project were not allowed to self-select their groups. Instead, they were grouped according to surname order, randomly. This was designed to give an authentic workplace experience but, as is often the way within teacher-selected groups in university projects, there were some objections, as is demonstrated thus;



"Picking our own groups would have made the process easier. Some people would have just picked their friends and some people would only pick certain others, but I could have looked around and said 'I want these people in my team'. Like, one person who is good at finance, another who is good at sales and got a good group together." Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.62 – Random, teacher-selected groups, were met with some objections

Another student, similarly to the student above, showed good organisational management skills and recognised that strong, talented workers make for a better team;

If I had been able to take control of the group then I would have done things very differently. I would have kicked certain underperformers out and replaced them with people who were conscientious. Edward, UCAS

Figure 4.63 – Random group selection allows students to work with unknown people with various skills and attributes

This quote does also indicate that some students were not used to working within teams though. Indeed, it demonstrates an important element of experiential group work; that students will be faced with team members that they might not immediately know how to motivate, manage or build relationships with.

However, some students seemed to be happy to defer the management and organisation within the group to another. They weren't alone in this regard;

Having previous people management experience, Leanne is really good with contacting all the businesses and suppliers whilst also ensuring that our social media is up to date. Being the main point of contact with the charity, we always turn to Leanne for clarity on any requirements or if we need her to go back to them with more questions. Having many points of contact with them would cause confusion – having Leanne is enough and she is really good at it. Helena, DA

Figure 4.64 – Some students deferred managerial responsibility to teammates

Leanne, the manager of the group, as described above, was happy to take the role on, giving her ample opportunity to demonstrate and develop her people management skills. She also felt that she was the right person for the role, despite her having some limitations;

As my day job involves a lot of management of people and exceptionally little management above me, I think I would struggle if I have to be managed. This is probably due to my age and experience that I have fallen into this role, which has always been a natural role for me, so I hope my team don't have any objections! I am proud to say that I have never been at the centre of a huge conflict at work due to my management, so I am happy to learn more about managing different types of people as it will help me in my day job. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.65 – Some students felt qualified for managerial role in team

She went on to speak about her specific skills and how they would be used within this project;

I know my skills lie in managing, creative ideas and definitely organisation, so I have begun to set up a calendar for the team, which will make it easier as the week's progress. I'll also have less to do as I delegate tasks. I have loads of ideas and like to create things that others can use, so I'll likely be the person that creates things like email templates for us to use, but then probably wouldn't take responsibility for using the template to contact donors. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.66 – Self-awareness was prevalent amongst some leaders

This excerpt indicated a strong sense of self-awareness, in addition to a healthy amount of self-confidence. She worked hard to manage people through a framework that she had designed and implemented, which was evident through the organisational calendar and the creation of email templates.

Leanne continually demonstrated not only the ability to manage people and their workload but also to lead by example when it came to demonstrating a high work-rate;

I think I'm putting in as much as I humanly can right now as I'm purchasing a house...so, I feel like I might be out of action for a bit soon, so have set up lots of templates for the team to use. This is an effect of managing some useless staff in my workplace before when I have been away on holiday! Leanne, DA

Figure 4.67 – Leaders worked hard and led by example

From this quote it is evident that the experiential project became addictive to some, with them working hard to ensure they were doing all they could for their groups and respective charities. This student appears to have been let down by staff members in job roles prior to the project and therefore took both the level of work needed and the managerial role that they held, very seriously.

Other managers found it difficult to manage certain individuals. Ellie found Karl (who I will go on to mention during the confidence section later) a particularly awkward person to manage.

In week 1 she stated;

Very slow to get any work done as Karl needs a lot of support meaning we don't really support in the seminars. It's very tempting to do the work for him instead. I'm learning about people management and keeping people motivated. Ellie, UCAS

Figure 4.68 – Some managers found certain individuals difficult to manage

In week 2 she wrote...

I tried to deal with this by suggesting slight changes to his approach and persuading him of the merits of other choices but he needs a lot of motivating so it may be difficult to get him to complete solo tasks. Ellie, UCAS

Figure 4.69 – Managers attempted to vary their approach

And in week 3...;

Karl is difficult to motivate. He doesn't get involved on his own and needs spoon-feeding. I must make an effort to include him. I'm still learning how to people manage. Ellie, UCAS

Figure 4.70 – Managers attempted to be inclusive

Despite the frustration that Ellie showed during her reflections, in which she chose to mention Karl often, she did show an understanding of her initial insecurity when it came to managing those that she perceived as low performers. As I will later demonstrate, however, this was an approach which was bearing some fruit and did assist Karl to improve the skills he had to offer the team. Ellie may not have seen it at the time but her persistent and thoughtful approach did show dividends, as I will later explain.

There were some disagreements about the nature of people management within one of the focus groups;

"I think it was really useful for us in terms of dealing with people, group dynamics and stuff. Because, obviously, we're exposed to our teams at work but we don't act like we would with each other in the same sense at uni and we were more valued as equals. It gives more of a perception of how we would be in the future in a workplace." Leanne, DA

Figure 4.71 – Experiential projects can provide a perception of the workplace

The dissenting student argued thus;

"See, I disagree with that. Because, in our group there were people who weren't pulling their weight and none of us had the authority to tell them. Whereas, in the workplace there is always your manager or someone senior than you that will be like 'you need to step up'. Even though we had a project leader they couldn't turn around to someone in the group and say that to them." Amelia, DA

Figure 4.72 – Experiential projects lack the authority of the workplace

Which was then countered with;

"Yes, but that's management skills isn't it really. People skills – not resorting to shouting at someone, but fostering team skills." Leanne, DA

Figure 4.73 – Experiential projects foster management, people and team skills

This conversational exchange, from one of the focus groups, demonstrated a mature attitude to how that particular group had worked through some awkward disputes. It also showed me a reflective view of what had been learnt through the dynamics of the team and the resolution of their problems. Both seemed to indicate the importance of managerial skills within a group project and showed an ability to reflect on differing styles and the successes that they might bring.

In conclusion it is evident that students perceive the need to manage team members appropriately. In the main they did this according to the demands and priorities of the project and to ensure different personalities were considered. Whilst some groups did not have obvious leaders, those who did were more likely to produce successful outcomes and have team members who worked productively.

4.2.2 Delegation

Sub-theme number 16 was entitled Delegation and is defined as the ways in which students undertook the act of giving control, authority, a job, a duty or a task, to another person.

The delegation of tasks within the group projects was something the group members took seriously, as can be demonstrated by the following quote;

This week we made sure that each member of the team had an active role and that they fully committed to the task. By allocating team roles we were ensuring that everyone can play a part. Rhiannon, UCAS

Figure 4.74 – The delegation of tasks was prioritised

However, merely ensuring that all team members had been delegated some responsibility did not predict a successful outcome in all cases;

Allocating tasks has been an issue, as I know/assume that I'm going to have to do someone else's work for them. There's little that can be done about this other than ensuring positive communications and continuing to work towards the end goal, though. Ellie, UCAS

Figure 4.75 – Equally delegating responsibility did not equate to successful outcomes for all

This student appeared to realise the importance of individual involvement and what can be done to aide task completion from others. However, whilst they clearly

appeared to perceive delegation as part of their role, they were under no illusions that the person to whom work had been delegated would actually complete it. Some other students felt as though they weren't being delegated to enough. One student excerpt read as follows;

When I ask what I can do and what there is to do I am being told that we're ahead and that we haven't got anything to do at this minute, so I'm just focusing on re-doing the business plan to fit with the points required during the seminars. I also started to put together a survey to help us to choose the main products that we could offer to our target market (despite the team leader previously allocating this task to another member of the team – which was fab as it gave me something to do!). Grace, DA

Figure 4.76 – Some students felt under-utilised

There are many conclusions that I have drawn from this excerpt; that some students who were not at the centre of decision-making could feel a little left out and excluded from the project and accompanying activities, that students who had not been allocated any tasks were often pro-active, despite that lack of delegated authority, and that delegated tasks not being completed could lead to work being left undone – or even replicated. This leads me to believe that the art of delegation and the associated skills formed an important role in the running of the business projects.

The difficulties the degree apprentices faced through the necessity to delegate were clear, as the following two quotes show;

It is difficult to organise and make sure that everyone has something to do as we only get to see each other on Friday's. We have a WhatsApp chat and four-way phone calls, but there's something different about seeing each other and talking face to face in person. If you can't talk every day it can be difficult to translate ideas quickly, especially when things are fast-paced like they are in our project. Sally, DA

Figure 4.77 – The perceived necessity to delegate caused difficulties

I understand this quote to demonstrate the importance of regular communication, to show that face to face communication is preferable and that fast paced projects often require quick decisions, which are better informed when there is a group consensus.

However, in the absence of a group consensus, it is important for someone to take the lead and not defer decisions, should they be immediately necessary. For this group a strong leader emerged, thus decisions were made swiftly.

Other students saw delegation as a skill that they needed to refine, demonstrated as follows;

The only thing I have found difficult is learning how much to delegate work to the team. I don't want to impose too much on other members, but equally I don't want to take all the work on-board myself. This is a learning curve for me. Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.78 – Students saw delegation as a skill they needed to refine

In conclusion effective delegation is a soft skill which is important for business management students learning through experiential projects such as this.

4.3 Project management

Main theme number 8 was entitled Project management and is defined as the ways in which students undertook the application of processes, methods, skills, knowledge and experience to achieve specific project objectives.

4.3.1 Individual Roles

Sub- theme number 17 was entitled Individual roles and is defined as the ways in which students undertook tasks on their own and the way in which groups delegated tasks to specific individuals rather than working collaboratively in partnerships or small groups.

The impact that delegation had was an increased focus on the need for individual roles and responsibilities to be divided amongst the groups. This division took place in several different ways;

Such as;

"We picked who we thought was best at each element in order to end up with a good grade. Actually, what we should have done was work as a group and give each other feedback." Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.79 – Stronger students were delegated to more often

And even;

Over reading week we allocated work to ourselves, with individual tasks. We all said we'd work on bits we thought we could add into the presentation at the end. Rhiannon, UCAS

Figure 4.80 – Delegation was often self-managed

My conclusion from these excerpts are that group approaches varied, that students felt individual roles hampered how much they were exposed to, and had the chance to learn about, other roles within the project. One student summarised this succinctly when they wrote;

It's also important for us to help people to develop in other areas. So, we tell them 'Ok, try this sector out because you are not particularly familiar with it', so then it becomes known to them as well. Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.81 – Some thoughtful delegation allowed weaker students to develop their skills

Those groups who were effective at communicating the individual roles and tasks throughout the team appeared to be working more cohesively, as shown thus;

For next week we have a list of companies to contact and we'll be splitting these between us to see if we can get even more donations. Whilst Anna will focus on the blog, Sally will update our business plan and Katie is working on the campaign video. Helena, DA

Figure 4.82 – Clear delegation was prevalent within successful groups

That particular group demonstrated a clear understanding of the need for individual targets and an awareness of what each member of the team was working on at any given point.

4.3.2 A Structured Approach

Sub theme number 18 was called 'a structured approach' and is defined as the ability of a student to structure the management of their project and its associated tasks in a formulaic and organised way. The nature of the experiential project was one that was led by me, the teacher, rather than rigidly directed, which can be seen from the following observation made from my field notes;

Once we had finished the starter activity in the classroom two groups moved into break-out space elsewhere in the building. I spent time walking around the groups to check progress and those groups seemed far more animated and engaged with the activity than those who had stayed in the classroom. Personal observation

Figure 4.83 – Experiential projects are led, rather than rigidly directed

I interpreted their animation and engagement as being heightened by them having the freedom to explore their surroundings, but it was interesting to note that despite the freedom that was afforded to the groups, they still chose to take a very structured approach to the management of their projects. The following quote evidences this;

Anna has taken on the role of setting up a calendar to keep us all on track. I believe my team was very keen on having a calendar as we are all achievers and like to stay on track, meeting goals and deadlines. I'm more than happy to complete tasks as and when they arise, but if having a calendar will help us achieve the best results then I am more than happy to compromise and use it for 6-8 weeks. Helena, DA

Figure 4.84 – Students worked within structures, despite freedom and autonomy

From these two statements I can see that people chose to place frameworks around the work that the groups needed to undertake. So, not only were tasks divided between team members and delegated out, but a structured method for monitoring this was implemented – a useful soft skill ability for those students to have developed.

One student demonstrated a reason for this sort of approach when they reflected thus;

I am continuing to ensure the whole group is aware of the different tasks that need to be done, as I have found that people appreciate knowing what tasks needs to be done and completing it. It appears to lead to a greater feeling of progression across the team as people complete individual tasks and we see the benefit to the overall picture. George, DA

Figure 4.85 – Students created their own frameworks

The structured approach which many teams took is demonstrated within Appendix 4.ix which outlines an HR policy manual and the associated tasks contained within the manual, which were assigned to different members of the group who developed their expertise and took responsibility for the development of that section.

Additionally, the use of the business canvas model aided the initial planning and structure of the work plan created by individual groups – demonstrated in Appendix 4.xi and a SWOT analysis in Appendix 4.x, which outlined the holistic structure through which project teams based the development of their project upon.

In conclusion, these excerpts demonstrate the importance of group members knowing their roles, understanding how their roles and tasks fit into the bigger picture and having suitable methods to record their accomplishments in order to meet their objectives in a structured way but also to feel that they have accomplished something important.

4.3.3 Time Management – A short timeframe

Sub-theme number 19 was entitled Time Management – A short timeframe and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively, regardless of the limited time-span of the project.

Students were largely happy to be engaged with an experiential project of this type, though some were concerned about the expectations placed upon them for such a limited time period – 6 to 8 weeks. Initial concerns were apparent, thus;

I am a little concerned about the time management elements of this task. Peter, DA

Figure 4.86 – Students had some concerns over time management

Ben spoke about finding the six-week timeframe difficult. Personal observation

Figure 4.87 – Some found six-week timeframe too short

However, some saw the benefits behind the project having a rigid deadline;

“It might be more beneficial to have a slightly longer time frame for the project, so we can better balance it with work too. However, having a tighter timeframe gave a lot more focus to the group and meant that we were concentrated on trying to find a more viable product idea.” Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.88 – Benefits of rigid timeframe

This statement showed me the importance of having a timeframe that did not allow the project to drift aimlessly along. It also highlights how some groups worked hard to meet their objectives, thereby learning how to complete their tasks and meet deadlines at the same time.

One group were not quite so pragmatic, however;

It's been a super hectic week which has meant that I've put off tasks for the project. I think it's going well, however I have a few issues with the process. Our idea is really good and feasible, however it's becoming rushed due to the timeframe. We weren't all involved in the meeting with the publishers and one member of our team told them that we'd get a brief over to them within 24 hours. Now, that was literally impossible for me as I have been in Salford doing training for my work this week and have been travelling back and forth. This meant that what we were producing, to be honest, was just looking poor and unprofessional. In my eyes it's better to get to the end of the six weeks with a quality product rather than a rushed, poor quality product which will open us up to further complications as no-one will want to buy it. We need to keep each other updated on everything, take our own roles seriously and not organise other people's time for them.

Grace, DA

Figure 4.89 – Timeframe and deadlines caused some realistic pressure

I understand this statement to mean a number of things; firstly, that groups did feel pressured by the six-week time limit. Had they not, then the pressure of needing to meet deadlines would not have been as meaningful. Secondly, although the deadlines were the same for every group to complete the project, the degree apprentices and others who had heavy work commitments did, in fact, have less time on which they could work on the project. Thirdly, groups who managed their ambitions in a pragmatic and realistic way were more likely to achieve their aims, and finally, individuals preferred to be responsible for their own time-keeping and did not appreciate others managing it for them by telling them what they should be achieving in any given time period.

In conclusion, students might have been initially concerned by having a tight timeframe within which to deliver a substantial project, but the associated deadlines acted as a positive driving force for the majority of students who were spurred on to work harder in order to ensure they achieved a positive outcome.

4.3.4 Time Management – Reading week and breaks

Sub-theme number 20 was entitled Time Management – Reading week and breaks and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively during periods where they were not physically in the institution or in class.

The amount of time the groups actually spent with each other, face to face, did impact upon the work that they produced. Many of them reflected upon the difficulties that reading week and breaks between seminars caused their groups to make progress on the projects.

“Sometimes the seminar was the only time you got to spend time with your groups, particularly if some of the team weren’t that committed. So, it was a matter of finding a balance between the structured time available to us from the timetabled seminar sessions and seeing what we could get done outside of that time.” Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.90 – The importance of group communications

This quote demonstrates the importance of groups communicating with each other and ensuring that meetings and/or the completion of tasks did happen in-between seminars, otherwise work would be left undone. This can be seen from the following statement;

Today was the first day back at uni following reading week, so we had a lot of catching up to do. We kept getting side-tracked though, as this was the first time that we had been together in a while so we couldn’t help but spend a lot of time discussing our thoughts and ideas rather than productively working through what needed to be done.
Grace, DA

Figure 4.91 – Uncollaborative groups face task backlog

In this case the students appear not to have worked together on the project during the reading-week break and, to compound matters, they also felt that the time spent in the seminar was unproductive. Therefore, I believe that elongated breaks (of, in this case, two weeks between seminars) can have a detrimental effect upon the productivity of a group when learning experientially. However, the contrasting view of this is that by heightening the awareness of the individuals concerned they are more likely to use their time productively during independent time in future.

The degree apprentices highlighted this as being an important difference between them and the UCAS students;

Meeting once on a Friday doesn't seem like enough time, but alas that is life. I'd love to be a full time student for a week. The amount of time they have to actually focus on their university work must be immense. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.92 – The perceived difficulty of group-work for degree apprentices

In fact, from my observations, the degree apprentices did actually seem to devote more time to their projects, particularly time outside of seminars, to the project. In conclusion, known breaks within term and absences from students for unforeseen reasons can have an effect upon the experiential project. However, these breaks replicate real-world project difficulties which teams must overcome, thus exposing students to these problems and developing their coping strategies.

4.3.5 Time Management – a personal skill

Sub-theme number 21 was entitled Time Management – A personal skill and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively throughout the project. With a tight deadline and not inconsiderable amounts of work to be produced, it was evident that students needed to manage their time to good effect. A student commented thus;

I am learning how good time management is a key factor and that there is a lot more effort and requirements needed to be successful when starting a business. But, our time has been used in the most effective manner to get things done and I believe that this project will make me a more effective and efficient worker, which will hopefully translate into everything I do. Helena, DA

Figure 4.93 – Students placed importance upon effective time management

I understand this quote to demonstrate the importance that students placed upon effective time management and also an awareness of how important it would be for their career in the future.

Some students, however, did not manage their time effectively through the process, with more than one group leaving work outstanding until the final two weeks of the project;

"I think we should have had weekly meetings scheduled where individuals talked about the work they'd completed and what was outstanding, just so you know that everyone is doing their bit. Then we'd have specific deadlines and goals for the week...and we should have managed the process earlier...to gauge who's doing what...and maybe it was just our group but if we'd had built our project and the final presentation up week by week then there wouldn't have been a mad rush of 'quickly, let's do it' when you've only got a week left at the end because everyone would have already participated so much." Jasmine, UCAS

Figure 4.94 – Planning and time management should be prioritised

In conclusion it is evident that the lack of effective time management in the project had a detrimental effect upon the outcome and placed unnecessary pressure on the group. However, the reflective attitude of this student within one of the focus groups indicates that they had learnt the importance of effective time management.

4.3.6 The impact of jobs and outside interests

Sub-theme number 22 was entitled ‘the impact of jobs and outside interests’ and is defined as the ways in which students had to overcome conflicting priorities from their personal lives and the impact those had upon their working on the project. The amount of time available to students varied considerably. Those who were working – including, but not limited to the degree apprentices – and those who had other serious commitments were impacted by not having as much time as some other students on which they could devote to the project. I did, however, have initial views on this, as shown by one of my early observations;

I probably have higher expectations of the degree apprentices in terms of the level of commitment that they will show, the work and effort that they will demonstrate and the quality of work that they will produce. They have been through a far tougher recruitment process, are being paid to work for four out of five days per week and will already be receiving practical experience of how to manage their time within their workplace. Of course, this may mean that they will have less time to practically commit to the project, also. Personal observation

Figure 4.95 – Teachers can have greater expectations of degree apprentices than traditional students

The degree apprentices did, on several occasions, reference their work, the time commitment and the effect this had upon their participation in the projects, as can be demonstrated within the following quote;

It has been tough working from Monday to Thursday, full time, with other coursework to complete and fitting this project in (whilst having some sort of social life), however I believe my time management has been good. It was quite draining on us though, as we're working as well. Milly, DA

Figure 4.96 – Degree apprentices perceive that they have less time for experiential projects in comparison to traditional students

This excerpt suggests that those working found time management to be challenging. Some, however, had contrasting views;

Because of the commitment that I'd made to the charity, I'd hazard a guess that I'd put more hours work into it than some of the other students, but that's what I do, that's what makes me happy and that's why I get the grades I do. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.97 – Drive and determination equate to effective time management

This quote, which was taken from a high performing student, seems to suggest that drive and determination to succeed is important and that effective time management skills are possible to display if you have those attributes.

Degree apprentices, specifically, did appear to be more creative when it came to arranging meetings, prioritising work and having group discussions, as the following statement indicates;

We normally have a catch-up call at 7.30pm, when we've all finished work. This is usually my dinner time, but it seems to work for everyone else, so we go with it. Grace, DA

Figure 4.98 – Flexibility is required within groups, when managing schedules

From this quote it is evident that a certain amount of flexibility is needed from people when managing their time, as work cannot always fit neatly around an individual's schedule.

In conclusion, students who had clear objectives for themselves and their teams, who focused on the immediate tasks at hand and who managed their time effectively did achieve more from their project and those who learnt these skills sooner in the process were advantaged also.

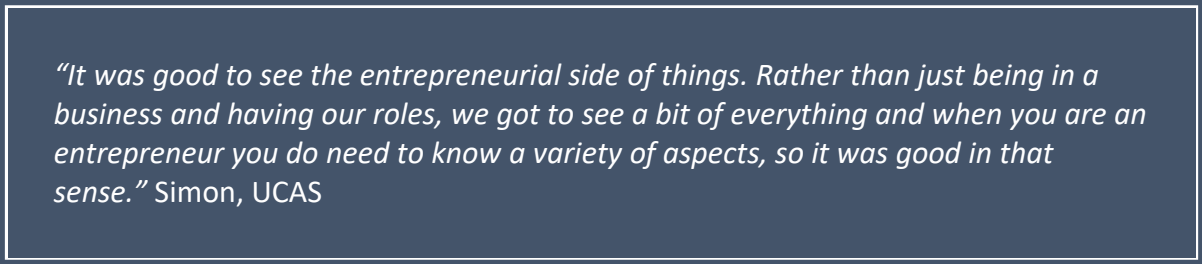
11. 4.4 Business skills

Theme number 9 was called Business Skills and is defined as the ability for a student to recognise what traits, qualities or behaviours are needed within a business environment. In particular, this references four sub-themes; entrepreneurship, commercial awareness, digital skills in the workplace and responsible, ethical business behaviour.

4.4.1 Entrepreneurship

Sub-theme number 23 was entitled Entrepreneurship and is defined as the ways in which students innovated and demonstrated the ability to be creative to generate new ideas for their business venture.

With the students enrolled on a Business Management course, it is expected that they would at least have an interest in business, management, or both. There were a number of entrepreneurial qualities and attributes developed over the six-week period, as evidenced by Simon in Figure 4.99;



"It was good to see the entrepreneurial side of things. Rather than just being in a business and having our roles, we got to see a bit of everything and when you are an entrepreneur you do need to know a variety of aspects, so it was good in that sense." Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.99 – Students perceive entrepreneurship as encapsulating a number of roles

This quote suggests that students perceive entrepreneurship as encapsulating a number of roles and that the experiential project facilitated the development of these.

It was clear that the groups approached the project in very different ways, however. Some groups were very focused on the raising of money, some on the raising of awareness for their chosen charity, some on creating the best project and some simply on the assessment – and I will discuss these in more detail throughout the chapter. One group, however, did show some pragmatic, practical, entrepreneurial flair, which was evident through my observations;

Tom's group have reduced their offering from a bowling night to a pub quiz in the college. This seems practical and they are forecasting the event will see 40 people attending. Personal observation

Figure 4.100 – Practical, pragmatic entrepreneurship was evident

The pub quiz is booked for April 4th. They seem to be playing it safe and keeping things quite low key but it is something that is achievable and, to their credit, they have already raised £80 without having even held their event yet. Personal observation

Figure 4.101 – Pragmatic entrepreneurship makes for achievable success

This was a sensible decision, even if it did show a lack of ambition;

Tom was very confident and used a financial forecast model to explain why they moved from a bowling event to a pub quiz, being held at the college. The idea was excellently outlined and clearly explained. They have organised an event. It has been advertised and is ready to go. They've chosen to run with something they know they can do and this does show that they've taken a pragmatic approach to business and taken the project seriously. It means they can, in one sense, take their foot off the pedal, but it will pay off in terms of allowing them to go through a full cycle to reach the reflective stage. Personal observation

Figure 4.102 – Pragmatic entrepreneurship can be limiting and can lack ambition

And whilst they could have striven for a larger event to raise more funds they created a project which was sustainable for them within the six-week timeframe and planned it effectively to ensure it ran smoothly – seen through the use of a well-planned but pragmatic business model canvas demonstrated within Appendices 4.viii & 4.xi.

Some other groups had far greater ambitions, many of which did not come to complete fruition in terms of delivering either a product, a service or an event;

We are going to create a charity cookbook for kids. I could only find three charity cookbooks, so this is quite novel. Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.103 – Some experiential groups have great ambitions resulting in novel ideas

From this quote it appeared that students understood the entrepreneurial trait of identifying a gap in their market, even if they were not able to completely and operationally fill that gap.

Claire's group are trying to arrange a football match but they are seeking to target high profile footballers and celebrities to play in the match. They need to think of a contingency plan as their dream is going to be quite hard to realise. Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.104 – High, aspirational goals may not always be realised

This excerpt, from my observations, suggests that one group had aspirational, entrepreneurial goals, despite them appearing difficult to turn into a reality and so it proved. Both of the above ideas were not implemented. The football match was a bold idea and the group members' motivation seemed to ebb and flow as the weeks

progressed. I felt motivated too, as their idea was not beyond the realms of possibility, as can be demonstrated by my following observation from the period;

The group have organised a venue for the football match (Sutton United FC) and they have a large, current charity which are prepared to back it (Bradley's charity, which has focused on Match of the Day recently). I feel like they could do something amazing if they have some drive but some of them seem to be looking for excuses not to cross the barrier between something and nothing (such as not wanting to set up a funding page or bank account in their own name). Claire, UCAS

Figure 4.105 – Ambitious projects should contain contingency plans

Despite this, two members of the group appeared extremely motivated and entrepreneurial. One of them campaigned for sponsorship and secured two large donations - £1000 from a company and £500 from an individual. They also went through an initial financial forecasting exercise, demonstrated within Appendix 4.xii. This was, however, on the basis that the event went ahead, which it did not. So, whilst one member did demonstrate an entrepreneurial flair, he was ultimately let down by team members who, perhaps, did not have the same attribute.

It seemed that those groups who focused on a project they felt would show quick and practical dividends were those who succeeded in actually realising their project aims. One group sourced knitted, ethically-sourced, toy turtles and sold them. They had a strong, entrepreneurial leader;

Natalie's group brought the turtles in. People loved the product straight away, bought them for three pounds and named them immediately. I bought one too and I think the group were pleased to see me get behind the campaign. They even shared their social media sites with me there and then. Natalie seems extremely well planned and prepared and it is a full-on project for the group, which they are taking seriously, despite them appearing to keep it relatively small. Personal observation

Figure 4.106 – Groups with strong, entrepreneurial leaders achieved tangible success

This demonstrates the ability of a group of students to find a niche product, run some low key social media marketing and run a project which did have reasonable success.

The turtles finally arrived (yay!). Thus, we were able to start selling. We have sold a grand total of 17 out of 35 so far. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.107 – Well-planned, low-key projects had success

The entrepreneurship of this group was not just down to one individual either, with others commenting thus;

This week our group has made a lot of sales which has helped to boost awareness, therefore benefitting the charity. It has been good to see everything up and running and we have plans to re-order more turtles. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.108 – More than one individual was responsible for the entrepreneurial success of a group

And;

We paid for the turtles out of our own money and are now investigating how to sell them through the internet on ebay, or shopify or bigcartel perhaps. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.109– Entrepreneurial flair was often demonstrated by all members of an experiential group

These comments indicate the entrepreneurial flair of the group, rather than just one person and there was a lot of entrepreneurial thought that went into the project, demonstrated within one of the experiential seminar activities – a hackathon, in which groups showcased their projects and ideas before being grilled by other group members in a ‘tear down’ that was designed to be critical yet constructive, initially through written, anonymous feedback on a flipchart with post-it notes.

'How did you find the lady selling them?'

'We looked for ethical products on etsy. We didn't want to go down an unethical route like Alibaba.'

'How much were they?'

'We bought them for £1.50 each and sold them for £3. Plus 10% of the lady's money goes to charity too, so we were actually running a charity organisation and helping out two charities at the same time.' Tom and Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.110 – Entrepreneurship can be driven by ethical morals

This exchange demonstrates the entrepreneurialism, fuelled by ethical morals, which led to them discovering a process through which they could generate limited profits.

They had a firm understanding of scaling-up and the limitations of their project also;

'What are you going to do next?'

'Going forward the turtles aren't sustainable as it takes so long for her to knit them. This was just a way for us to get started. The woman selling them had only sold 30 in the past year but we sold 35 within two weeks. Our next steps would be to link with crowdfunding entrepreneurs in developing countries to keep a service going. We could link with a partner, build up a network and find a way to make products in an ethical way, as these turtles had been.' Tom and Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.111 – Students understood the importance of scaling-up a business

This indicates the groups understanding of the ways in which entrepreneurs must find ways to scale-up their business in order to drive up profits.

In conclusion the experiential project demanded that students thought entrepreneurially and whilst this was demonstrated in a variety of ways, it was evident that many group members who participated in the project did either act or think with entrepreneurial vision.

4.4.2 Commercial awareness

Sub-theme number 24 was called Commercial Awareness and is defined as the ability for students to see commercial opportunities to make money or to grow their organisation.

The majority of students enrolled on the course would not have run a business before. Many of them might not have been in employment either, so this was an opportunity for them to demonstrate the commercial awareness that they had, or to reflect on that which they needed to improve. This awareness, or lack of it, was demonstrated in various ways.

I felt a bit constrained by the project, but in a good way. We had no funds so had to start small. I'm always thinking of creating the next google, the next massive corporation which will make another one redundant, but this has given me a shock into reality. I now know how to set up a quick business and the paperwork and such. So, it was good to get a viewpoint on all that. Paul, DA

Figure 4.112 – Pragmatism is needed alongside commercial awareness

Which indicates that a certain level of practical, pragmatism is needed within commercial awareness – something that students developed over the term of the project.

The largest and most successful event was run by the Minerva Project who had a close eye on the commercial viability of their project throughout;

Sally has arranged to hire a hall (for free!) for the event. They've asked us about the process of collecting money for people who attend the fete, so we are thinking about the end result. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.113 – Successful events were achieved through focus on commercial viability

This indicates to me that the group were very aware, even from the beginning of the project that they needed to generate funds for their charity.

I have changed from writing the blogs to asking companies for sponsorships, raffle prizes and auction items that we can use. I think we couldn't really have enough of these as they are one of the main draws to get people to attend. Helena, DA

Figure 4.114 – Individuals moved away from vanity projects and towards commercial ones

Here their commercial awareness becomes even more evident, with a member of the group moving away from one, non-revenue generating role, into a profit-making one.

This week we received even more raffle prizes and donations that we have decided to have an auction at the event for the more expensive donations as well as keeping the raffle for the least expensive items. We believe this will attract more people to the event as well as bringing in more revenue. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.115 – Pro-active groups sought out commercial opportunities

Minerva designed a number of ways to raise funds and make their summer fete a commercial success. One method was through a raffle, with prizes having been donated by local organisations – as demonstrated within Figure 4.115 and Appendix 4.xiii. This shows a pro-active group who sought out commercial opportunities through simple methods of revenue generation. Again, one member of the group is speaking of revenue – demonstrating a strong level of commercial awareness.

Additionally, I focused on finalising the logo too this week, so we can start using it in the email signatures and on our social media campaigns. Once our logo is out there, people will start to recognise it and we hope they will share our event page to get as much attention as possible and to bring people to the event on the day. Helena, DA

Figure 4.116 – Raising awareness led to commerciality

This suggests the group was aware of the need to raise awareness in order to generate revenue.

Our aim is to get 200 people there on the day. We currently have 90 people confirmed as attending on our facebook event page, all of which are likely to bring someone with them. We haven't paid for a single thing so far and are hoping we won't have to pay for printing either.

We have £485 already raised on justgiving so far. All stall-holders have paid £25 just to be there and the location was free. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.117 – The commercial viability of projects were taken seriously

Through the above quotes it is evident that the group had considered their approach to the running of the fete and its commercial viability seriously. They aimed to secure prizes, sponsorship and free services and facilities to ensure they maximised profit for their charity partner. This did prompt them to reflect upon, and streamline, their approach at times, as can be demonstrated within the following figure - 4.118;

There was a moment over the past week that it felt like we were working for a charity and not running a business. An example of this would be when we decided our original idea of running a website to allow for purchases and donations would be too much work and may not be successful within the six weeks.

The charity had also mentioned that online sales had not been as successful as events had been, in the past and hence we have decided to focus on the stalls event only.

We have clarified that our business is a CIC (after considering the advantages and disadvantages of running a partnership or a company) and we'll also look to build a consulting agency in the future. This would give basic instructions to anyone considering running an event and we'd give support, wisdom and education on how to run successful events.

However, we now need to focus on making this event as successful and raising as much money as possible. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.118 – Groups understood the legal formation of their entities

The groups understood that commercial ventures can be established in a variety of ways – through limited companies, partnerships and CIC's (Community Interest Company). The groups researched the advantages and disadvantages of each incorporation and experientially completed the requisite documentation in order to register their organisation. This can be seen within Appendix 4.xv and 4.xvi. Several of the groups undertook research into their competitors and market share of different organisations within the industries that their project was targeting. 'Aid a Change' demonstrated within their project portfolio – part of which is documented within Appendices 4.xvii and 4.xviii - that their area of focus could have commercial viability should the project be executed successfully.

This streamlined approach could suggest the awareness of the group to focus on what was needed to ensure a successful project and event, rather than spending time looking into the future.

In conclusion, students became commercially aware. They developed an understanding of the need for a balance between pragmatism and entrepreneurial

optimism, creating projects which are achievable yet still daring. Despite some groups not achieving what they set out to do, their reflections demonstrated an understanding of what is required in start-up projects such as this.

4.4.3 Digital skills in the workplace

Sub-theme number 25 was entitled Digital skills in the workplace and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated the knowledge and ability to determine information needs from digital technology sources, and to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to input, access, organize, integrate and assess digital resources; as demonstrated thus;

We raised awareness through social media and leaflets which we had created. Tom, UCAS

Figure 4.119 – Awareness was raised through social media

We developed social media to drive up orders. Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.120 – Social media generated orders

We raised awareness through video campaigns. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.121 – Awareness was raised through media campaigns

These excerpts indicate the awareness of the students to consider the use of social media and other digital methods of raising awareness and whereas some saw the difficulties and limitations that social media and technology presented to them;

Online presence takes a long time to establish. A website allows for expansion, but we're going for car boot sales and the like.

We were looking into using YouTube but I don't think there's much point. Paul, DA

Figure 4.122 – Some students saw limitations of using social media

Others, however, were very creative in their use of such methods;

We are going to differentiate ourselves from the charity to some extent. We've had lots of ideas of what we could use for this such as justgiving pages, an online shop and videos. Milly, DA

Figure 4.123 – Some groups creatively used online opportunities

And the group which designed the Aid a Change project were demonstrably active within the social media sphere. They had a Facebook and twitter profile and even designed a social media strategy (appendix 4.xix). The detail and content contained within it showed great awareness of the importance of social media, of setting targets for social media postings and measures of success, and of the optimisation of messages to suit and appeal to different audiences.

One group designed a social media calendar which outlined when posts should be made upon various platforms, what they should contain and who might be responsible for them.

The most successful exponents of social media were the Minerva Project;

We have already contacted our first choice company (Leanne did this on facebook, to the founder directly as she has mutual friends with them) and they have decided to back us!
Helena, DA

Figure 4.124 – Social media led to commercial partnerships

I will be sorting out a printing company and finding 10 businesses to advertise in our booklet. I will also be contacting various people to market the event and push the advertising on and offline. I will also be tweeting the video to as many people as possible.
Leanne, DA

Figure 4.125 – Social media was multi-channel

They created a Facebook page, a justgiving site and a twitter account. Within these forums they showcased a video which they had created. No members of the group had had any previous experience of video editing, but they were adamant that a video would help them to create awareness so they researched ways to create the video including the use of pictures, video and music, in order to produce something relevant to their business needs. The video was highly emotive and it told the story of how the charity was formed and who can be helped through donations. The video went viral with over 5000 views in the first 24 hours and that video has now received over 100,000 views across all platforms.

Minerva also recognised the importance of having a traditional paper-based offering for those who might not use social media, as documented within Appendices 4.xxiv, 4.xxv and 4.xxvi The creation of leaflets and posters offered information about the summer fete to a wide range of people within the community and the group understood the importance of distributing this within shops and community centres in their local area in order to generate interest which would ultimately lead to attendees.

In conclusion, students used digital tools effectively. Predominantly this was demonstrated through the prominent use of social media and communication devices such as mobile and web-based applications.

4.4.4 Responsible, ethical behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Sub-theme number 26 was entitled Responsible, ethical behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated moral professional standards, honesty, responsibility to both their micro and macro environments, and to show social responsibility whilst acting corporately.

It was a pleasing aside that several students commented upon the ethical behaviour of their groups and their partners. Some of them were alerted to the responsibility that businesses have when developing new ideas and products and the corporate social responsibility they saw in action;

"I think it was nice working for and giving to a charity. I was actually really put off at first when we were told all of our profits would go to charity. I was imagining that we would get the profits initially, and because of that it did take a while to get invested in the idea or to lean towards the charity rather than wanting to do something for ourselves. It's not that I didn't think they were a good cause but the line between it being our idea, and for us, and for them meant we had to tailor what we did but, we came to see that it wasn't about raising funds, it was about the charity." Amelia, DA

Figure 4.126 – Experiential projects can develop social responsibility

This quote demonstrates the development of a social responsibility within the individual which they might not have seen within themselves previously.

Demonstrating that, by working within an experiential business setting, the student developed an understanding of the need for sustainability within commercial ventures.

We genuinely want to help the Skye High Foundation. Our charity is so small and local that £1000 to them might mean far more than £1000 to another larger charity. We actually feel social responsibility here. When looking for a venue we came upon a play café who offered their space free of charge. This wasn't convenient for our event due to the size of it, but we put them in touch with the charity and they now have a space for their monthly meetings and support groups. It's probably the best feeling in the world when you know you're making a good difference for someone else. It's like a little legacy!
Helena, DA

Figure 4.127 – Experiential groups embraced the charitable nature of the project

In conclusion, despite the initial reservations from some individuals over having to pass profits onto the charity, or that they may not be as motivated to work for others, it was evident that, on the whole, groups embraced the charitable nature of the project and actually saw other, non-monetary benefits, which drove them to succeed.

4.5 Personal maturity skills and character qualities

Theme number 10 was called personal skills and is defined by the ability for a student to show the skills that they have, or have demonstrated, which are pertinent to them personally. This encompasses character traits, attributes and individual soft skills.

4.5.1 Independence, autonomy and accountability

Sub-theme number 27 was called independence, autonomy and accountability and is defined as the ability for a student to work on their own, to be pro-active in assigning themselves tasks and to be accountable for the tasks they are responsible for and the role they hold.

Students demonstrated that they were happy with the chance to take ownership of their learning;

"I like that we were left to do it. We met up independently and although there was a lot of work that was left on people's shoulders from all angles, which was quite stressful, I think we all preferred having the chance to work independently. Compared to other modules this was more independent." Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.128 – Students were happy to take ownership of their learning

This quote suggests that students were comfortable with being responsible and accountable for their workload, even if that workload was quite heavy at times during the project. Another student illustrated the difficult workload and the need to take responsibility for that to ensure tasks were completed;

"On a practical level, I learnt a lot. Having to work with some people, with team members who were just not working, teaches you different skills for the workplace. Like when a project is not working well and you just have to put the work in to get the deadline." Jasmine, UCAS

Figure 4.129 – Students who took responsibility for their learning completed tasks

From this excerpt it is evident that some students recognised that they were accountable and that they needed to work harder in a pro-active manner, not just because someone had asked them to do so. This was further illustrated by another student;

I think it's made us all aware that it's just on you at the end of the day. Even if it's a team effort, you still have to take individual responsibility for the whole thing. Ashley, UCAS

Figure 4.130 – Students who recognised they were accountable were more pro-active

This suggests that students felt responsible not only for their own independent areas of responsibility, but also for the project overall as its likely success was partly based upon the students ability to work autonomously and to take accountability.

It was also evident that the project promoted a mature level of independence;

"I think those students who might have been critical of the project need to realise that they are adults now and they're in the adult world and that what happens when you go to uni. I feel this is much more supportive than a bigger university where you'd go under the radar and no-one would know your name for three years. A lot of this project was down to the individual. There was help available but you had to get on with it." Leanne, DA

Figure 4.131 – Experiential projects promote independence

From this excerpt I can see that students felt supported through the process, despite the necessity for them to work independently. It also points towards an understanding that the project was designed to be more testing than a traditional course, particularly in the sense that students were coaxed into acting autonomously. Some students, the quote would lead me to believe, did rather baulk at the idea of having to take accountability for their work and actions, though this is a necessity if students are to successfully bridge the gap between school and the workplace.

On balance, students saw the benefits of working independently, as can be seen within the following excerpt;

I have learnt to work individually as well as part of a team. I have managed my own responsibilities whilst still contributing and helping other team members with their tasks.
Tess, DA

Figure 4.132 – Students saw the benefits of working independently

In conclusion students saw themselves as within a dual-role – part independent, autonomous individual and part team-player.

4.5.2 Productivity/work ethic

Sub-theme number 28 was called productivity & work ethic and is defined as the ability for a student to be productive, to work hard in achieving their goals or completing their tasks and to demonstrate the understanding that hard work is important to ensure success. It was evident that students were inconsistent with regards to productivity levels, both within groups and individually, throughout the project.

Some students were critical of their peers;

At the beginning of today's session I believed that we were all working well together as a team. However, as the seminar progressed, I found that other members of the team were getting distracted and unfocused. I found that I was typing up the information because I was the only one who had brought a laptop in with me today. I had to stay focused and I did a lot of the work for the team today. Therefore, I do not want to be completing the forms for the model articles throughout the week and would like somebody else to contribute. Milly, DA

Figure 4.133 – Students could be critical of peers' work-rate

From this quote I can see that some students felt there was an imbalance between their own productivity levels and that of their team colleagues. This, if not dealt with and communicated, could have possible negative consequences on the interpersonal relationships and chances of a successful project due to resentment amongst individuals or for work to remain incomplete.

My own observations also noticed a less than desirable commitment from some of the students;

Leo was late to the session and also had to leave early. He is a very popular and likeable member of the seminar group and whilst he fits in easily, I do not feel that he is working to his full potential. I have noted that he is very active on social media and in attending and arranging external events for his employer but he seems to let Thursday nights spill into Friday mornings (the day on which he was timetabled to attend lessons). He needs to be more engaged to find the project worthwhile. I will speak to him about reaching his potential. Personal observation

Figure 4.134 – Less commitment minimised a student's chance of success

This quote illustrates some of the frustrations that I felt, as the teacher, when spotting that some teams were not maximising their chances of success. I felt it necessary to point out the perceived shortcomings that I had noticed in order that productivity for this student could be increased. The conversation which followed was an open one, which did result in an improved work ethic.

Other students saw that their enjoyment of the project could have been increased had they worked with different people;

"I think the enthusiasm of some students could be improved. Because you might get some who aren't as good at one part but you can help them with that unless they're not willing to learn or to actually get involved, then it just makes it a hell of a lot harder. But, the actual project I did enjoy, though if people were actually enthusiastic then it would not have mattered who was in your team as you'd have help them to improve...but some people were not enthusiastic enough and they just didn't care...they did the bare minimum." Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.135 – Enjoyment of the project is compromised by unenthusiastic team members

I can see from this quote that the student felt the enjoyment they derived from the project was compromised by unenthusiastic team members who did not care enough about the project. It also suggests that some people worked harder than others and did, in some of the groups, carry other team members. The individual work ethic of some can also be seen within the following quote;

I think I became more organised and focused by doing this project as I knew that the team were relying on me to complete the tasks assigned to me. The fact that we were doing it for charity made it even more important as I know that we had made commitments that we needed to uphold, which we could only do by completing the project. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.136 – Students were committed to their own tasks, the group's success and the charity partner

In conclusion, students showed a tenacious commitment to work hard to complete the project and to deliver upon the expectations of the charity which the group partnered with. The student felt responsible for their individual elements of the task and was productive to ensure they were delivered.

4.5.3 Drive and determination

Sub-theme number 29 was called drive and determination and is defined as the ability for students to have goals and/or a purpose and to resolve to do whatever is required to ensure those are realised. Students within the project had a number of difficulties which they needed to find a way to overcome. I witnessed what I defined as a number of 'brick wall' moments for the project teams – instances which, had students overcome them, would have led to successful completion of a project.

However, had they not overcome them, the project appeared to be in danger of stalling or, in some cases, petering out completely. This was evident from one of my observations, thus;

For Claire's group it is brick wall time now – everything or nothing. The charity is behind them, the location for the event is booked and the evening event is arranged. Now, for their football match to happen they need to source players and sell tickets to spectators. They seem so enthusiastic to make this happen when I see them together. I just hope the same levels of enthusiasm and interaction are there inbetween lessons as this could be a huge coup for them to pull off. Personal observation

Figure 4.137 – 'Brick wall' moments caused some projects to be unsuccessful

Alas, the project did stall at this point. Logistically the event was sound and arrangements had been put into place to run a successful event, but the difficulty of booking celebrity players to attend was a bridge too far and possibly one which students in the group could have achieved only if they had had higher levels of drive and determination to make it happen. One student within the group recognised this;

I'll be completely honest...I was lacking a bit of drive. In the beginning I started off well but then I lacked what was needed. Amelia, DA

Figure 4.138 – Students working towards unattainable goals saw a decrease in motivation and drive

This quote is indicative of members of that group, who appeared to choose a project which was unsustainable for them. For other groups, however, momentum built as the weeks went by, which prompted them to increase their determination to succeed, as can be seen from the following excerpt;

We have moved forward quite considerably during the last two weeks. I am eager now to push the group forward in purchasing the products and carrying out the sales events as I am conscious that we are now four weeks into the six week project. Milly, DA

Figure 4.139 – Momentum built within some experiential projects

This excerpt alludes to the high levels of productivity that students needed to show in order to complete so many project-related tasks within a short timeframe of two weeks. The student also emphasises the urgency and time-bound nature of the project, which, it appears, had an impact upon the determination for the group to complete their tasks.

One student saw the process as a way to determine which students were driven to succeed:

"I think there's a risk with running projects like this, in one sense, because not everyone wants to do it and some people didn't turn up and pull their weight. Experiential learning is, to some degree, a chance for them to disappear into the background and not be seen again. But, on the other hand I think this filters out the candidates which the college aspires to bring in. I know it's difficult, but you could even run a project like this before they decide to come, as part of the admissions process. Because it's so beneficial to learn like this and get a hands-on approach."
Rhiannon, UCAS

Figure 4.140 – Experiential projects might be used as determiners of success

From this quote it can be shown that students recognised that experiential learning can offer a chance for some students, with low levels of motivation and drive, to hide in the background and not contribute as much as others. This is, as the student alludes to, a shame for those students, who miss out on the opportunity to learn in a beneficial, hands-on way. The excerpt also, interestingly, suggests that the college could use it as an admissions method to see which students have a disposition to learn experientially and, therefore, presumably, have the potential to be successful in studying business within such an environment.

Finally, a student reflected upon their individual levels of drive at the end of the project;

What have I been learning through this project...hmm...a lot. I've learnt I am extremely motivated and determined to make something succeed once I believe in the idea. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.141 – Students recognised the importance of their intrinsic motivation levels

In conclusion students recognised the importance of their motivation levels and that determination was needed if the projects were to be successful.

4.5.4 Resilience

Sub-theme number 30 was called resilience and is defined as the ability for students to handle and overcome pressure, to demonstrate grit, to fight challenges and to overcome adversity and to manage stressful situations effectively.

It was clear that the experiential project was a challenging one. It was a new way of learning for many of the students and certain elements of the project appeared to cause difficulties which needed to be overcome. These include; the limited timeframe of the project, working with difficult people, time management and handling outside responsibilities, such as work commitments, in unison with the project. One group in particular, through their reflective journal excerpts, appeared to illustrate the blend of challenges which the project created and the ways in which they handled them.

For instance, Paul wrote;

Milly gets stressed over the small things. We hadn't picked our charity within the first 30 minutes and she was getting really stressed and really annoyed. I think the combination of George and I (as we're both dominant but quite relaxed) stressed her out no end. We sent her for a break and she seemed more chilled. I think it's something for us to be wary of as I can foresee it becoming a problem if she gets stressed and too volatile/explosive over small issues. So, I feel like now I'm aware of it, I need to reassure her a little more than I'm used to. This in itself is not a bad thing as it will allow me to develop as a leader as George and I have to learn better how to work with her. Paul, DA

Figure 4.142 – Experiential projects create a blend of challenges

This excerpt demonstrates the views which Paul had of another member of the team – someone who appeared to be stressed when work was not being completed to her desired timeframe or to a high standard. It also demonstrates the ability for teams to create methods for handling stressful situations and the fact that they need to be tailored to an individual – in this case allowing Milly to have a break from the project and the group.

Milly, had her own view on the stress faced by the group;

As the weeks progress I think George is starting to feel a bit stressed. I can sympathise with him though as I believe I felt the same at the start of the project. When I felt like this, the team were helpful by starting to take on more responsibility. Therefore, to help George and to combat him getting stressed, we all need to make sure we are continuing to contribute and to distribute work evenly and support one another, as we were at the start. Milly, DA

Figure 4.143 – Experiential students under stress should seek help

This quote offers a very helpful tool for students who are being taught experientially and facing stressful situations to manage their stress levels – to seek help, to support each other and to ensure that no-one in the team is over-burdened. It demonstrates the need to speak with peers about any difficulties that are being faced and how students did, in this project, generally support each other. This could also be shown quite distinctly in the journal excerpt of another student;

Throughout this week I've had three mental breakdowns. I believe the situation and problems I am facing in my personal life with my Mum and I having to move house suddenly, along with the stress from work and workload from university, finally hit me and I acknowledged how important it is to focus on what I need to do rather than just pleasing others and waiting to be praised for my efforts – praise that never comes. That Friday, Leanne called me in the evening and we had a nice heart to heart conversation. It was sweet of her and showed how much she cares. I never thought that they could tell I was upset that week. But, I am glad she picked up the phone to call me as it was reassuring to talk to someone who overcame similar problems in her life. I think even having someone to talk to really helped. As I am writing this now on the train on my way into university it brings a smile on my face. Thinking about it now it seems like a dream or something silly for me to cry over – something I should never do again. Helena, DA

Figure 4.144 – Groups support each other through stressful situations

This quote demonstrates the power that team members had to help each other and to assist them with difficulties they faced in the project. It also illustrates the deeper friendships that were formed within the project and how, by having a friend talk to her, Helena was able to overcome a stressful situation. This was one of a number of challenges that Helena faced during the project. One other is illustrated below;

I had no internet access this week and contact with my team was difficult. I had to get hold of Leo from my office (another degree apprentice) and get the girls numbers from him so I could put them on my temporary phone. Then to continue my bad luck streak, the home key broke on my phone, so I had loads of obstacles this week and kept having to find different ways to overcome them. Helena, DA

Figure 4.145 – Stressful situations required grit and resilience from students

This demonstrates resilience and grit in the face of adversity. Helena was constantly knocked-back during a period of the project, yet rather than detach from the group she found ways to overcome the challenges faced and to remain in touch with her team mates.

The nature of the experiential project, with students being afforded a high degree of freedom and autonomy, did cause some students to feel uncomfortable, as the following quote shows;

I have felt quite stressed learning in this way as there are not very clear guidelines or instructions which I usually prefer. It has been good to work with others and work on other people's ideas, however I prefer a more structured and independent style of learning. So, it has been a bit out of my comfort zone, but it's also been sociable and fun.
Grace, DA

Figure 4.146 – Freedom and autonomy did cause some students to feel uncomfortable

From this excerpt I can see that students may find experiential learning a challenge as it is not a learning method which they may have experienced before. Therefore, the lack of spoon-feeding information to them may cause stress and uncertainty for some over whether they are on track, whether they are actually learning and retaining what needs to be retained and whether the guidelines they set for themselves are appropriate. Of course, I facilitated the group activities to ensure they were always on track to meet the learning outcomes, but it was certainly a teaching method which demanded a certain amount of resilience from students in order for them to keep going, even during periods of uncertainty.

In conclusion students worked through problems individually, supported people around them by offering practical assistance and advice and were resilient in the face of adversity and problems.

4.5.5 Flexibility/adaptability

Sub-theme number 31 was called flexibility and is defined as the ability for students to adapt to differing situations faced by their group, to not be too constrained by their tasks and to change direction, neither individually, nor as a group, should the landscape of the project warrant it. Students noted the need for team members to work in a flexible and adaptable fashion;

"It was really interesting seeing all the characters in the group come out. People were really flexible and adapted to things that they're not used to doing. I enjoyed it in that sense." Peter, DA

Figure 4.147 – Team members needed to work flexibly and adaptably

From this excerpt it can be seen that the project was quite fast-paced, with new ideas being considered by students regularly and people needing to change what they might have previously planned on doing to suit the new direction of the team. The individual tasks which people were asked to complete did also change regularly;

This week I changed roles with Anna as she was having trouble with the blog. So, she sent out emails for raffle prizes and I am now responsible for the blog (I also got a little help from Leanne as the blog was due on the same day that we changed roles). As a result, I made sure to speak to Anna and let her know she can speak up the next time she is struggling and not leave it until it is too late. Helena, DA

Figure 4.148 – Individual tasks changed for people throughout the project

In conclusion, the changing priorities the teams faced and the need for them to switch roles and prioritise other tasks dependent on what was needed at any given time was evident. It also demonstrates that when students were flexible people gained support and tasks were more likely to be completed on time.

4.5.6 Handling friction

Sub-theme number 32 was called handling friction and can be defined as the ability for students to work with people in a productive and efficient manner despite the interpersonal relationships demonstrating some friction between individuals within the group.

There was inevitably friction demonstrated between certain individuals, which you would expect to emerge from a pressured, work-simulation exercise. Students spoke about the intra-personal difficulties they faced, which I have covered within the sub-theme of teamwork – relationships, but the way the students handled those difficulties was a soft skill that emerged, in and of itself, as can be see within the following quote;

“There was obviously friction but I just think with people in groups there was tension between certain individuals and friction came from that. Because there’s always an element of ‘are you bossing me about?’ or ‘why didn’t you do this?’” Amelia, DA

Figure 4.149 – Handling friction was a soft skill which emerged

Some students saw this as an authentic replication of the workplace;

“I think friction is enevitable in groups like this and the tasks just facilitated bringing that out more, but I don’t think that’s a negative thing because I think it replicates the workplace...I’d say there’s always tension in the workplace and when you have to work with just a few people that sometimes can come out more. I’d say, if anything, that taught me a bit of a lesson that you’re not gonna get on with everyone but it’s about working with people you don’t get on with when you have work to be done.” Leanne, DA

Figure 4.150 – The need to handle friction authentically replicated the workplace

Whilst some students saw the added burden of the learning and assessment context to add to the friction which needed to be managed;

"I think in the workplace if there is someone you don't get on with, even if there is a task you have to work with them, I think there are still ways you can go about it. But, because we were getting assessed at the end of the project and there was so much pressure on the groups, it's a lot harder to try to avoid it." Milly, DA

Figure 4.151 – The need to handle friction was an added burden for students to manage

But whilst some groups chose to manage friction and some found it hard to avoid, some groups attempted to circumvent it altogether by distancing themselves from the people who they perceived as being the causes of the friction;

It was difficult to get one of the team members involved, they were just causing friction and I had the personal conflict of wanting to exclude them in order to speed up the process. Victor, UCAS

Figure 4.152 – Some groups distanced themselves from members who caused friction

This quote highlights the fact that some groups saw handling conflict as a time consuming management tool and chose to completely avoid any further occurrences.

However, in conclusion it was evident that students understood the need to deal with friction in the workplace. This was not always demonstrated in an entirely pro-active manner, though an awareness of friction between individuals and the link between this problem and real-world workplace similarities did demonstrate a need for students to develop this skill.

4.5.7 Emotional intelligence

Sub-theme number 33 was called emotional intelligence and is defined as the capability of individuals to recognise their own emotions and those of others, as well as being able to discern between different feelings and then to label them appropriately, before using those labels to act appropriately and behave in a positive and influential way for themselves and those around them.

Emotional intelligence was a sub-theme which emerged in a strong fashion from the data. Students recognised their own strengths and weaknesses;

My strengths lie in thinking over what someone else might suggest and trying to figure out whether this is tangible, realistic and appropriate. Paul, DA

Figure 4.153 – Students recognised their own strengths and weaknesses

Others were reflective about the emotional intelligence of themselves and their team members;

I have also felt quite angry at times. I have felt that, unfortunately in life, people will sometimes not do something if they don't see a personal gain from it. Of course, we are basically working voluntarily for a charity. But I feel that if people were doing this project for their job and were being paid for it, then they would have put more effort in. Clearly the people on the course are driven and capable, but some, for some reason, haven't really done anything in this project. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.154 – Students were reflective about their and their team member's emotional intelligence

This student was clearly unhappy with the efforts shown by some of her team members, but was able to reflect on the reasons why and, quite philosophically, see this as part of life in such situations. Her high levels of emotional intelligence

accepted other people's lack of commitment, so as not to impart negative consequences onto the project as a whole.

Other students reflected that they had made alterations to their own actions, which shows mature levels of emotional intelligence. They demonstrated that they were able to amend practice for the benefit of the group, showing reflexivity and a positive approach;

Learning how to control your emotions was such an important part of the project. How to say things in a productive way and not telling them to do this or to do that. Taking into account other people's emotions and what they might have going on outside of university when allocating roles and responsibilities. Simon, UCAS

Figure 4.155 – Students amended their practice to benefit the group

In conclusion students with high levels of emotional intelligence were able to

'Ellie's group - Very fractured from my observations. Ellie and Victor are working hard on the presentation and what needs to be done to get a good mark. How committed they are to making the project work I'm unsure of. However, despite Rhiannon arriving late and Karl's body language looking very disengaged they did ask him to take a part in the mock presentation today and I heard him practicing, with them giving feedback. This will help develop him and build his confidence, which he has mentioned personally and in writing to be a concern of his. I heard him run through his part of the presentation and they helped him with which words to use. It was really positive and he finished by saying 'thanks for the help guys!.' Personal observation

understand the individuals within their team, what motivated them, what issues they were facing and then use those factors to delegate tasks and set deadlines.

Figure 4.156 – Individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence showed understanding of team members

4.5.8 Confidence

Sub-theme number 34 was entitled Confidence and is defined as the ways in which students demonstrated a feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of their own abilities or qualities and/or in having a feeling or belief that they can have faith in or rely on someone or something.

One particularly prominent story of an individual's growth of their own confidence, and indeed the confidence that others around that individual begun to have in that person, is important to tell. I have chosen to represent this story entirely through data excerpts, as I feel that this data chronologically tells that story. This is followed with analysis of these findings subsequently.

Ellie's group have a plan - Karl and Rhiannon still seem to be disengaged despite me hearing Ellie and Victor trying to involve them. They have been delegated individual tasks this week and seem to be working on them individually.

*Asked how the four groups were feeling about the project;
Karl replied that he felt frightened; seemed daunting. (He was thoroughly disengaged with his group for the session.*

Karl asked me for some personal help, possibly because he saw it as a private forum where we wouldn't be overheard, which was a positive as he wanted to address issues of his lack of confidence and Victor called me over to assist with some questions they had on the project.

Karl came up to me during the break saying he felt like he wasn't getting involved and that he doesn't know anything about this stuff. He seemed to really lack confidence. I tried to coach some potential solutions out of him - asking more questions, moving locations, sitting nearer, taking ownership of a small chunk of the task etc. That group moved locations and he spoke to me afterwards to thank me for the advice and to say that he feels like he's learning. I'm sensing that this is, in part, lip service to me, but he does at least realise that he needs to get involved. His reflection seems to indicate a real lack of confidence but he comes across as very self-assured so I'm worried that his team won't understand the reasons for his perceived attitude. I don't want to break his confidence and trust by addressing it with them directly or writing this to them on their reflections but I also can't keep letting him drift away. I'll ensure I ask him what he is specifically working on next week to ensure he is contributing. Personal observations

'Something I wish I could improve on was self-confidence, especially with people from business as I have no experience on what to write. I feel that the reason that I lack self-confidence is due to not wanting to make mistakes which will make the group dislike me or blame me for. As I feel it would cause me to struggle more as well as stress a little.'

Karl, UCAS

'We were tasked with presenting a five minute presentation. I was given the role of presenting our future plans which I thought I did better than I would have imagined. I think I need to really spend some time with the group, going back over everything that we've done before I forget everything. Some of the things I enjoyed was working together with my team to do the task. Also, everyone in my team was patient with me as I was having trouble wording what I was going to say.' Karl, UCAS

'Karl, good voice, better when not reading but confidence grew.' Personal observation

'I hope by the presentation date I'll be able to talk confidently about my slides and work that I have enjoyed doing with my group. One way I think I could improve is practicing more to make sure I know what I am talking about.' Karl, UCAS

'Great group-work, I enjoyed the task. I thought that this might be fairly hard, however I have more confidence in myself now. I think that I should try to be more talkative and could try to recommend ideas.' Karl, UCAS

'I felt that being outside the classroom enabled me to be more engaging and speak freely with the other members that I couldn't do inside a classroom full of other groups. I also felt that I was starting to enjoy taking some responsibility within the group which allowed me to slightly gain some courage and confidence. I love the new things that I learnt and the understanding of how business structures work.' Karl, UCAS

'Karl left the room and said 'thanks for your help, Rod'. Presumably regarding building his confidence over the fact that he can now undertake research.' Personal observation

Figure 4.157 – Students developed confidence throughout the project

The findings which emanate from these quotes indicate that experiential learning can have a positive effect upon a person's confidence. Karl developed the soft skills of confidence and self-efficacy through the experiential process; he was encouraged to step out of his comfort zone, given self-belief, supported through positive and constructive feedback and made to feel an important part of a team, where his thoughts and actions were valued and required in order for the team to be successful.

In conclusion, experiential learning can aid the development of confidence within students. This is heightened by the supportive nature of the learning exercises, teachers and peers.

4.5.9 Leadership

Sub-theme number 35 was called leadership and is defined as the ability for students to take the lead of a group, to take the lead with regards to the projects and to set a positive example to those around them.

The ways in which the project teams decided upon their leader were varied. Sometimes leaders were appointed, otherwise individuals appeared to take the role on voluntarily and pro-actively. I observed thus;

Leaders have already emerged and they are driving their groups into activities and charities that fit within their own interests. For instance, Leanne really took control of her group and I feel that Helena looked a little overrun with her (Helena has a strong will and lots of drive herself, so there may well be a clash there).’ Personal observation

Figure 4.158 – Leaders emerged to take control within some groups

The above quote highlighted how I saw the leadership position within a particular group. This seemed slightly contrary to the reflection of one student within the group, however. They reflected as follows;

‘We all seem to have a focus for the task but no-one has really stepped up as a leader, so we were slightly lost. Kelly did eventually do this which I think we all needed. We managed to assign tasks for everyone and so far I think our business plan is pretty good.’
Ricky, DA

Figure 4.159 – Some groups are slow to appoint leaders, to their detriment

Whilst another student, Leanne, who I saw emerging as the leader of the group commented within her reflections upon the subject as follows;

Well, I have been working super hard this week. I think naturally I got the role of leader because I'd been contacting the charity as its from where I'm from and I know the organisers friend. So, I have fallen into the leadership role. I am the first to come up with ideas before I speak to the group and I have been hosting the calls. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.160 – Some leadership roles were a by-product of tasks completed, rather than by appointment

And yet another student within the project team had a view on the role of leadership within the group;

We do not have a single leader in the group. We all lead and influence each other within the group – some more so than others. Because of this, I think Anna and Sally are more academic learners so they are happy to be in charge of updating the blog and completing any necessary paperwork and typing up business plans. Meanwhile I think I am the most creative in the group and have offered to create leaflets and logos to make them presentable and appealing. However, an outsider would see Leanne as the leader of our group as she is the main contact with the charity, as she has the closest relationship with the founder. Helena, DA

Figure 4.161 – Some students considered the leadership role as a shared one within the group

It was evident that Leanne was leading the creation of materials for the group, such as the leaflet shown within Appendix 4.xxvii. These materials generated a lot of interest in the community and online, which ultimately led to a high attendance at the fete itself.

Leanne clearly saw herself as having a large influence upon the group;

'I've learn about me and my team. I've learnt that I am a leader, that I am demanding, that I am motivated and that I want everyone I know to do well. I've learnt that people in my team don't speak up when they should. I've learnt that I can persuade a group of people to do what I want them to do. I've learnt that I want my peers to get the best marks that they can.' Leanne, DA

Figure 4.162 – Some students recognised their own influence upon their group

From my observations as an observer of the unfolding events there are two important findings from this series of excerpts. Firstly, the majority of leadership tasks were undertaken by one person within the group, Leanne. This would appear to an outsider to make her the leader of that group, which she also believed to be the case, however, secondly, it was evident from this group that individuals took on what they believed to be leadership roles of their own. These roles may have been less impactful than some of the tasks which Leanne sought to lead on, but they were deemed to be important roles for that individual to hold, and they took pride in leading those tasks through to successful completion.

In conclusion, this emphasises the importance of group leadership and individual leadership, particularly given that this group was one of, if not the most successful project team within the process.

4.6 Reflexivity

Theme number 11 was called Reflexivity and is defined as the ability for a student to demonstrate reflective thought, to reflect both 'on' and 'in' action and to show personal and professional development and growth.

Reflexivity, in much the same way that it is a key attribute of a researcher investigating their own practice, is also a key attribute for those in the workplace who ought to be considering their actions in order to improve their capability to do this

jobs and to work with others harmoniously. I have already noted the effect that group work had on many teams and how personal disputes and clashes led to dysfunctional teams when not corrected but this section outlines the benefits to individuals through reflective journaling.

4.6.1 Journaling and reflections

Sub-theme number 36 was called Journaling and Reflection and is defined as the ability for a student to critically journal and reflect upon the actions they have taken and the consequences of such actions.

A number of different reflective models were introduced to the students. The aim of this was not to force any one particular method of reflection, or to drive certain comments or topic coverage from students, but merely to help them to understand the various avenues of reflection which were open to them;

This week I introduced the groups to the Burton method of reflection. It'll be interesting to see whether they reflected any differently because of this. I asked them in their previous reflections whether a) reading week and the break from their peers had made any difference, and b) what they feel they are learning through the project so far.
Personal observation

Figure 4.163 – A variety of reflective models were incorporated into the experiential project

I felt that it was important for me to help to guide them through the reflective process, to use the tool to ask questions to make the journals two-way and to gather data for the research study;

I showed them Gibbs' reflective cycle and indicated that it was a useful method for capturing feelings and emotions as it draws more upon description from the reflector. I explained that it may be useful for them to use in today's reflections and that I was equally happy if they chose to reflect in another way. Personal observation

Figure 4.164 – Journals were two-way in order to draw description from reflector

The two systems for reflection did show a contrast in terms of results, with the degree apprentice students writing less often than the UCAS students. This was, in part, because I had asked UCAS students to write their reflections down on paper before they left each class, which most of them did. However, this, in turn, had the effect of making some of them rush through their reflections in order to leave the room as quickly as possible. In contrast, the apprentices reflected on an online google document, which both they (individually) and I, had access to. The outcome was that whilst fewer of the apprentices completed their weekly reflections, they wrote far more meaningfully, more personally and the volume of words per reflection was considerably higher on average.

I preferred the google document, however;

It feels nice to be able to dip into the google doc whenever I have some time to reply to the students and it's preferable to carrying around scraps of paper. Personal observation

Figure 4.165 – Flexible, online methods of reflection were beneficial

And the students found a personal meaning from their document and my relationship with them, within it;

I'm now going to email you to ask you to check my journal early.

I'm updating again whilst at work because I'm stressing and then thought you could answer my questions on here.

I'm reflecting later because it's my own time and I've had a chance to think.

It feels a little like free therapy.

Dear Diary (Lol) Grace, DA

Figure 4.166 – Students took the process of reflective journaling seriously

The previous five quotes indicate that students took the process of reflective journaling seriously, that they developed their own style and time for reflections and that they used it to build personal connections with me, their teacher, which could be used for seeking feedback or answers to their questions.

It did appear that the process of reflection was useful for some students, and the following quotes indicate this;

I found the reflective journals useful and I thought they were a good idea.

Writing things down as I go will definitely help me to learn from my mistakes and I should be able to use part of my learnings later on. So, I'm happy to spend time doing it now rather than struggling to recall something I need to know, later on. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.167 – Students find reflective journaling to be beneficial

Some students, however, seemed to feel that what they were being asked to do was not how they would define reflective practice;

"I researched what reflective writing was and everything I came across said that it wasn't like a diary but actually more formal than that. I struggled to reflect about something that I hadn't actually thought about. I was just trying to learn stuff and be able to answer what we needed to do that week and that wasn't reflection, because I'd just learnt it." Tess, DA

Figure 4.168 – Some students had differing definitions of reflective practice

This indicates to me that some students found the act of reflection a difficult one to undertake on a regular basis. So, if we are to see reflection as a useful soft skill, then

Some students preferred it when I offered them a more structured, formulaic approach;

"It would have been nicer if it had just been bullet points, like we started off with, instead of it being so open." Amelia, DA

Figure 4.169 – Some students preferred a structured approach to reflection

This might suggest a number of things – the students desire for a speedier approach to their learning, a formulaic approach which they could remember from week to week or, as I think more likely, that they had not by this point learnt to appreciate the important benefits that a learner, or indeed a professional, can glean from reflecting.

Whereas others liked the flexibility to reflect in any way they chose;

"Reflection-journal wise, I like it. Because you were responding back to us it got us to think about other things as well. It really helped us to develop our approach that we took." George, DA

Figure 4.170 – Some students found a flexible approach to reflection beneficial

From this statement it appears that the two-way nature of the process assisted them with developing not only their ability to reflect but also other actions that they took.

However, the very essence of the reflective process did prompt students to reflect on a very wide variety of subjects, hence the breadth and depth of the data for this

study. In fact, some of them were very reflective about their own reflexivity, as the following statement suggests;

“Reflection as a concept is meant to be like your own way of thinking, so I don’t think that being told about reflective models and how you should do it was helpful because it would give us a model and then we’d dismiss it if we didn’t like it. I like to reflect on something and then I write about it. I don’t evaluate, action and then create a plan...it’s just not how I reflect at all.” Peter, DA

Figure 4.171 – Journals prompted reflections of student’s own reflexivity

In conclusion, students became more reflexive, through use of their journals, as the process continued over time, developing the soft skill of reflexivity.

4.6.2 Accepting feedback

Sub-theme number 37 was called Accepting Feedback and is defined as the ability for a student to listen to, accept and act upon feedback they have been presented with.

Another soft skill which was evident within the reflective part of the experiential processes the students went through was how they accepted and acted on feedback. Some actively avoided opportunities for them to receive feedback;

*“I will put my hand up and say that the 500-word draft you encouraged us to hand in for feedback – well, I didn’t do that.
I think that’s one of my main learning points from the project – ask for feedback.”
Amelia, DA*

Figure 4.172 – Opportunities for feedback were sometimes avoided

I understand this as demonstrating that some students saw accepting feedback as a weakness, and one which they would seek to improve in the future.

Other students, however, seemed to develop a real thirst for feedback which they used to benefit them and their groups. This can be shown within the following two quotes;

"I would really like feedback throughout. Just to keep giving us a bit of guidance on what areas or aspects we need to focus on. Sometimes I feel like 'I'm doing this, am I doing it well, I just don't know' or that the team will just go with it's instinct' but you did check some of what we did, like the business plan which we emailed over to you – that was helpful and useful." Jasmine, UCAS

Figure 4.173 – Feedback was sought after by students overall

and;

"The presentations we delivered in class were really useful and the feedback we received was constructive and brilliant, both from the teacher and our classmates. We really pushed our project on after that." Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.174 – Students appreciated teacher feedback

Additionally, some students saw benefit from receiving feedback not only from me, but also from their classmates, as the following two quotes indicate;

"I also found the positive comments that we received from other classmates gave us a confidence boost and made us feel more motivated to succeed." Milly, DA

Figure 4.175 – Students appreciated feedback from classmates

and;

I found hearing from other groups really useful and I hope to take some of their approaches on board and apply it to our teamwork and my individual work. George, DA

Figure 4.176 – Students acted upon feedback from peers constructively

In conclusion accepting feedback is an important element of reflexivity, or reflection within the experiential learning process, as it allows for students to consider their shortcomings and areas for improvement – thus moving away from the third section (abstract conceptualisation) and towards the fourth section of Kolb's cycle (amendment to practice).

4.6.3 Self-awareness

Sub-theme number 38 was called Self-awareness and is defined as the ability of students to show understanding of their thoughts, impact of their actions and an appreciation of the position they hold within a group setting.

Some quite a personal stories emerged within some of the reflective journals. Some of the excerpts indicated various problems and struggles that individuals had faced. Also, however, they highlighted the thought process and levels of self-awareness that some students developed and how they might use them in the future, as indicated thus;

I am looking forward to seeing how this project will challenge and stretch my current skills and enable me to develop new skills. Elizabeth, DA

Figure 4.177 – Students were aware of the challenges they faced

Some students also looked back upon what they perceived their previous skills and abilities to be, showing high levels of awareness as to some of the reasons behind their previous career decisions, as can be seen within the quote;

I'm definitely a person that likes what I perceive as security and a guaranteed income. I've even been known to turn down sales roles purely for the competitive nature of them and insecure nature of those roles. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.178 – Students were holistically self-aware

Some, it appeared, were confessional and apologetic;

Sorry it's taken me so long to write.

Apologies I haven't added anything here for such a long time.

I will respond when I get home, I promise. Tess, DA

Figure 4.179 – Students reflected confessionally at times

This indicated to me that students were taking the reflective element of the experiential project seriously, and that they cared about the relationships that was being created between me and them through the undertaking of the process, despite them writing infrequently, on occasion. Some other, however, wrote at length;

Sorry for the essay! Grace, DA

Figure 4.180 – Reflections could be lengthy

This was written by a student who wrote diligently every week. They wrote at length and took great care to discuss their own part on the project, their feelings about the group work and team mates and appeared to suggest that their writing at length might be an inconvenience to me. This was, however, far from the truth.

One student demonstrated an awareness of their self-perceived insecurity which indicated a mature level of reflexivity;

I'm usually a very independent person. It's not that I'm not able to work with others, I just usually like the security of doing everything myself and knowing that it's done the way I want it to be and to the standard I want. I'm slowly learning to trust people and trust that they can do tasks just as well, if not better than myself. Paul, DA

Figure 4.181 – Mature levels of reflexivity were evident

This quote is an important one to demonstrate the emerging self-awareness the students showed as it strongly indicates the high levels of trust which were emerging throughout the project. It also suggests they were letting go of control. This, it could be argued, is an important skill for a team member to have – allowing others to do work rather than attempting to do everything oneself.

I asked one group to hand me their reflections straight away, on paper, at the end of the class. This immediately gave me the idea to ask the apprentices to reflect on a google doc to offer an interesting comparison. Most students did willingly reflect, though some only wrote very briefly, a couple of lines, as those students were keen to leave. Personal observation

Figure 4.182 – Differing methods of reflection prompted a range of outputs

In conclusion, students appeared to become more self-aware, form judgements of their own actions and behaviours, and indicate maturity associated with a willingness to develop.

4.6.4 Personal growth

Sub-theme number 39 was called Personal Growth and is defined as the ability for a student to demonstrate growth and development in an area of their lives, whether that be professionally, educationally or personally.

An important part of reflexivity within individuals is the ability to honestly self-critique and to grow from constructive criticisms to make positive changes. Initially, not all students saw the benefits of reflections and were reticent to engage with the process, as can be seen within the following quote, which demonstrates that not all students 'bought in' to the reflective process immediately, or indeed at all;

Those who did reflect in a meaningful way did, evidently, show levels of personal growth throughout the process;

I am super committed to the course, probably because I went to university once and it didn't work out and because I already work in a small business I am hyper-aware of the commitment they have made to fund my studies. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.183 – Experiential learning aided personal growth

This showed the journey of change and development that some students were on. The author of the quote, in particular, showed growth which they linked to their studies and their current employment role, which indicates that being on a workplace learning scheme requires maturity levels which can be more advanced than those on traditional courses.

"Whatever mistakes we made as a team we learnt from." Natalie, UCAS

Figure 4.184 – Growth was demonstrated through learning from mistakes made

This short excerpt is very telling. It indicates the knowledge from the student that they, or their group, did indeed make mistakes throughout the project, but it also shows a certain degree of collaboration, or of 'sharing the load' of failure, which is a mature approach. Additionally, the fact that the team learnt from the mistakes shows a growth mind-set, striving for improvement.

Some students also grew further than they would have imagined;

Overall the experience has made me feel really proud of myself. I have certainly realised that if I believe in something then I can make it happen. I have never organised an event as large as this and I have worked with the team and the charity to make it happen. Leanne, DA

Figure 4.185 – Student growth exceeded their expectations

From this quote I ascertain that the student grew individually, far more than they may have expected to, and achieved something they did not think would be possible. They did this, admittedly, with the help of their team, which indicates their understanding that teamwork can help ideas come to fruition and that groups can deliver stronger results than an individual.

And the levels of change that some saw occur within their lives and everyday practices were quite stark;

Most importantly, I've learnt that the decision I made to come to university was to be honest the best decision I have ever made. It's reinvigorated my education. It's made me look for things throughout my life that will help my job, that may help my essays and that may help in this project. It's made me turn off my pop music at work and listen to motivational podcasts or Ted Talks about the topic we are learning that week – yes, really! Leanne, DA

Figure 4.186 – Change was stark within student's lives and every day practices

I understand this quote to say something very meaningful and important to that individual student – that the experiential learning project changes their life and their everyday habits.

In conclusion the personal growth that had occurred for the students during the six-week period suggests that the project had put them onto the pathway of being a lifelong learner, which is a powerful testament for the method.

4.7 Review of section 4

In summary, a wide range of soft skills were developed by students within the experiential project. Not only did the students appear to develop a breadth of skills, they also demonstrated a depth of soft skills which were not prominently in existence for the majority of students at the beginning of the project.

5. Summary of Chapter 4 - Findings

The findings, documented within this chapter, lead me to conclude that experiential education, and the learning activities within it, can impact upon business management undergraduate student's soft skill development. This findings chapter has outlined the ways in which students participate within experiential activities, both inside and outside the classroom; the variety of ways experiential education is supported and facilitated by teachers; and the multitude of soft skills which can be developed by students within an experiential project which encompasses a range of experiential approaches. Chapter 5 discusses some of the underlying reasons for these findings, leading to chapter 6, which offers the reader and the field potential models for further research and for practical usage.

Chapter 5: Discussion

1. An Introduction to the ways in which experiential education can aide undergraduate soft skill development.

The discussion offered within this chapter reflects upon the challenges of drawing conclusions from an insider-outsider researcher perspective, address pre-existing beliefs which I held prior to undertaking the research, and outlines a number of unexpected findings which were uncovered through the course of analysing the data thematically.

2. Reflecting on the challenges of drawing conclusions from an insider-outsider researcher practitioner's perspective

As the course designer and teacher, this afforded the research some key advantages: flexibility to amend classroom activities; flexibility to design the course around an experiential project; and the opportunity to outline the teaching approaches taken, to my students. Whilst pure insider-research can draw criticisms of undue influence upon a study, these have been addressed satisfactorily within the methodology chapter. Also, I am satisfactorily detached from the participants to consider myself an insider-outsider researcher, thus offering objectivity to the analysis and the study.

The data gathered was collated, coded, counted and discounted by myself. It is therefore an unarguable fact that the findings were a product of my own interpretations. Within case study research, there are often many differing interpretations on offer to researchers. These are primarily dependent upon the viewpoint of the researcher and reader. It is, however, worth noting the extensive thematic analysis and interpretive focus which was undertaken to reliably inform the reader of its triangulated outcomes and to demonstrate efficacy from the original ethical aims. The interpretations, are wholly emergent and arising from the data generated by the research.

To conclude, I entered into the study in order to make meaning and sense from the metaphorically messy classrooms that house experiential learning. Whilst the literature highlights the challenges faced by insider-researchers; challenges which are magnified when one is also a practitioner within the field of their study; I feel that my position as an insider-outsider researcher aided this study. It enabled me to witness reality, to determine links between people, processes and activities, and to reach conclusions that I felt were authentic, genuine and correct, rather than ones which were represented by mere words on paper. This study was a living, breathing one, with me at its centre, witnessing the stories unfold.

3. My pre-existing beliefs as an experiential educator

The following section considers some of the pre-existing beliefs which I held prior to undertaking the research. The section presents these beliefs in the light of the findings emanating from the thematic analysis.

3.1 Experiential teaching fosters student-led learning which creates a freedom for a more holistic teaching approach

This study demonstrated the benefits of experiential learning to student's soft skill development, but it also highlighted; in chapter four, section 3; the ensuing findings that teachers get breathing space when students lead their own learning autonomously. When students are focussing on themselves and their own learning, and are more immersed in projects which they are working on autonomously; a teacher is free to facilitate, to spend time getting to know individuals and to answer specific, pertinent questions. This benefits both parties in the process – students and the teacher – as it ensures that students are able to connect with their teacher individually and in small groups, as the teacher moves around the room observing and facilitating. It also affords the teacher an opportunity to check understanding and to collate evidence of student learning. Additionally, teachers can then ensure the direction of the lesson and further activities are in response to what they see occurring within the classroom during that lesson thus far. One further advantage to a teacher is that talking, leading the lesson, and lecturing is not necessary for long

periods of time, as students need to be given time to explore their learning. Experiential education provides teachers with an opportunity to use their reflexivity – demonstrated within section 3 and section 4.6 - to provide the students with their learning requirements and it is therefore important that experiential teaching practitioners create continuing professional development which will aide and develop their reflexivity skills.

3.2 Student motivation and engagement levels are linked to that of the teacher

The study supported a belief which I had held previously; that students' motivation and engagement levels are linked to teacher motivation and engagement levels. The findings of this study concur with Bruner who found that experience-based learning had an exhilarating effect on learners, who became individualised and self-directed. The classroom is a living, breathing environment with a great many variables that can influence the social constructs of it. The importance of the student-teacher relationship should not be downplayed as it is vital that students are motivated and engaged to learn and that teachers recognise that they design and implement the frameworks which afford them this opportunity. Certainly, the study evidenced, throughout the findings chapter, the engaging nature of experiential learning, the positive effect upon student's motivation and the link between these factors and the teacher's own levels of motivation and engagement, both within the classroom and outside.

3.3 Timetabled classes do not equate to productivity

The experiential projects offered both student groups the opportunity to work both within the classroom setting, during timetabled seminars, and outside of the classroom whenever they wished to. This can be derived from the findings chapter in sections 2.3, 3 and 4.2. Students who relied upon only timetabled seminars to work collaboratively with group members on experiential projects produced less than those who appeared to work harder away from the classroom. Whilst it would appear obvious that those students produced a greater amount and higher quality of work

because of the extended period of time they spent on their projects, they also delivered a significantly greater amount and higher quality of work within seminar time than those who relied solely on seminar time to meet and work with their group members. Overall, the study demonstrated that those students with high levels of motivation outside of the classroom also had higher levels of motivation within the classroom, leading to higher levels of productivity in both settings.

3.4 Reflection can offer a triangulated version of classroom events and student development

Reflection is a crucial element within an experiential learning environment. It provides teachers with an opportunity to understand the full picture of what is occurring within the classroom. Through the analysis of their own observations and the thoughts and feelings of students within the class, they are able to get a more accurate picture of 'truth' to emerge. This is beneficial for them to respond to individual students, to design further learning activities in the most suitable way for the students, and to ensure they are not merely guided by their own perceptions of reality, which may differ from the full, triangulated version of truth. Students who demonstrated advanced levels of reflectivity, as evidenced within section 4.6 of the findings, both through the number of times they reflected, the volume of their reflections and the depth of their comments, appeared to develop a broader range of soft skills.

3.5 Lectures can aide experiential learning when delivered appropriately

It was evident, particularly based upon the student reflections and comments about certain lecturers that lectures can aide engagement if they are delivered interactively. This is outlined within the findings chapter, section 3.1. Students appreciate content which replicates actual lived experiences. They also felt engaged by a heightened understanding of real world problems which they may face in their employment or within the experiential project itself. Contrarily, students who were recipients of didactic, one-way lectures in which they sat passively, were far less engaged and

appeared less motivated by the experiential activities for that week. Subsequently, it is advisable for experiential content designers to carefully consider the use and design of lectures within their experiential education frameworks to ensure they are delivered through interactive and engaging means, such as through telling stories and sharing practical, real-world experiences which will resonate with the students and the experiential project they will undertake.

3.6 Students who willingly lead their learning are more reflective and aware of their development areas

Students who participated in the study were aware of their abilities and became progressively aware of their shortfalls and level of skills. These findings are outlined within sections 4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.3. The findings concur with the Chang and Rieple (2013) study. However, it should be noted that this was demonstrated predominantly through the reflection process, which fostered trust and honesty within the learners who felt they had a safe space through which to highlight and address their insecurities and concerns.

3.7 Review of section 3

In conclusion, several findings emerged from the study which I had, in part, due to my experiences and observations of experiential teaching, expected. These had not all been grounded in the previously existing literature and they offer an influence upon the creation of the original theoretical models which are introduced within chapter 6, as a contribution to knowledge. Within the next section I will turn to the unexpected findings which arose from the study.

4. A number of unexpected findings arose from the study

This section presents a variety of unexpected findings which arose from the research study. Each of these findings are demonstrated thus; in the form of a sub-section heading, with discussion of the thematic analysis presented within each sub-section.

4.1 Experiential education can foster trust within teacher-student relationships

The study indicated, primarily highlighted within section 3, that the more a teacher allows students to lead their own learning within experiential activities, the more soft skills can be developed. This leaves the potential for novice experiential educators to feel a lack of control and to feel that learning might not be occurring, should they not be directly, actively in control of it. However, the open nature of the experiential activities led to students feeling free to experiment, to initiate their own learning and for student-led learning to lead to soft skill development. Teachers should feel comfortable in facilitating fewer directed activities and trust that this approach will lead to soft skill development within students. This partially contrasts with the views of Breunig (2005) who believes that a teacher must retain the role of an active facilitator and ought to observe students regularly, as this study found that students developed greater depth of soft skills through working autonomously. Teachers must learn to trust the students and the process (Friere, 1998) and not revert back to traditional teaching methods which probably lie within their own comfort zone. Several students within the study were moved from a position of initial reluctance; both with regards to taking a full and active part in the study, and in reflecting openly and frankly; to a position of honesty. Students did not just write what they thought the teacher wanted to hear, nor did they act sycophantically during focus group sessions or within classes. On the contrary, as is evidenced within the data throughout the findings chapter, students wrote honestly and critically of the processes and the form of learning, where they felt that criticism was appropriate. This honesty developed over the period of the study and is evidence that experiential education can aide the relationship between teachers and students, fostering trust and a safe space in which students can learn.

4.2 Students self-determine their actions and engagement within experiential projects

Students have the ability to determine their actions and engagement within experiential projects, though this is guided and facilitated by the teacher/learning designer. However, the way that students choose to engage is crucial (Posner, 1982). Many of the students appeared to be more naturally pre-disposed to lead their own learning, for instance. This is demonstrated within the findings in section 4.2, 4.3 and throughout the chapter. It is my assertion that students are the most important person in deciding how they will act or engage within an experiential project. This can be influenced by previous learning experiences, peers and their teacher, but those factors do not need to prevent them from leading their own learning and the ways in which they choose to act or to learn.

4.3 Distinct project roles can aid the facilitation of student-led learning

Inter-personal relationships within the groups were crucial in them achieving success, particularly with those groups which contained individuals with dominant personalities. Sections 2.2, 2.3, 4.2, and 4.3 within the findings chapter display this. Some of these strong individuals relied upon others in their group being passive, as opposed to them being confrontational or challenging, which appeared to allow them to take the lead and control the group and its activities. Some groups with more than one dominant personality did struggle to work pro-actively and collaboratively together whilst a leadership contest ensued. Whilst the literature shows that poorly functioning groups can prevent autonomy for some members (Sibthorp et al, 2008), the likelihood of successful student-led learning and therefore effective soft skill development was heightened by having distinct roles from early on in the project process; so those groups who designated, and were happy with their leader from the outset, were advantaged in this regard.

4.4 Groups with like-minded individuals may be more likely to gel

Arguably, the most successful group contained only females. This is highlighted in section 2.2. The group put their success down to that being the case and argued that having a male member within their group would have affected: the balance; the speed at which decisions might be made; the harmony within the group; and the agreement over what project they would run and for which charity. Whilst it is difficult to accurately legitimise their claim due to the lack of other control groups upon which this hypothesis could be tested, it may be likely that groups who find themselves with likeminded individuals with similar interests, similar demographic backgrounds, similar ethics, and possibly of the same genders, would be highly likely to gel. Gender may play an influential role within some of these determinant factors, but it is beyond the scope of this study to explore this in detail.

4.5 Communication channels were varied and multi-faceted

Communications channels were varied, regular and through a variety of mediums, as highlighted within section 2.3. It is beneficial for students who are participating in group work to communicate regularly. Expectations of business management students, who may be likely to go into organisations where collaboration is necessary, are high in this regard. However, the level and regularity at which the students communicated was impressively professional, in the main. Students used a wide variety of mediums and did not merely rely on face to face communication in the classroom. Rather, they used digital, remote means frequently, which aided their intra-group communications.

4.6 Student ambitions are bigger than traditional learning allows for

Many students/groups were ambitious – see sections 4.3-4.5. I had not expected the large-scale ambitions which some students had for their projects, particularly as they fell within only their second term of the first year of their undergraduate studies. It led

me to believe that students are more capable than lecturers and teachers give them credit for, and certainly are more capable of producing commercial, authentic work which is normally impossible through traditional, classroom-based learning. These big projects required strategic thinking and planning, rather than merely completing a set of tasks which had been teacher prescribed, and is evidence of the facilitation of the development of soft skills.

4.7 Students seek out structured frameworks, even within experiential learning

Students can be extremely structured and organised, as highlighted by section 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5. The participants within this study sought out opportunities to assign roles, set deadlines for themselves and delegate work to people more appropriate within the group than themselves. Many sought out responsibility and accountability and gave themselves larger workloads than was necessary as they saw this as being beneficial to the success of their project. This is evidence that teachers should trust the experiential process as students will navigate the boundaries and confines of their learning in a mature way.

4.8 Short timeframes create focus and a pragmatic approach

The short timeframe of the experiential project, which several students commented upon in their reflective journals, may have created some pressure, but these students delivered strong outcomes for their chosen charity partners, as is evidenced within 4.3.3. It was evident that those students who spoke about the short timeframe and the pressure they felt were, in fact, stronger performers than those who undertook the project without taking on extra work. This evidenced the benefits of student-led learning and how it advantages students through the development of a range of soft skills such as effective time management and resilience.

4.9 Successful entrepreneurship can arise from practical pragmatism

In order for entrepreneurship to succeed, a degree of practical pragmatism appeared to be necessary within the experiential projects. This was highlighted throughout the findings chapter, though primarily within sections 4.1, 4.3 and 4.4.4. Whilst the groups were varied in their ambitions, those who were most successful were those who created a project which was ambitious yet practically deliverable. Whilst this project does highlight the importance of freedom and student-led learning, it also questioned where the line ought to be drawn between teacher-led learning and student-led learning. I would recommend that teachers facilitating experiential learning encourage their students to be pragmatically ambitious, which might allow for a sweet spot of development to occur. This sweet spot lays, I assert, somewhere between projects which are not stretching students, yet are highly deliverable and those projects which are overly ambitious and likely to be undeliverable.

4.10 Students who are less-inclined to be drawn to experiential learning need to be challenged, yet supportively guided through the process

Experiential learning may be challenging if students have had little prior experience of learning in this way. Some students within the project felt uncomfortable with the freedom that had been afforded to them and may have felt they were lacking direction from the teacher. Alternatively, it can be argued that students were being offered the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. This is detailed within sections 3 and 4.3.1. These students, albeit a minority from the group of participants, may have preferred more rigid direction from the teacher. My advice for those considering an experiential approach such as this would be to spend time explaining the pedagogic approach to students, the benefits of it, and the importance of students stepping out of their comfort zone. Linking authentic learning to real-world situations and the workplace was also advantageous to the process as this project developed, as it uncovered the many benefits of experiential projects to student soft skill development.

4.11 Experiential learning can lead to lifelong learning

Experiential projects can place the learner onto a pathway of lifelong learning due to the personal growth and soft skill development that can occur within the project period – see sections 4.5 and 4.6. The findings build upon those of Sibthorp et al (2011) which stated that motivated, experiential learners will be likely to continue to engage in a learning process and that experiential education seems to provide the right experiences to offer engagement in learning and to influence lifelong learning. Many students commented on their personal development and their changed beliefs and motivations. It was evident both throughout the duration of the project and afterwards that students felt more committed to their undergraduate studies overall and for many it appeared that they had a greater desire and motivation to learn.

4.12 Review of section 4

In summary, the study uncovered a range of unexpected findings, as demonstrated within this section. This was facilitated by the open nature of experiential learning, the constructionist approach and the aim for the study to reveal what happens within an experiential classroom and the effect that can have upon students, particularly on their soft skill development.

5. Summary of chapter 5 – discussion

This chapter has presented a discussion of the findings. These included findings which addressed the pre-existing beliefs I held, prior to the research study; and findings which arose from the data and were unexpected. In the following chapter, these discussion points are fused with the findings from the thematic analysis to shape a number of original theoretical models which emanate from chapters four and five.

Chapter 6: Original Theoretical Descriptive Models

1. Introduction

The study proposes that a number of descriptive models and diagrams be made available to the field as new contributions to knowledge. These might be relevant and of practical use to teachers and course designers; particularly those whom are working within an experiential context; those seeking ways to educate experientially in the future; and those facilitating work-based learning and/or degree apprenticeships. The descriptive models might also hold relevance for educational leaders seeking to implement experiential learning within their institutions; as they seek to provide an accessible framework of learning and, perhaps, to implement cultural and institutional change away from more traditional, didactic forms of learning towards more contemporary, active, experiential methods, which might benefit students and future employers by developing a range of soft skills.

It should be noted that the findings, original theoretical descriptive models, diagrams and conclusions are drawn from this study and are limited to that which arose from the research itself. While generalisability is not claimed there may be circumstances in which lessons from the current study are transferrable to other contexts Models contained from here on in are descriptive in relation to what occurred within the study. They are the results of the researcher's theorising, emanating from the findings of this study, and are the first steps towards models which need further testing in practice. They should not be extrapolated onto other settings.

The following section will present my interpretation of the findings alongside inter-related descriptive models and diagrams.

2. The over-arching descriptive model: A tentative model for how students learnt experientially within this study- The Experiential Education Framework – ExpEd

2.1 Introduction

There are four descriptive sub-models which I propose have arisen from the amalgamated findings detailed within Chapter 4. This section will explore those models and the ways in which they inter-relate in order to exhibit an over-arching descriptive model which outlines the relationship between experiential education and soft skill development in undergraduate studies.

2.2 The ExpEd Diagram

The theory espoused by the findings from this study and demonstrated by the over-arching descriptive model outlines that experiential educational approaches plus experiential activities and tasks plus student-led learning can lead to student's soft skill development within business management undergraduates. This, I have contracted to the following formula, which is demonstrative of the Experiential Education Diagram - as demonstrated within Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3:

$$\text{ExpEd} = (\text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD})$$

This chapter will outline the four associated descriptive models which sit within the over-arching model. Firstly, within the Experiential Education Diagram - the ExpEd - sits three diagrams; the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – the IntEx Wheel (presented in Figure 6.4), the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct (Figure 6.5) and the ways in which Student-Led Learning are undertaken within the Taxonomy of SLL, illustrated within Figure 5. The combination of these three factors culminates in the Soft Skill Development Diagram, or SSD (Figure 6.6).

It should be noted that for the purposes of this study the following definition of the term taxonomy has been used:

‘Taxonomies are classification systems based on an organizational scheme. In this instance, a set of carefully defined terms, organized from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract, provide a framework of categories into which one may classify educational goals.’ (Education, State University, 2021).

I, as the researcher, have sought to classify findings within the Taxonomy of Experiential Activities – the types of activities which students participated in – and also sought to classify findings within the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning – the ways in which students did or did not lead their own learning within the project.

The complete over-arching descriptive model of the Experiential Education Diagram (ExpEd) is contained within Figure 6.3. This diagram incorporates all four minor elements in order to exhibit the links between experiential approaches, experiential activities, student-led learning and soft-skill development. This chapter offers information and guidance to the reader on the model and the interrelating aspects contained within, and whilst the ExpEd diagram, in three different explanatory formats, has been presented in the initial part of this chapter; the chapter subsequently works through and towards a comprehensive explanation and description of the full model itself. Furthermore, Appendix 6.i offers the reader more detailed guidance as to the order in which this descriptive model should be read and further outlines its foci.

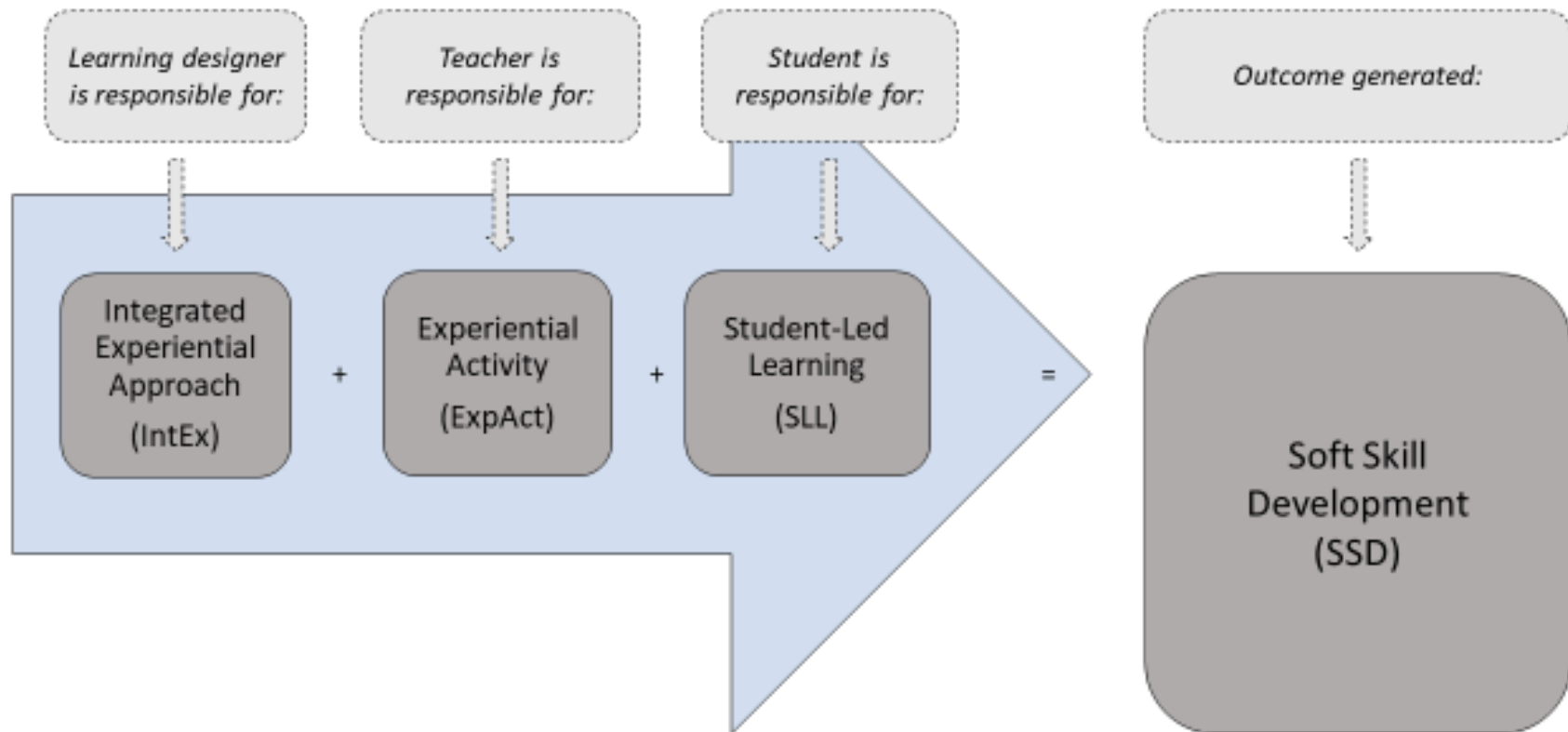
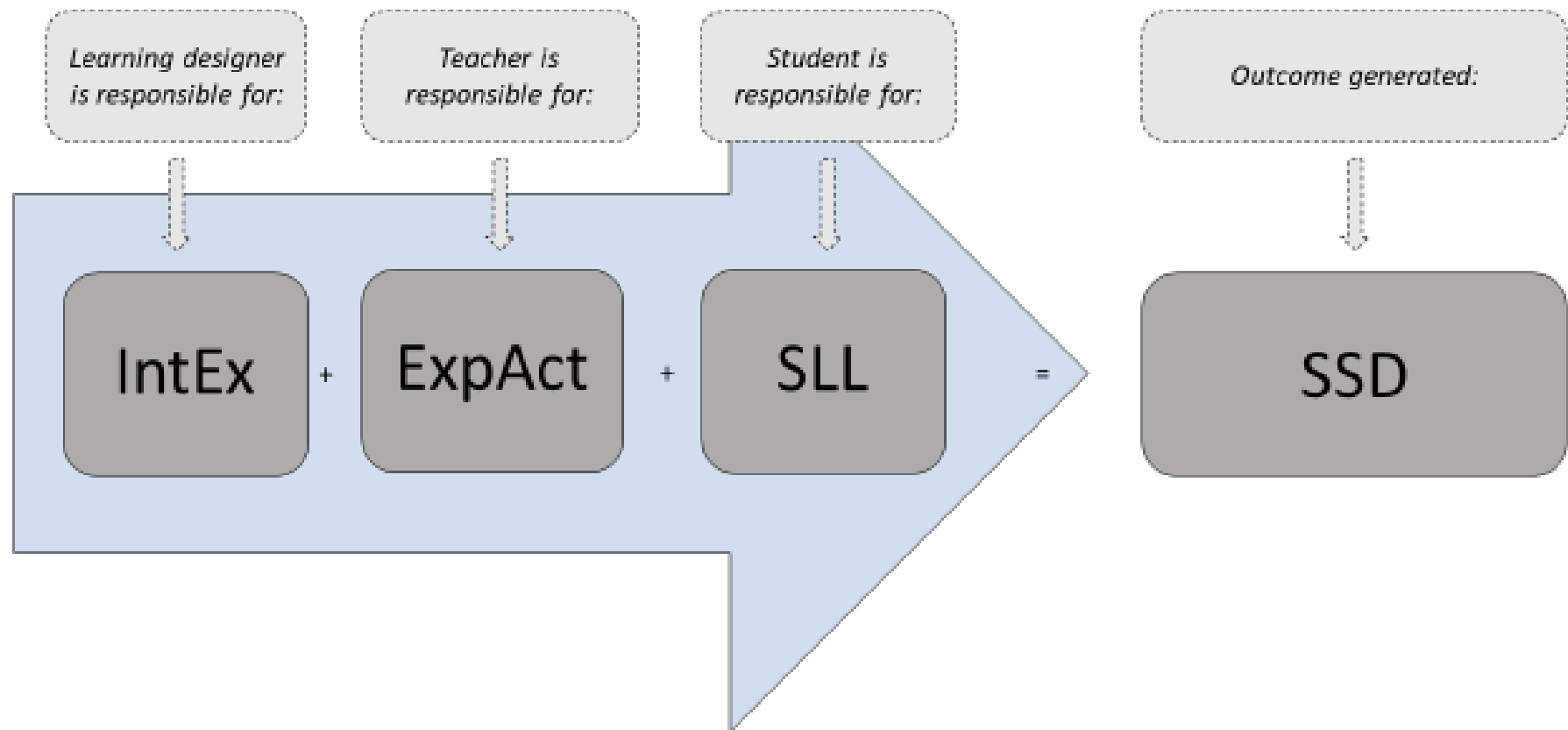


Figure 6.1 – The Experiential Education Diagram – A descriptive model for practitioners and students



The Experiential Approach formula:
 $\text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD}$

Figure 6.2 – The ExpEd Diagram – A descriptive model which led to the development of soft skills within students

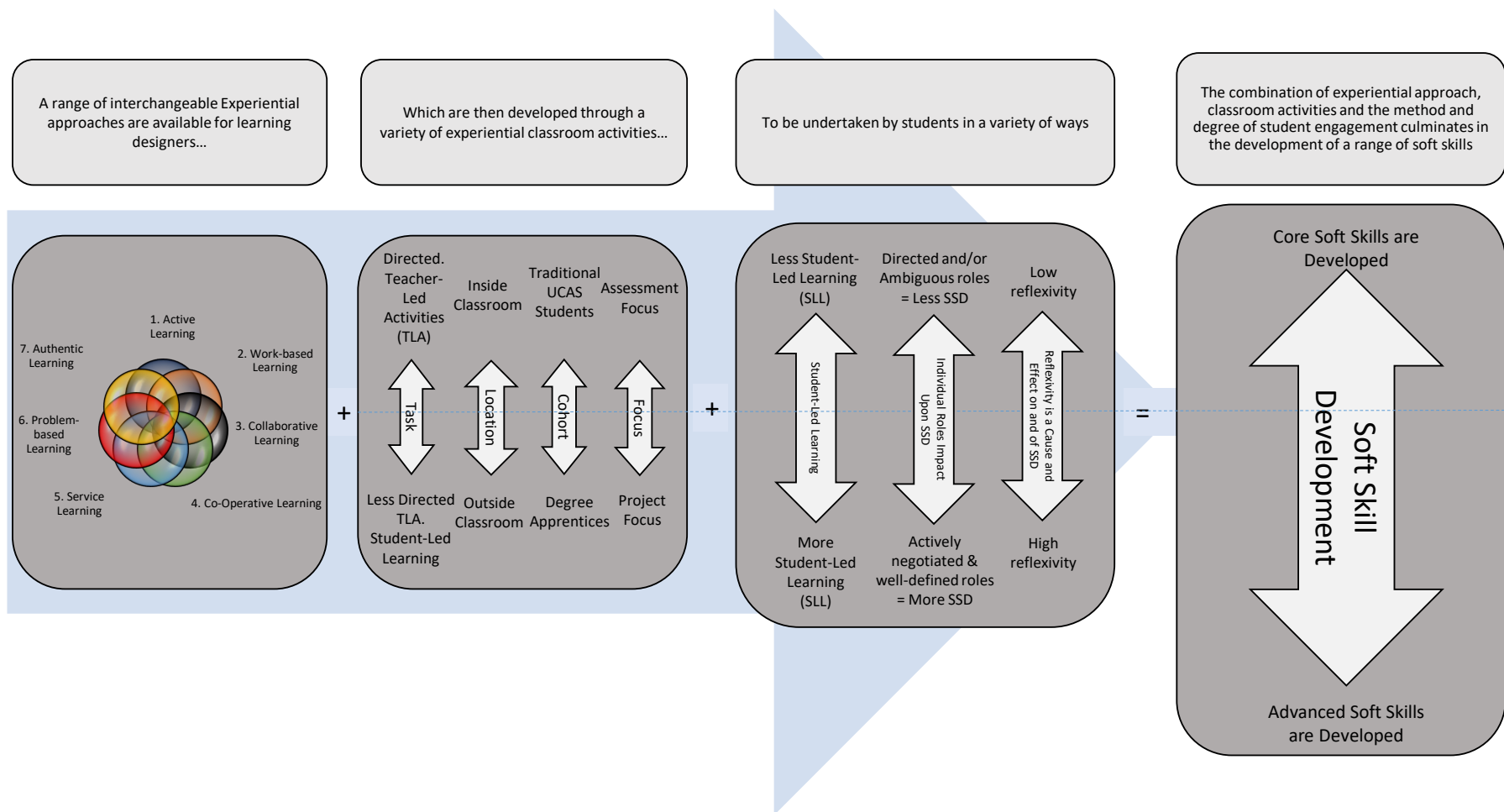


Figure 6.3 – The over-arching descriptive model of the Experiential Education Diagram (ExpEd)

2.3 Summary of section 2

Three diagrams feature within the input section of the Experiential Education Diagram, which I will hereby refer to as the ExpEd. This is illustrated in its complete form in Figure 6.3, with Figure 6.1 offering guidance for practitioners and students and Figure 6.2 presenting an overview of the ExpEd formula.

The ExpEd, as a tentative descriptive model, plays an important role in establishing which soft skills can be developed, how they are developed and what actions a learning designer, teacher and student can take in order to foster that soft skill development. This chapter will demonstrate those. The initial part of the ExpEd is the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel, which is presented in the following subsection.

3. Sub-diagram 1: A descriptive model to demonstrate the convergence of experiential approaches available to learning designers and teachers - The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – The IntEx Wheel

3.1 Introduction

The literature notes seven main approaches which feature underneath the umbrella of experiential education. These are active learning, work-based learning, collaborative learning, co-operative learning, service learning, problem-based learning and authentic learning. Whilst these seven approaches have many features in common, such as learning by experience and the use of reflection, they also have distinct attributes which position them aside from each other, such as group-work versus individual activity, community focus versus project focus and real, authentic learning versus simulated activities.

3.2 The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – The IntEx Wheel

The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) – illustrated within Figure 6.4 – is an invitation to the reader to explore a variety of experiential approaches. It has been designed with the premise that a multitude of experiential approaches exist; that many of them share attributes – such as activity-based learning, or group work; and that these approaches can be merged together to form holistic experiential approaches. For example, service learning is an experiential approach whereby students work on community-based schemes, or work in service for members of the wider community. This can be in the form of offering legal advice to people or by creating vegetable plots which the community can share. However, in this study the students partnered with charities to aid a variety of people and animals – thus, the service learning element was present. Authentic learning was also present within this study. Students did not work on a mere simulation, nor were they involved in a hypothetical case study. Rather, they worked on a real-world project in which their actions had both positive and negative consequences which affected the outcome and their groups success – in terms of how much money was generated for their charity partners or how much awareness was generated of their charity's cause.

Furthermore, the design of the project within this study ensured that an element of each of the seven types of experiential education which feature within the IntEx wheel were present within the project. The purpose of this was to allow for a thorough exploration of experiential education within the study and readers are invited to explore the range of approaches used as set out within the literature review and findings.

Experiential education is designed to foster meaningful learning activities and for students to learn in a contrasting way from a traditional lecture approach (Prince, 2004), with more time spent on contextualised learning (Noone, 2009). The wheel is an invitation to consider - for educators, specifically learning-designers, who seek to design immersive, experiential learning frameworks that combine active learning approaches and develop more than merely knowledge within their students.

Whilst the literature outlines a number of experiential approaches which currently exist, the findings from this study outline that learning designers can choose any combination of these approaches – a multitude of approaches were amalgamated within this study – to create a smorgasbord of experiential activities to best suit their student's needs. The study found that certain experiential activities, documented within section 3 of this chapter, will provide advantageous conditions through which students can develop soft skills and the section also offers tentative pointers towards the link between those activities and student participation, engagement and success.

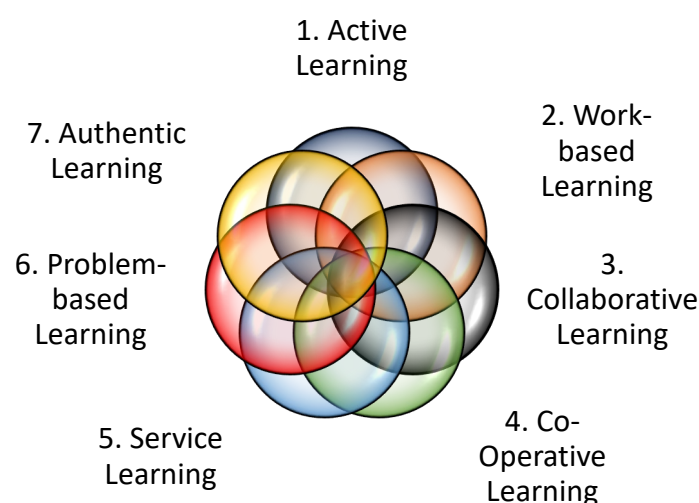


Figure 6.4 - The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – The IntEx Wheel

The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) shows the range of permutations available to experiential education designers. Any number of approaches can be combined, dependent upon the aims of the designer and the learning outcomes that are sought to be achieved and Figure 6.4 outlines the combinations that are possible - from one single individual experiential approach to ones which combine any number of approaches. It is also possible, with careful planning and forethought, to design an experiential approach which combines all seven experiential methods, particularly if a project has sufficient time and space to allow for this. This builds added levels of authenticity and societal benefits onto previous studies, such as that by Chang and Rieple (2013). It also explores the notion that entrepreneurship can be, if not exactly taught (such as within Henry et al, 2005; and Gibb, 2002), then facilitated and encouraged, as how it should be taught is debateable (Matlay, 2008). The project which formed the basis for this research contained elements of all of the seven approaches.

It should be noted that an experiential approach is more akin to a set of overriding guidelines and principles which drive the learning designer towards creating the optimal experiential activities for the student body in order for them to reach their aims and learning outcomes. More detailed, careful planning is needed to ensure that projects and activities are fit for purpose and the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct - offers guidance on this.

3.3 Summary of section 3

In conclusion, the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) is a guidance diagram which might be suitable for use by educational leaders wishing to embed experiential learning into their institutions, for learning designers who wish to create multi-faceted experiential approaches within which teaching activities can be designed, and for teachers who seek to coax students into a new way of learning; to engage, to participate and to act autonomously. It gives a broad understanding of the overlaps of experiential approaches whilst inviting the aforementioned groups to draw conclusions of educational travel.

The following sub-section presents the next original theoretical descriptive model – The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – The ExpAct.

4. Sub-diagram 2: A descriptive model to aide learning designers who want to teach in a more experiential manner – The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – The ExpAct

4.1 Introduction

The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity diagram – the ExpAct (Figure 6.5) - is a set of four continua which offer learning designers and teachers a variety of options for experiential lesson activities. Those continua are the task, the location, the student group and the area of focus. The Taxonomy represents the findings from section 3 of the findings chapter, which promote the need for the *Task* and *Focus* continua. Section 4 of the findings chapter offers a plethora of evidence to support the need for a *Location* continua and all sections from chapter 4 support the need for specific guidance to be offered within a *Student Group* continua - which highlights evidence of existing and emerging differences between traditional full-time UCAS students and degree apprentices. This chapter will now outline each of these four continua and their importance to the ExpEd diagram.

Which are then developed through a variety of experiential classroom activities...

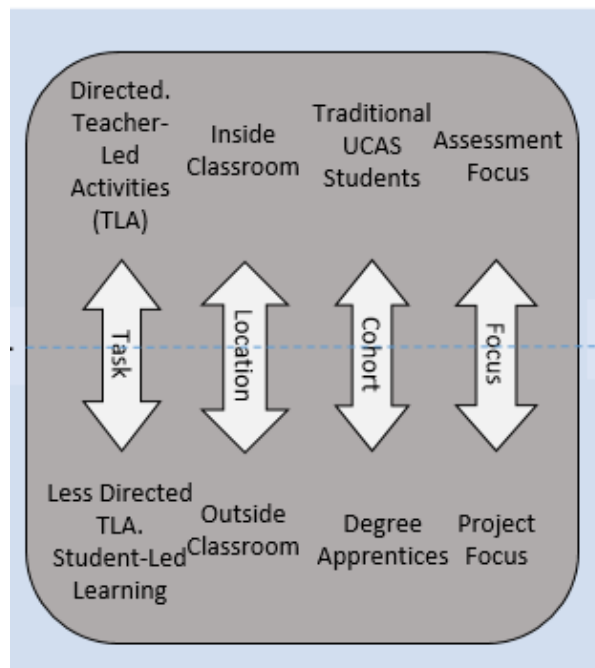


Figure 6.5 - The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – The ExpAct

4.2 Student-led learning aids experiential learning - The Task, and how students undertake it, can impact upon soft skill development.

The experiential project which students undertook within this research study featured a range of experiential activities over a six week period. These are evidenced throughout the findings chapter, specifically within 3.1-3.4. I do not subscribe to the view that only longer programmes are suitable for research purposes within experiential education (Thomas, 2008) as careful research design can be exercised to great use within the field of experiential education, providing that research questions are narrow enough and their methods suitably robust. I do, however, concur with Mink and O'Sreen (2003) regarding the lack of research into experiential methods in traditional learning settings – something this study has sought to partially rectify.

Some of the activities within this study were teacher-led activities (TLA) and were directed by the teacher in an inflexible way – as can be seen from the findings in chapter 4, section 3.1. Others, however, were less directed in terms of their TLA and featured more student-led learning (SLL). These can be seen within 3.6 and 3.7 of chapter 4. This project offered a distinct mode of learning for students. It gave opportunities to engage with new experiences in order to learn fresh concepts, whilst additionally honing skills that may have been initially developed through previous experiences (Billet, 2001). It was evident from the findings that experiential activities, or tasks, can vary greatly. An example of rigid TLA would be asking students to complete a SWOT analysis within a set timeframe, or setting a series of questions for students to answer within a worksheet. Whilst the research that students may undertake in order to ascertain the correct answers can be determined by themselves, the layout of the worksheet (the task) is rigid and there is less scope for students to interpret the activity in a variety of ways.

Contrary to these examples is *less directed* TLA – as outlined within Chapter 4, sections 3.7, 3.8 and section 4, which lead themselves to student-led learning (SLL) where students both uncovered and discovered information for themselves (Knapp, 2010). This was made possible through the facilitator trusting the students to use their ability to learn through experience rather than by forcing learning upon them (Higgins, 2009). An example of this, within the study, was brainstorming activities, which required students to develop an idea to raise funds and awareness for a charity. The fact that students were not led towards a particular charity or a particular method of raising funds, and were permitted to self-determine the course of their project, meant that a high level of openness surrounded the learning experience. Another example of less directed TLA arose from the facilitation of the groups. Groups were formed randomly, by alphabetical positioning of their surname within the class, yet groups were self-selective when it came to choosing a leader and allocating any other roles that they thought important to the success of the group. This can primarily be seen within section 4.3.1. This encouraged thought, active negotiation, openness of communication and, latterly, accountability. Whilst it is, of course, possible to rigidly prescribe roles within groups, and even to assign people to

those roles, this would fall at the Directed TLA end of the continua, rather than affording student's choice, which falls at the Less-Directed TLA end of the continua.

In conclusion, it was discovered that Less-Directed TLA lends itself more highly to Student-Led learning (SLL). This, as I shall further explain, has a strong, positive influence upon the development of soft skills. The planning and facilitation of the task, and how students undertake it, can greatly impact upon soft skill development.

4.3 Students who learn with fewer physical classroom boundary constraints are more inclined to engage in student-led learning - The Location of learning can greatly affect soft skill development.

The study was more than merely one of neo-experientialism (Roberts, 2008). Whilst the location of teaching was within a set of classrooms on an atypical Higher Education campus, the campus contained a number of break-out areas and meeting rooms which students were able to book. There was no designated library area, nor was there a designated canteen or eating area for students. Also, classrooms which were free for students to use when no teaching was occurring within them, meaning the rigid boundaries of a formal neo-experiential approach were widened, both literally and metaphorically. This study goes some way to answering the question posed by Thornton Moore (2010), namely; whether experiential learning can belong within a university setting. The findings from the study clearly show the benefits of experiential education to these students within this institution.

These factors are important for the study and for the design and testing of future ExpEd frameworks as the second continua upon the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct - is that of location. At one end of the continua is *inside the classroom*, whilst *outside of the classroom* is at the other end. Sections 3 and 4.3 exemplify this point.

Students within this study demonstrated higher levels of student-led learning, as shown within sections 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, if and when they demonstrated the ability to work on their project outside of the classroom. This raises a number of important

points for the experiential learning designer: students who are asked to work on experiential projects within solely a classroom-based setting might feel constrained against working freely, working openly and working autonomously – thereby demonstrating less SLL and, in turn, developing fewer soft skills; students who are working in predominantly classroom settings with a teacher present may seek guidance from the teacher and lean on the teacher for support more than those who work autonomously, thereby fostering a reliance upon the teacher; creativity of students may be stifled by the presence of other students, which can lead to a sense of students seeking to fit in, to follow what the rest of their group is doing and to overhear instructions which might be specifically directed at another group and not intended for them. Additionally, those classes with a number of groups all seeking answers from the same teacher might be led towards what the teacher perceives to be the right answer, thus causing difficulties for the teacher to allow the students to make mistakes, to discover answers for themselves and to take a chance on doing what they think is right, rather than merely confirming their actions with a teacher before they undertake them.

On the opposing end of the continua is the experiential learning which takes place outside of the classroom, demonstrated within 4.3. The project within this study did facilitate this in a variety of ways and those individual students, and groups, who took advantage of this seemed to benefit; with a greater development of a wider range of soft skills. Several groups took advantage of the opportunities to position themselves away from the classroom during seminar periods. This does require a certain degree of bravery and courage from a teacher; who is trusting that their students will be proactive with their learning and will complete any tasks which have been set. However, in an experiential project, where students are encouraged to reach their own conclusions and to learn independently, this should pose few problems. In fact, by facilitating open activities which have longer, sometimes multi-lesson, timeframes, rather than giving detailed prescriptions of what is required by students in short, single-lesson timeframes, it became evident that not only can students be trusted to work pro-actively, but that those who are encouraged to take ownership of their own learning responded favourably. They did not want to let their teacher down, they completed the work that they felt was necessary, which was often far beyond

minimum expectations and they learnt to manage themselves, their time, their priorities and the dynamics of the group itself.

In addition to the groups who placed themselves outside the classroom during seminar periods were the groups who demonstrated the ability and desire to work on their projects at other times of the week; outside of timetabled lesson periods, outside of college hours and even at weekends. These groups were innovative and dynamic with the ways they worked, and the locations, both real and virtual, at which they sought to do so. It is my assertion that experiential education designers can create an ExpEd which prompts students to work collaboratively with each other away from their classroom and that this framework encourages student-led learning which, in turn, fosters soft skill development. Student groups within this study worked together virtually via skype, WhatsApp, google meetings and facetime and in real terms in coffee shops, libraries, their workplaces and empty classrooms. These collaborations took place at different times of the day and week and were driven by the needs, requirements and schedules of the students, dependent on what was sought by the project at any given time. This drove students to become inextricably linked to the project, to take ownership of its success and to ensure strong communication lines were upheld between group members.

In conclusion, students who learn with fewer physical boundary constraints are more inclined to engage in student-led learning. The study highlighted that they arranged their own learning spaces, planned their own timeframes and deadlines for project work and were more determined to complete tasks which stretched them than those students who rigidly adhered to their classroom setting and pre-determined timetable. The location of students' learning can greatly affect soft skill development.

4.4 Students who appreciate the relationship between study and the workplace are more inclined to embrace experiential autonomous learning - The Degree Apprenticeship Student Group developed stronger soft skills.

Two student cohorts participated in this study; traditional university students who applied to study for their degree via UCAS, and Degree Apprentices, who entered

their course via a more thorough recruitment process in which they had to demonstrate a number of attributes and qualities to the recruitment panel. The type of student that is being taught is of important note to an experiential learning designer as their focus, background, previous ability, and their attributes may all differ.

I propose that learning designers, within an ExpEd setting, can foster the development of soft skills within students (SSD) if they attempt to develop activities which lean towards the bottom of the arrows within the ExpAct diagram, and that degree apprentices not only found themselves leaning towards these positions upon the continua more often than traditional full-time UCAS students (requiring less TLA, working outside the classroom more often and focussing more on the project and less on the assessment) but those degree apprentices whom demonstrated more of these characteristics showed greater SSD than those who demonstrated less. Therefore, acting towards the bottom of the arrows within the taxonomy is not a domain merely for degree apprentices, nor is it unachievable for traditional full-time UCAS students, but it is a position which degree apprentices more often found themselves in. It is also one which led to more SLL and SSD, so should be a desirable position for ExpEd learning designers to aim for, should SSD be a requirement. However, as demonstrated within the research findings, there is an element of choice which falls onto the individual student as to where they sit within the four continua. Whilst some activities offer a natural pre-disposition to guide students toward one direction or the other – top or bottom of the ExpAct taxonomy continua, a student can actively choose to lean their position to top or bottom of their natural position in order to fully embrace the SLL or to receive more guided tuition from the teacher, thereby choosing their own position upon the continua. This should not be underestimated by either the learning designer/teacher or the student themselves, as the power for intrinsic motivation to guide each individual student appeared to be strong within this study.

In conclusion, students who appreciate the relationship between study and the workplace are more inclined to embrace experiential autonomous learning. Predominantly, degree apprentices developed stronger soft skills than traditional full-

time UCAS students, which is detailed throughout the findings section, but particularly within section 4.4 and 4.6.

4.5 Rote, didactic learning can lead primarily to assessment focus. Engaging with experiential projects can lead to both assessment focus and to the development of soft skills. Students should focus on experiential projects to prevent limited soft skill development.

Students within the research project tended to focus on one of two things; the end of term assessment or the overall success of the project. This is demonstrated within section 3.5 of the findings chapter. The findings showed that these areas of foci drove student actions and behaviour, prompted them to limit or widen the questions they asked and had a wider effect upon their success within the project. However, given that the experiential framework was about facilitating learners in developing their own learning rather than merely designing ways of passing on the teachers views of reality (Hovelynck, 2002) it was correct for the study to allow the students to take their learning in whatever direction they wished, with only careful, minimal direction from the teacher.

Many students focused primarily upon the assessment. This had a limiting effect upon their participation within the project, their engagement with other group members, and their ability to develop soft skills as effectively as they might otherwise have been able to do. Those students who focused on the assessment tended to ask the teacher what they needed to do in order to successfully pass the assessment and were very inquisitive as to how the assessment - a group presentation reflecting upon the activities which the group had undertaken within the project - would be graded. Many of the groups which contained these students were pragmatic, as their projects were of limited ambition. These groups were able to unambitiously organise a one-off event or describing how they would produce and market a product had the timeframe of the project been longer. This, in combination with their actions within the project, led me to believe that their intentions to successfully deliver a project which hit the brief of raising funds and awareness for their charities, could be disingenuous. Many of their project ideas did not come to fruition and remained as

either dormant ideas, which were not actioned due to a number of barriers those students foresaw, or raised a low level of awareness for their chosen charity with little or no funds being raised. They did, however, participate in classroom activities and the majority of students at this end of the continua made sure that they understood the assignment brief and did what was needed to pass the assessment. It can therefore be argued that those students who focus on assessments at the expense of their participation within experiential projects can be disadvantaging themselves with regards to their soft skill development.

At the other end of the continua are those students who fully embraced the project, demonstrated in sections 3.4, 3.7 and 3.8, primarily, but continually throughout the findings chapter also. These students were enthusiastic about learning experientially, recognised the ups and downs of learning in an unfamiliar way and, importantly, were driven by producing a successful project which met the aims of raising awareness and funds for their chosen charity. Other motivations affected these students, such as: their standing amongst their peers and their teacher; their personal connections to their chosen charities and the desire to help them; their commitment to the team and other group members; and their natural inclination to be entrepreneurial and commercially successful. These students met my prior expectations of business management students.

Students at the project focus end of the continua appeared to pay less attention to the assignment brief throughout the duration of the project. They certainly asked far fewer questions regarding the assessment content or its format. Additionally, they appeared to demonstrate a commitment to making the project ambitious yet viable. Many of these students stretched themselves and proposed quite large projects, such as managing a summer fete, whilst others ran smaller scale projects which were more likely to be completed. However, the distinguishing factor these students demonstrated over those who were at the assessment focus end of the continua was their ability to see the project through to completion. This required: teamwork; commitment; strong communication skills; and a willingness to go beyond minimum expectations; to work independently away from the classroom; and, crucially, to be pro-active, to take chances and to make things happen.

It is my assertion that students who are encouraged to focus upon an experiential project rather than an assessment will benefit in a multitude of ways. They were more engaged with the activities and the learning outcomes, they were more reflexive and reflective and are open to truly learn authentically, by doing. Students who focused on doing only what is required to pass an assessment as opposed to focusing on the experiential project were potentially damaging their potential to develop soft skills, by remaining closed to much of the student-led learning that can occur within an ExpEd setting.

The study concludes that whilst rote, didactic learning can lead, principally, to assessment focus, those students who pigeon-hole themselves as a didactic learner are losing a greater opportunity to develop more than mere knowledge - the development of a wide range of soft skills. By engaging with experiential projects, students can achieve both assessment focus and soft skill development. Students should focus on experiential projects to prevent limited learning and development.

4.6 Review of section 4: Lesson and activity design is crucial if experiential education is going to lead to soft skill development.

The approach taken, as demonstrated by the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx), and the learning foci, as outlined by the Taxonomy of Experiential Learning (ExpAct), are two elements which combine to create an ExpEd; that is a framework of experiential learning within which students can learn.

It is through the taxonomy of experiential education – the ExpAct - that we can see the beginning of soft skill development (SSD) through student-led learning (SLL). The ExpAct combines with the IntEx to offer four distinct continua, within which teaching activities can sit. Students whose learning is facilitated within the lower end of the arrows within the taxonomy are more likely to be engaged in student-led learning, which gives them distinct advantages with regards to their development of soft skills.

Whilst each of the four continua are distinct, with clear causes and effects to them, they inter-relate to create a setting, activities and an atmosphere which allows students to feel free to explore, to make decisions for themselves, to make mistakes (and to learn from them) and to act autonomously without prejudicial directives from the teacher. This combines to facilitate student-led learning.

In conclusion, the lessons which are designed, and the activities which are undertaken within them, form a crucial element of the potential success of experiential education with regards to development of student's soft skills. The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity (ExpAct) outlines four key continua, which learning designers and experiential teachers should consider when planning and facilitating experiential learning: the task; the location; the student group; and the area of focus. Teaching practitioners are advised to consider the four continua, reflect on the ways in which they gain results through experimentation with experiential learning and encourage students to pro-actively take control of their own learning by moving themselves into positions away from teacher-led learning and towards student-led learning. This can be more closely illustrated through the investigation of the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning (SLL), which forms the next section of the ExpEd diagram and is discussed in greater detail in the following sub-section.

5. [Sub-diagram 3: Student-Led Learning \(SLL\) is a key causal factor within the potential development of soft skills \(SSD\) within students.](#)

5.1 Introduction

Many students developed soft skills regardless of their positioning upon the four continua within the taxonomy of experiential activities (ExpAct). The study demonstrates that even when students leant towards the top end of the taxonomy continua, experiential learning still abled them to develop soft skills. The findings chapter outlined this throughout section 4. This is not to say that students who were positioned more frequently within the bottom end of the continua did not develop these skills – they did, and many of them to a greater extent than those on the top

end of the continua – but that those on the top end, and therefore those who are participating in an ExpEd which is teacher-led, classroom-based and who focus on the assessment, do still benefit from an experiential approach. They developed soft skills, even when their activities were not as open or student-led. The delineation between the basic, core soft skills, which were predominantly developed through top-continua activities and advanced soft skills, which predominantly emanated from bottom-end continua activities is illustrated within Figure 6.6

5.2 The continua of student-led learning (SLL)

Whilst Figure 6.6 outlines the soft skills developed by students sitting upon both ends of the SLL taxonomy continua, due to the nature of this research it is difficult to precisely examine every individual student to ascertain the personal reasons for their soft skill development. However, it can be seen from the findings that certain activities appear to lead to certain soft skills being developed. For instance, all students were aware of the commercial nature of the task, which required them to generate awareness and raise funds for their charity partner. This prompted a development in the soft skill known as commercial awareness. Students also developed corporate social responsibility. This was, I believe, heightened by the experiential approach taken – in part a service learning one – which brought the need to act ethically into the students' sphere of proximity. Confidence was developed through the experiential learning project, whether that be through the self-belief that can arise from autonomous, student-led learning whereby students grew in confidence when they achieve a target or goal; or through the interjection of team-mates and teachers within a classroom setting; responding to actions the student had taken with positive feedback and compliments. Students within the ExpEd setting undertook a range of activities and tasks and were given feedback by team-members and the teacher accordingly. Students at both ends of the continua developed an ability to accept feedback and to use it constructively in their next activity. Students at the bottom end of the continua have the potential to be subjected to less feedback than those on the top end due to the nature of autonomous learning, and the fact that they may spend less time with the teacher could equate to fewer feedback opportunities. Therefore, should a teacher wish to

design an experiential project which contains a large element of learning outside the classroom, not in the vicinity of the teacher, appropriate feedback mechanisms must be built in. Those students who are largely classroom-based, with the teacher present, are highly likely to develop the soft skill, and ability, of accepting feedback through experiential learning as it offers multiple opportunities for a teacher to give feedback. In addition experiential learning promotes the opportunity for teachers to provide students with feedback which is 'in the moment', personal, often verbal and covering a wide range of matters, such as actions and behaviours rather than simply a judgement of a student's knowledge.

The distinction between autonomy and student-led learning is an important one to make. Students were afforded a high degree of autonomy within the ExpEd project, and this should be encouraged as it moves students towards the advantageous position of being able to lead their own learning. However, a learning designer should not assume that all students will lead their own learning simply because they have been granted autonomy. Some may seek guidance and direction from the teacher. To support this, it is advisable for teachers to encourage students to fully grasp their autonomous position in order to lead their learning, whether that be through discussion in the classroom or through encouraging comments from the teacher within reflective feedback. Section 3 of the findings chapter outlines ways in which learning activities can be designed and supported by teachers to take this into consideration, whilst sections 2 and 4 highlight the range and depth of soft skills which were developed by students as a result of participating and engaging in the experiential project.

Figure 6.6 illustrates the ways in which student-led learning can be facilitated within an ExpEd project, which, in turn, has a demonstrable impact upon student's soft skill development. A greater depth and breadth of soft skills were developed by students who actively engaged with student-led learning activities, illustrated via the lower side of the four arrows within Figure 6.6. Those students who regularly engaged with those activities demonstrated a greater development of their soft skills, along with a wider range of soft skills which were developed. The soft skills they developed are extensively noted and outlined within Chapter 4, specifically within Appendix 4.i.

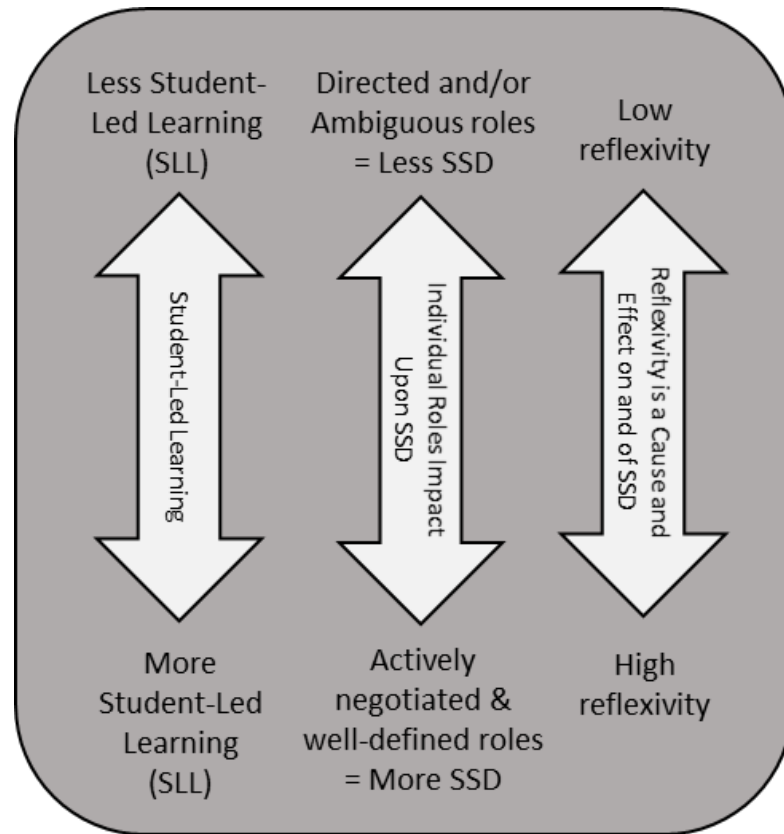


Figure 6.6 - A Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning - SLL

5.3 The continua of individual student roles

Two specific features of student-led learning did facilitate the development of soft skills within the students on this study, namely; the impact of individual roles – highlighted within 4.3.1 of the findings chapter - and the level of reflexivity and reflection – see 4.6 of findings chapter. These two important facets of student-led learning within an ExpEd project are worthy of future research exploration, however the initial hypothesis drawn from this study is that students who are given the opportunity to actively negotiate a specific role for themselves within a group setting will develop a wider range of soft skills, with more depth, than those students who are either directed towards having to take a particular role within an experiential project or those who have ambiguity over their role, and therefore the expectations upon them.

It is the assertion of this study that students who have well-defined roles and tasks within a project, such as leader, blog writer, external communications officer and financial officer, engaged more autonomously in student-led learning. They were more self-sufficient, more pro-active, more independent and more accountable and, whilst these are all soft skills which students are practicing and thereby developing and enhancing in their own right, these skills fostered the development of others. For instance, accountability directly related to time management, as when a student has a specific role and task which they are individually accountable for, they will therefore prioritise and manage and organise their time accordingly to ensure it is successfully undertaken. Contrary to this, students who were not present in the early stages of their projects appeared less likely to be fully engaged in their autonomous, student-led learning, which led to less soft skill development for those individuals.

5.4 The continua of reflexivity

Reflexivity and reflectivity are two key elements of experiential teaching and learning (Weil and McGill, 1989; Boud, Cohen and Walker, 1993). Adequate time was made for reflection within the experiential learning process at the centre of this study (Kolb, 1984). Reflexivity is the amendment of practice within an activity in order to best suit the circumstances an individual is faced with. It is an appropriate reaction, or reflex, to an event that surrounds an individual. Reflectivity is largely deemed to be the ability to consider actions taken in the aftermath of an event occurring, with reflection-on-action being a typical example of this. Reflection-in-action is more closely linked to reflexivity, as this reflection occurs in the heat of the moment, whilst action is ongoing. Both reflexivity and reflectivity can be described as a soft skill. They are important attributes for a person to have, within both a personal and professional context. This is particularly true for people within employment who need to amend actions and behaviours to develop themselves; to act appropriately; to build relationships with people around them; and to meet their personal and professional aims and goals. In this way, students who engaged in autonomous student-led learning developed the soft skills of reflexivity and reflectivity as they were continually engaged in reflexive and reflective practice. Through an ExpEd project, which lends itself to less-directed teacher led activities and deliberate reflective practice being undertaken by students on a regular basis, students who

worked autonomously reflected more often, at greater length, in their own time as well as inside the classroom; and those students demonstrated a deep understanding of their own reflexive practice within their projects, through their reflective excerpts.

Reflectivity is also a prompt for other soft skills to develop. By facilitating deliberate opportunities for students to reflect, either in class time – as this study did via paper based reflective journals – or outside of class time – as this study did via cloud-based online journals – the student-led autonomous learning was enhanced. The development of this open space for thought and for communication with the teacher developed student's soft skills and provided important opportunities for reflection within students. It also encouraged students to consider the actions they had undertaken within the project, the relationships which they were fostering, or those which were deteriorating, with team members; and allowed them to develop their appreciation of the benefits of experiential learning that go beyond a mere understanding of subject knowledge. In example, the study highlights the volume of students who reflected upon their abilities, their shortfalls, their reflexivity and the improvements they had made to their own soft skills.

5.5 Summary of section 5

In conclusion, the soft skills which students developed throughout the project were wide-ranging, as can be seen from the findings. These are illustrated within Figure 6. The study concludes that these were heightened through experiential learning. However, only a small selection of those skills were developed by students who engaged in less student-led learning, amongst other actions, and as such found themselves sitting primarily upon the top end of the continua contained within the Taxonomy of Experiential Activities – the ExpAct.

It is my assertion that student-led learning had a direct, positive effect upon soft skill development within undergraduate business management students in this experiential project and that was exacerbated by them having: autonomy within their learning; actively negotiated and well-defined roles; and, a high degree of

reflexivity with periods of deliberate reflection built into their ExpEd framework. These factors arise via the approach taken within the design phase (IntEx) and the activities facilitated within lessons (ExpAct). The study concludes that a greater number of Soft Skills were developed through ExpEd when students embraced and engaged with Student-Led learning (SLL).

6. Sub-diagram 4: A consequence of experiential education is student's soft skill development

6.1 Introduction

The ExpEd diagram is a tentative, descriptive model which educational leaders, teachers and learning designers may find useful in order to foster student soft skill development within their programmes.

The Experiential Education framework is underpinned by three minor diagrams; the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (the IntEx), the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity (the ExpAct) and the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning (SLL). These three diagrams converge together to create the ExpEd diagram, which has the potential – once further testing has occurred - for the planning of experiential education, and through which student's soft skills are developed. They collectively lead to a sub-diagram of student's soft skill development (SSD).

6.2 An even greater number of Soft Skills were developed through ExpEd when students engaged in Student-Led learning (SLL)

An ExpEd designed to promote student's soft skill development is more likely to occur when less-directed teacher led activity and more student-led learning (SLL) is present. It also has greater potential to advantageously move students outside of their comfort zone (McMullan and Boberg, 1991; Munro, 2008) as it will subject students to environments and experiences which they may not have encountered previously. More SLL also affords students the opportunity to learn their own

processes and methods of working (Glaser, 1984), to have ownership and control of their learning (Reeve, 2002) and to negotiate their own meanings from experiences (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This study concurs with Billet (2016) who asserted that a successful programme is, in part, mediated by learners themselves; but also builds upon the work of Caulkins (2010) who reported that experiential field trips can tie a class together like a family, generating bonding and teamwork. The findings from this study indicate that this is possible within an experiential project which begins and is largely undertaken within a traditional classroom setting also – albeit with flexible boundaries which allow for work to be taken outside of rigid confines. It was through autonomous SLL that advanced soft skills were developed within this study.

The SSD is a continua which demonstrates the output of soft skills which can derive from either the top or bottom of the ExpAct and SLL continua. This study found that students who engage with top-ended experiential learning activities, which are more teacher-led and contain less student-led learning, developed core, basic soft skills. These skills, as demonstrated within Chapter 4, included: People Management; Commercial Awareness; Corporate Social Responsibility; Confidence; Accepting Feedback; and Managing the Impact of External Forces.

The lower end of the SSD continua arrow, sitting beneath the dashed blue line and thus a direct consequence of actions taken by teachers and students within the ExpAct and SLL diagrams which also fall beneath the dashed blue line; at the lower end of the continua from the preceding sub-diagrams; are a range of advanced soft skills. These are wide-ranging and do, I hypothesise, emanate directly from: the experiential approach taken - via the IntEx; the taught activities and tasks – via the ExpAct; and the ways in which students engage and lead their own learning – via the SLL. Within this particular research study, a vast number of soft skills were developed, as discussed at length within the findings chapter – chapter 4.

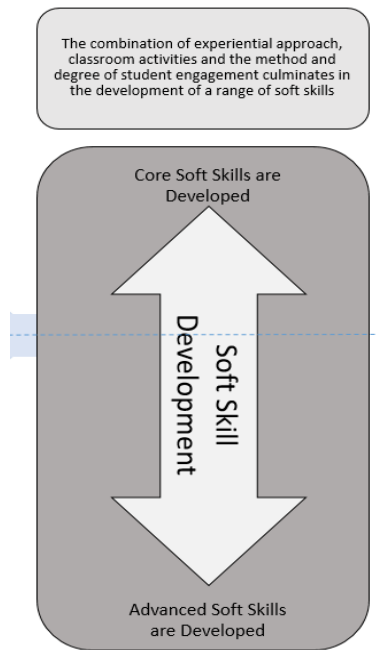


Figure 6.7 - The Soft Skill Development Diagram – The SSD Continuum

It is my assertion that the experiential education project (an ExpEd) led to soft skill development (SSD) within this study. With thought given to the experiential approach and the positioning of activities within different points upon the four continua of the taxonomy of experiential learning an ExpEd can be created which fosters SSD within undergraduate students whether they are degree apprentices or traditional full-time UCAS students. Additionally, ExpEd led to SSD regardless of where students naturally gravitated to within the four continua. It can be seen that students who were more often positioned at the bottom end of the four continua within both ExpAct and SLL did benefit from this positioning. They appeared to develop a wider range of soft skills and developed those skills to a deeper extent than those students who were positioned mainly within the top end of the continua. SSD largely arises from student-led learning (SLL) which is a feature of less-directed teacher-led activity (TLA).

It is precisely due to students learning autonomously; actively negotiating their own roles and tasks within a group; and working with a high degree of reflexivity throughout the duration of the project that greater SSD occurred. This is an important distinction to make within the study and is particularly true of students who were not restricted to the classroom for their project activities and those whom worked in a

variety of settings, at different times of the day and week, in order to progress their project independently.

6.3 Summary of section 6

This research study found that those students who were positioned within the top end of the continua did develop some soft skills. However, the development of those soft skills was limited. Alternatively, students who found themselves more frequently at the lower end of the continua; those who demonstrated more student-led learning; actively negotiated their own roles within group work; and were more reflective and reflexive; developed a greater depth and breadth of soft skills. It can be argued that positioning teaching and learning activities within the top end of the continua does offer teachers an element of control within the classroom and it might also provide them with the opportunity to more regularly assess and measure learning and soft skill development within their students. However, the advantages of directing students and learning activities towards the bottom end of the continua arrows does far outweigh the advantages of a neo-experiential approach, especially when seeking to foster student soft skill development.

7. In review of the Experiential Education Diagram – The ExpEd

The study concludes that experiential education led to soft skill development and that the range of this development was widened and enhanced when students engage in Student-Led Learning. To fully demonstrate this, the overarching diagram of the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) plus the Taxonomy of Experiential Activities (ExpAct) plus the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning (SLL) equals Soft Skill Development – with its more conveniently palatable formula $\text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SDD}$, presented within Figure 6.3.

$$\text{ExpEd} = (\text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD})$$

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The following chapter: summarises the research study; reflects upon its challenges; identifies how the study addresses the research topic and sub-questions; demonstrates how the findings offer distinct, original contributions to knowledge; presents recommendations; and offers to the field a range of implications to practice.

1. Introduction

This study has explored the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education within contrasting business management undergraduate courses. It provides answers to the following set of sub-questions within the research:

RQ1) In what ways do students who are taught using experiential learning activities participate within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ2) In what ways are experiential learning activities supported by teachers?

RQ3) What soft skills are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom?

RQ4) What are the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes?

The aim of the study was to further understand, through a nested case study approach and the thematic analysis of a wide range of rich data, the effect experiential learning can have upon the development of soft skills within undergraduate business management students. It offers several contributions to knowledge within these domains. The following section will summarise the research study.

2. Research Summary

In order to fully explore the effects of experiential learning upon soft skill development across contrasting groups of student practitioners, a nested case study approach was undertaken. This allowed students to be viewed as individual units within one of two larger units; a traditional group of full-time students and a group of degree apprentices; in order to inductively ascertain, through a naturalistic, social constructionist epistemology, what effects experiential education might have within such a setting. Through symbolic interactionism and the thematic analysis of a range of qualitative data, findings were triangulated in order to provide patterns and meanings that arose from the field notes, reflective journals and focus group discussions.

Findings from this study provided a clear emphasis upon the growing trust that emerged throughout the reflective process, and the strong relationships that developed between students intra-group and between students and their teacher. With reference to the relationship between experiential learning activities and soft skill development, whilst I may have expected to see the pedagogic approach having a positive effect upon the development, I did not anticipate such depth and breadth of soft skill development. Patterns emerged from the data which showed a wide range of soft skills, which demonstrated the holistic ability of experiential education to benefit undergraduate students. Additionally, the micro and macro ways in which students demonstrated student-led learning exhibited the importance of experiential educators trusting the pedagogy to deliver a hands-off teaching method, whilst students develop their soft skills through an authentic, real world approach to learning. The following section presents my reflections upon the research undertaken.

3. Scope and limitations of the study

The study was undertaken between 2016 and 2020. This was due to the practical constraints surrounding the dates within which I had access to student participants, whilst employed as a Programme Manager and Lecturer within the college within

which the study is set. This was an advantage to the study due to the available access to both degree apprentices and to traditional full-time undergraduates, but I was forced to make a number of decisions pertaining to the study.

Due to practical constraints, the study was not able to explore the effects of experiential learning upon such areas as engagement, attendance, retention rates, continuation rates, student satisfaction, pass rates and submission rates. It also did not focus on whether experiential education has a significant effect, or of what that effect might be, upon any particular gender, although there are some tentative findings within this area. Additionally, given the limited timeframe for completion of the study, it was not possible to consider the long-term effects of experiential education upon the student participants, which might have been explored through further focus group interviews, questionnaires - which might consider graduate outcomes, positions of employment, or graduate's salaries at set periods following the study. The field would benefit greatly from such research studies as they do not currently exist.

In summary, the area of focus for this study was an appropriate and very relevant one in the current educational landscape.

The following section presents a range of exploratory thoughts and answers to the research topic and sub-questions.

4. A section to reflect upon the research statement and sub-questions and the ways in which this study addressed them.

This section summarises those findings alongside the existing literature in order to outline the ways in which exploratory statement and research sub-questions were answered through this study. The section directly addresses each of these in turn, and presents answers in response.

4.1 Students who are taught using experiential learning approaches participate within their learning activities in a variety of ways both inside and outside of the classroom?

In answer to research question 1 (RQ1), students participated within their learning activities in the experiential classroom in four key ways. These key findings have been holistically amalgamated from chapter 4 but can be specifically derived throughout 2.3, 3 and 4.3. This section will now outline these in more detail.

4.1.1 Experiential learning leads students to be creative and to generate ideas.

Experiential learning, by its nature, allows for more freedom and greater degree of decision-making and autonomy for students due to the lack of certainty and direction that arises, in comparison to more traditional, didactic and directed learning.

Students within the experiential project were given loose guidelines for their project brief and were allowed to interpret these as they wished and make decisions which they thought were correct in order to best advantage their groups and the charity partners. As such, students demonstrated creativity throughout the process; making decisions, showing innovation and generating a range of ideas for consideration – some of which were exercised and some discarded following group discussion. It is asserted that this creative, idea-generating process stems directly from the open nature of experiential education and, particularly, an ExpEd approach which sits

within the lower ends of the Taxonomy of Experiential Education diagrams and associated continua.

4.1.2 Experiential learning leads students to demonstrate teamwork and collaboration.

An ExpEd project offers learning designers a greater opportunity to apply group work within their teaching. As opposed to traditional teaching which can often drive students towards individual learning and individual assessments; experiential group work ensures that students must work together, in teams, in order to succeed. This is particularly prevalent when they are also assessed within a group framework; whether they receive individual marks or group marks; as the necessity for all members of the team to collaborate on the assessment ensures a consistent direction for members of the group and a mutual benefit in them working to achieve a successful outcome. Whilst the experiential project within this study did not have individual accountability through the assessment; which was through a group presentation; it did foster individual accountability through tasks and roles as we have seen; which builds on the findings of Pittaway and Cope (2007) in asserting that individual accountability can result in a determination of participants to succeed.

Additionally, students collaborate within experiential projects in a way which does more than merely self-serve their own interests. Rather than simply ensuring their team members were delivering what was required for the assessment, students were supportive, both with the work that was being undertaken and in other personal ways. This supports Dewey's (1963) view that those students participating in active learning can develop as citizens in addition to gaining knowledge. Students, when given the responsibility to work with others to produce a product or service, seemed to mature. This was demonstrated by them communicating with each other to check on mental health and wellbeing – an unexpected benefit of experiential learning. Students also gauged when their peers were struggling with work, due to a lack of experience, confidence or interest in a task. Most groups overcame this scenario by assisting with work, re-prioritising tasks and working together to ensure completion through collaboration.

4.1.3 Experiential learning led students to build strong relationships, with their peers, their teachers and other stakeholders

Students who learn through experiential projects have less opportunity to work insularly. They are cajoled into talking, debating and collaborating with their peers in a way which traditional learning does not necessarily require. Rather than sitting passively in a lecture theatre or a seminar classroom they are often found working in close quarters, across groups of tables or even in break-out areas away from the classroom. In addition to this, students spent time away from each other outside of the classroom and outside of standard college hours; whether in person or virtually. An interesting future study might examine the amount of time students spend studying in different places; within an ExpEd setting; in comparison to students who study through traditional methods. However, this research did not capture the information, so only my observations and hypothesis that more time was spent together by students studying experientially, can be offered. Additionally, the view espoused by Jacobs and Archie (2008) – namely that experiential education may be able to help foster communities, is strengthened within this study as relationships developed and were nurtured throughout the project period.

The study did demonstrate, however, that students built strong relationships. As previously stated, they checked on each other for wellbeing and mental health, they appeared to become close friends, which was evident through the project itself, through their attitude towards each other in class and through the arrangements they seemed to make with each other to organise out of college social activities.

The students also built strong working relationships with each other. The project required a professional, mature approach and students began to learn of the strengths and weaknesses of their peers and themselves as the weeks progressed. This prompted honest appraisals of what they could achieve together, recognised strengths within each other (Steven and Richards, 1992) and ascertained who might be best suited to particular tasks.

4.1.4 Experiential learning prompted students to communicate with various partners in a multitude of ways

It was evident that students used a variety of methods to aide their communication with each other. Face to face, oral communication was evident throughout every teaching session and the discussions held by groups were productive in the manner in which students debated ideas to arrive at agreeable solutions. The study concurs with Cazden (1988) who found that individuals work well in team settings as a result of developing their listening skills. The experiential learning within this study certainly appeared to facilitate that skill. This negotiation of their learning might not be so prevalent in traditional lessons, nor as regular or continuous as it was within the ExpEd project.

In addition to their oral communication, students communicated regularly through electronic means. Their written communication skills appeared to develop through the regular use of emails and written communications such as priority lists, gant charts and rationale papers which were sent between them. The students also developed their electronic communication through the regular use of email, skype, google documents, PowerPoint, WhatsApp and google hangout. This list is not an exhaustive one but does outline the main electronic means which students used to communicate. It was evident that due to the experiential nature of the project, those students who behaved mostly towards the bottom end of the four continua needed a method of communication which facilitated their learning and group work outside of university. Those groups and individuals who fully embraced digital methods were advantaged both within the project and when preparing for their assessed presentation, leading me to conclude that those students who were more project-focused were, in many cases, more likely to develop a greater depth and breadth of soft skills than those students who were predominantly assessment-focused.

4.1.5 In conclusion, students who were taught using experiential learning approaches participated within their learning activities in a variety of ways both inside and outside of the classroom

Students within the study were substantially more engaged than students who I had taught the same module to in previous terms, despite there being no differences in the ways in which those students were recruited into the college, nor to the entry grades required by the college from them in order to be awarded a place upon the course. However, this group's advanced participation and engagement levels can be attributed to the fact that their learning activities were experiential rather than traditional and didactic, which prompted more active involvement from them. The learning activities were also more varied than a traditional classroom might be, thus causing them to participate in a more flexible, open manner. Finally, the freedom which students were given to design and manage their own learning; including where they learn, how they learnt and what they learnt, in some cases; drove students to participate outside of the classroom and designated timetabled class-time far more regularly than they might have otherwise done.

4.2 Experiential learning is supported by teachers who are pro-active, brave and encourage students to learn autonomously through student-led learning.

The study uncovered four key ways in which experiential learning can be supported by teachers, as outlined within this sub-section. Holistically, the study also concludes that experiential teachers must be pro-active and brave in order to effectively encourage their students to learn autonomously through student-led learning. These findings are evidenced throughout chapter 4, but primarily within section 3.

4.2.1 Lecturers within experiential projects should have industry expertise.

Lectures formed a part of this ExpEd project, but lecturers were selected to conduct sessions because they delivered the lecture through active means; such as involving the students in question and answer sessions; and because of their personal, practical expertise within the subject area – often linked to or currently working within industry. This, I feel, largely demonstrates the reasons for the positive feedback from students for the lectures they participated in – and I use the term *participated in* rather than *watched*; or *listened to*; very deliberately, as those lectures can be differentiated from other lectures which received less complimentary feedback through comments and observations made by students.

4.2.2 Experiential education is facilitated, not taught.

It was, however, the experiential activities, which were fundamental to the development of soft skills for the students and these were facilitated and supported by the teacher. The study does not agree with the views of Roberts (2008) who argued that experience-based education is just as likely, if not more likely, to legitimize systems of domination in comparison to other curricular approaches. It was evident from the research within this study that students felt empowered and I can conclude that experiential education actually neutralised the relationships within a classroom; particularly those between teacher and students; as students are given freedom, openness and trust in order to develop their own learning mechanisms.

Freire (1970) found experiential learning to both require and facilitate a more balanced relationship, and my findings support that view. The findings within this study are also contrary to those of Estes (1998) who asserted that teacher-centred facilitation can be problematic within the use of experiential education. I argue that it is not merely the use of teacher-facilitation, but the degree of power and control which a teacher holds over the actions of their students, which can lead to less student-led learning. Teachers using experiential methods have an opportunity to

observe their students, to ascertain where problems may lie and who is struggling to perform a task. It provides the teacher with an opportunity to time interventions effectively by either discussing with a student where they may be going wrong, immediately; or by watching the solving of the problem unfold as a group collaborates together to achieve success and to develop.

The positioning of an experiential teacher is important. Becoming too close or too involved with a student when they are learning can lead them towards teacher-led-learning as opposed to the more desirable student-led-learning. Therefore, teachers must be wary of how involved they become with experiential learning and ensure they are being considerate enough to allow students to find their own ways around a problem. This, of course, requires an experiential educator to trust the process and to trust their students, in order that conceptualisation of subject matter and knowledge can take place.

4.2.3 Successful experiential learning incorporates authentic, real-world activity.

An important element of the ExpEd project within this study was the incorporation of real-world, authentic learning. Students benefitted from being taught by industry experts. Furthermore, the difficulties they faced were a deliberate element of the project itself and pushed them into positions where they had to solve problems, overcome difficulties and collaborate together as a group. This aided their soft skill development and exposed them to some of the difficulties they might face within the workplace and equipped them with the resilience to succeed.

Because the ExpEd project was focused upon the success of the project itself rather than the final end of term assessment, the majority of students, and certainly those who embraced the experiential nature of their learning, worked experientially rather than didactically. They went through processes rather than solely memorising information, and they undertook experiences for the success of the project rather than simply seeking to advantage themselves with regards to the assessment. The teacher within an experiential project can support student's success in this area in a

number of ways. By designing an assessment which links closely to the project itself they will motivate students to embrace the experiential element of it, therefore increasing the likelihood of their soft skill development. Additionally, students must be informed that learning; and pertinently to this study, development; is not measured through assessment alone. Rather, that the lifelong benefits they will derive from engaging in an experiential project could be argued to be of greater benefit to them than a slightly higher assessment grade. Furthermore, students must be shown that it is through their own engagement within their learning that they will be successful. The students who were more engaged with the experiential nature of this project did, generally, develop a greater depth and breadth of soft skills than those who were less engaged – both within the project and the assessment itself.

4.2.4 Experiential learning demands reflexivity from students and teachers.

The role of teacher within an ExpEd project, and particularly within ExpAct, is not dissimilar to that of a traditional classroom-based teacher. This is evident in the volume of reflexivity that is necessary for an experiential teacher to demonstrate. Whilst all teachers need to work reflexively in order that they can amend the direction of the lesson to make it more appropriate for students' needs, within an ExpEd context there is a far wider range of paths for the students to go down. Therefore, ExpEd teachers need to flex with the decisions their students make and have a dialogue with them which encourages them to lead their learning. This must be exercised in the full knowledge that they might make mistakes, but that those mistakes will ultimately be learning and development opportunities for them.

Additionally, an ExpEd teacher must be available to students for advice and support whenever they are called upon. It is important that the students feel supported outside of the classroom and even outside of the timetabled day; as regular, quick responses from a teacher might aid engagement and motivation amongst students. This will, I anticipate, be a controversial view amongst the teaching profession, though I hold that teachers who wish for students to reach their potential - in terms of soft skill development - will make themselves available as much as they possibly can

and, as those teachers themselves become more engaged within the ExpEd projects, they will in turn find the work of an experiential educator to be a more rewarding and fulfilling one than that of a traditional lecturer.

4.2.5 In conclusion, experiential learning is supported by teachers who are pro-active, brave and encourage students to learn autonomously through student-led learning.

Students who are afforded freedom and the opportunity to lead their own learning can often produce stronger outcomes than those who are bound within teacher-led learning. These outcomes derive from engagement, autonomy, ownership and the personalisation of their learning. Ultimately, they have greater control over what they do, why they do it and what they wish the outcomes to be, which provides them with an intrinsic motivation to work, to develop and to learn. Teachers can foster student-led learning by ensuring that their students have a safe, personal space for reflection, and that reflexivity becomes a two-way process as students begin to feel comfortable in leading their learning.

4.3 A vast range of soft skills are developed through experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. These skills are advanced when facilitated through autonomous, student-led learning.

The wide range of soft skills which students developed within the ExpEd project was demonstrated at length within the findings chapter of this thesis. Specifically, the table within Appendix 4.i addresses this, as do sections 2 through to 6, with exemplar data for each. Therefore, I do not feel it necessary to further outline the different soft skills which were developed nor how they were developed within this chapter. However, it is important to highlight that an ExpEd offers a multi-faceted approach to learning which can offer different opportunities and methods for students

to learn within; and it is the range of methods and activities which ExpEd offers that leads to a wide variety of outcomes, or, soft skill development, in this context.

However, whilst some students developed their soft skills within a classroom setting, much of the work that many students undertook outside of the physical classroom was an influential factor over what soft skills they developed and to what extent. The study outlined the benefits of widening the learning space by allowing students to have freedom to work away from their desks and even the walls of the classroom itself. The freedom to roam was inherently linked to the degree of autonomy that students demonstrated, which linked closely to the ways in which they led their own learning; as opposed to students who relied upon teacher direction and intervention. The extension of the classroom boundary walls also reached as far as facilitating meetings between students outside of the college and, in many cases, virtually for students throughout the week. This was especially prevalent in the degree apprenticeship students, who were only physically present in college for one day of each week and therefore found creative ways to keep in touch, to meet and, ultimately, to develop their projects and their own soft skills.

In conclusion, a multitude of soft skills are developed through experiential learning both inside and outside of the classroom. This study highlighted many which the literature had sought out as being required skills for student development in the 21st century. Additionally, the study uncovered many soft skills which had been unexpected during the design of the study. This indicates that experiential learning, due to its constructionist nature, prompts students' knowledge and skills to grow organically. Additionally, the soft skills were heightened through high levels of autonomous, student-led learning, displaying that students play an active role in their learning and can choose, through participation and engagement both inside and outside of class, to develop their soft skills in addition to their knowledge, which may benefit them greatly in later life.

4.4 Experiential learning led to soft skill development for students in the context of different course routes. Degree apprentices benefit from experiential learning, largely due to their appreciation of the relationship between study and the workplace.

The study highlights nine key attributes of students from the traditional full-time UCAS group and the degree apprentices, in terms of how they engaged and participated and how their soft skills developed. These nine attributes are discussed within the following sub-sections.

It is worth noting that every degree apprentice within the study was subject to an employment contract. The traditional UCAS students, however, may not have had any prior or current work experience. These factors may be relevant to a comparison between the two sets of students, but it is beyond the realm of this study to address this. Equally, it was also important to highlight the literature surrounding degree apprentices, which notes some potential differences between those students and traditional degree students, such as the greater opportunity for rounded-learning within degree apprenticeships (Saraswat, 2016) and work-based learning moving responsibility more so into the hands of the learner (Rhodes and Shiel, 2007) – thereby, one would presume, fostering autonomy and accountability in that learner. The findings of this study, discussed below, go some way towards supporting the claims made by Saraswat and Rhodes & Shiel.

4.4.1 Degree Apprentices appeared to demonstrate high levels of work rate

It appeared that degree apprentices demonstrated high levels of work rate and great commitment to their projects. This can be seen holistically within section 4 of the findings chapter. They were also committed to the charity with which they linked their organisation, and while there were some individual outliers to these points, it was evident that degree apprentices had more success with their experiential project in

terms of funds and awareness raised and, in many instances, delivered more successful projects than their UCAS student counterparts. Degree apprentices were reflective and also consciously recognised their own soft skill development throughout the reflective journal excerpts which were evidenced within the project. They commented upon their advanced abilities throughout the period of the project, whereas fewer UCAS students appeared to recognise the positive impact that experiential learning was having on them until towards the end of the project and within the end of term focus groups.

4.4.2 Female degree apprentices appeared to demonstrate higher levels of drive, commitment and work-rate towards their experiential projects than their male degree apprentice counterparts.

Attendance levels were high for both genders, though this was the case both prior to the project and during it. This can partly be attributed to the levels of maturity within the degree apprentices, which appeared to be higher than the UCAS students in general. Additionally, degree apprentices were committed, contractually, to attend college for one day per week, so non-attendance had ramifications for them which was not replicated for UCAS students.

Participation across males and female degree apprentices was fairly equal, as were leadership roles. It did appear that female apprentices showed higher levels of drive, work-rate and commitment to the charities than their male counterparts though, as demonstrated in section 2 4.2, 4.3.6 and 4.6.4 of the findings chapter.

4.4.3 Degree Apprentices can reflect at length if conditions allow.

Degree apprentice reflections were undertaken online via a shared google document - which was accessible by each of them, individually, and by myself as their teacher. Within the degree apprentice reflective process it was evident that many strong two-

way relationships were forged with the teacher which led to enhanced levels of trust, openness and communication which far fewer UCAS students appeared to develop from within their reflections. This issue is highlighted in section 4.6 of the findings chapter.

4.4.4 Degree Apprentices show great ambition, engagement and participation within experiential projects.

Degree apprentices developed and delivered more ambitious projects than their UCAS counterparts. Their commitment to see them through to completion was also stronger. Degree apprentices communicated through electronic methods throughout the week, whereas UCAS students appeared more likely to rely upon face to face meetings with their groups within college. UCAS students relied upon attendance at pre-arranged meetings or depended upon the successful utilisation of seminar time, which was inconsistent and affected by attendance levels of team members.

Leadership styles and the commitment of group leaders/managers did not appear to differ significantly between the two groups of students, though it was evident that degree apprentices appeared to feel more passionate about their projects - namely that they either loved and fully embraced the project, or they hated it and desired a more traditional form of learning. UCAS students, however, were more apathetic and offered less commentary on their feelings towards learning in an experiential way, at least until the end of term focus groups. These findings emerged throughout chapter 4, but substantially so from sections 2.3 and 4.2 to 4.5. One conclusion to be drawn from this could be that UCAS students are more passive and subservient than their degree apprentice counterparts who, in contrast, are more likely to be autonomous and active. This claim would benefit from further research, drawing upon the previous teaching methods that individual students are recipients of, whilst also considering the impact of employment and other factors external to the classroom setting.

4.4.5 Traditional UCAS students show high levels of pragmatism. They are likely to be assessment-focussed.

UCAS students were often pragmatic, as demonstrated within section 4.3. 3 and 4.4.1. They tended to focus upon micro tasks which were needed on a weekly basis and many students did not stretch themselves beyond that. In fact, UCAS students focused more on their summative assessment than the degree apprentices, which appeared to limit their engagement with the experiential project. The degree apprentices were often more focussed on producing a strong outcome for their charity organisation, their team ethics or their own soft skill development - these were all consequences of their work, rather than driving forces.

4.4.6 Gender differences appeared to exist within UCAS students. Female students in first-year undergraduate study were more focussed than male students.

Female attendance levels were far stronger than male levels (see 4.3 and 4.5) and group leaders were almost entirely female (see 4.5.9). It appeared that male UCAS students were less collaborative than their female team members (2.2.1) and that males tended to work on tasks individually, away from the classroom, whereas females would be more likely to involve those around them to ensure they were on a pathway which all team members agreed to (2.3).

4.4.7 The reflections of traditional UCAS Students tended to be structured, formulaic and inexpressive.

Section 4.6 of the findings chapter outlines differences between the ways the two groups chose to reflect upon their project. UCAS students reflected on paper, during the last ten minutes of every lesson. This had a dual effect. It was evident that more UCAS students did actually reflect than their DA counterparts - almost all students who were present in a lesson did submit reflections at the end of the class. However, full-time UCAS students wrote less, wrote with little depth or analysis, and

sometimes appeared to be writing in order for them to leave the classroom, in a very structured, formulaic way, which offered less insight into their thoughts, feelings and actions than the degree apprentices.

4.4.8 Engagement and participation levels within traditional UCAS Students were inconsistent.

UCAS student engagement and participation varied significantly between those who were overly ambitious and those who were safe, pragmatic and realistic, which can be seen throughout the findings chapter. This created some imbalance within groups, with some students wanting to push their boundaries and others seeming to ground the group. The engagement of UCAS students was, as previously alluded to, largely driven towards assessment success and fewer UCAS students (in comparison to degree apprentices) were willing to put themselves forward to lead their respective project teams. Those who did become project managers were, in some cases, almost single-handedly responsible for driving the success of their projects and appeared to have a much greater level of work-rate than their peers. Whilst engagement and participation are not the subject of this study it should be noted that further exploration of the inconsistent levels of engagement and participation amongst full-time UCAS students, would be beneficial to the field.

4.4.9 Clear differences existed within the ways traditional UCAS students and Degree Apprentices undertook learning in an experiential context.

There were differences between the ways in which the two sets of students engaged with the experiential learning project, as demonstrated throughout the findings chapter. Although whether this was down to the maturity of degree apprentices or the fact that they were committed, contractually to their course, is not known from this study. Further research into this is recommended. Evidently, however, degree apprentices appeared to show greater ambition and drive within the project. They also appeared to take more pride in delivering funds and raising awareness for their

chosen charity, whereas UCAS students appeared to be more driven by achieving a good final grade in their summative assessment. Whilst soft skills were noticeably developed within both groups of students, the degree apprentices did notably comment upon this more often, perhaps indicating a greater level of reflexivity than the UCAS students.

4.5 In conclusion, experiential learning led to soft skill development for students in the context of two different course routes. However, degree apprentices appeared to develop more holistically, potentially due to their appreciation of the relationship between study and the workplace.

Whilst it appeared that students from either group – degree apprentices or traditional UCAS students - were neither advantaged or disadvantaged by being a member of that group, and that the group within which the student sat did not affect their choice to fully immerse themselves in the experiential activities on offer; degree apprentices did choose more often to go beyond what was expected and displayed higher levels of drive and commitment to the project. However, it is not the case that those students from the traditional UCAS group were not able to do this. Many of the UCAS students were committed to the project and took a very active role in their own learning, including some excellent examples of student-led learning. On balance though, degree apprentices appeared more likely to lead their own learning and to focus upon the experiential task and project rather than merely be passive recipients of teaching and working towards an assessment. The study draws several conclusions from this: firstly, that students from either group of students are able to consciously choose to be engaged and active within experiential learning; secondly, that traditional UCAS students were more likely than degree apprentices to choose to take a passive approach to their learning. This offers the potential for a future study to ascertain whether a link exists between passive undergraduate degree level learners and the ways in which schools teach towards assessment for GCSE's and A Levels; and, thirdly, that degree apprentices were largely experiential-project focused and were driven to ensure their project succeeded, as opposed to being assessment-focused only, which appeared to be the case for many traditional UCAS

students. The conclusion drawn from this is that degree apprentices were motivated and driven by authentic, workplace objectives rather than mere grades alone; potentially due to their work history, or the fact they were currently employed in their apprenticeship workplace.

The following section presents the ways in which this study offers distinct, original contributions of knowledge to both research and practice within the fields of experiential education, degree apprenticeships and soft skill development.

5. The findings from this study offer an extension to current knowledge with some distinct original contributions to knowledge.

5.1 Introduction - Contributions to the field

The findings from this study offer an extension to current knowledge with distinct original contributions to knowledge. The need to develop soft skills within undergraduate students is paramount, as demonstrated within the literature. This study offers guidance on a range of practical ways for higher education institutions, teachers and learning designers to develop soft skills through experiential learning. The major contributions to knowledge, offered by this study, are outlined within 5.3-5.6 of this chapter.

5.2 The need to develop soft skills within undergraduate students is paramount. This study offers a range of practical ways for higher education institutions, teachers and learning designers to develop soft skills through experiential learning.

Twenty-first century skills are considered as desirable for learners to develop and are seen as being the kind that need to be learnt rather than taught (Billett, 2016). It is evident that the shortage of skills exists (Report by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, 2014) and that these skill shortages have a negative

implication for the labour market and the economy worldwide. Whilst skills shifts are ongoing, companies often complain of the difficulty in recruiting skilled, talented graduates (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). Furthermore, they expect to have more openings for people with higher level skills, particularly digital skills, over the coming years (CBI, 2017).

This research study offers a contribution to the solution of these problems. If, as predicted by the McKinsey study (2018), workers of the future will spend more time using soft skills in the future than they do today, then it is the responsibility of educators to attempt to equip graduates effectively. If the predicted growth of 22% of time being spent deploying social and emotional skills and 33% rise in the need for entrepreneurial and initiative-taking is realised, then an educational approach which fosters the development of soft skills in addition to imparting knowledge has the potential to better equip our graduates of the future.

The Global Institute Workforce Skills Executive Survey (2018) compared the skills being used in today's workforce with those predicted to be needed in the future. The survey highlighted the range of skills which are expected to be in greater demand: leadership; digital skills; communication; interpersonal skills; managerial and entrepreneurial skills; and adaptability, all featured within this list. All of these skills were prevalent and developed by students participating in this study, demonstrating that an effectively designed ExpEd with sufficient space for student-led learning (SLL) can offer a solution to the problem. This is a crucial step forward, particularly for those 31% of young people who state that they do not feel they have the appropriate skills when starting their working lives (CBI Report, 2013). It should become the responsibility of universities to consciously communicate which soft skills are necessary for its students to develop and then set them on a pathway of discovery for those skills to be developed. This would also address the concerns of employers that there is not enough work-related content within degree programmes. If universities build these into their courses to a greater extent it would heighten the awareness of the skills which need to be developed both for the learning designers and the students themselves. This, I assert, would lead to an appreciation of the necessity to develop them and, in turn, an actual development.

Businesses within the UK have called for improvements to the work-ready skills of graduates (Saraswat, 2016) and; as retaining talent is so vital, for financial reasons, to them; then the development of real world skills and experiences is crucial also (Stevens, 1994). The literature asserts that real-world learning offers distinct advantages to learners; a bridging of the gap between education and work (Overton & Lemanski, 2015); and a layer of experience onto conceptual knowledge gained through study (Gray, 2001). But there is still a gap. The question posed by the gap is 'how can educational experiences be designed so as to fuse work-based learning with traditional classroom-based study in order to offer all students the benefits that those on work-based learning courses can derive?' The answer lies in the form of a hybrid pedagogy combining the advantages of a range of approaches with the outcome of that approach being the development of soft skills.

There is a need for higher education institutions to produce entrepreneurial graduates (Hermann et al, 2008) and a clear weakness in the skills base within the UK workforce; particularly when compared to productivity levels in French, German and North American counterparts (Saraswat, 2016). These factors, in combination with the high levels of youth unemployment and the shortage of people with critical job skills (Education to Employment: Designing a System that Works, 2012) should prompt universities and governments to act to a larger extent than they previously have. Whilst there has been a move towards measurements, key performance indicators and league tables within the UK higher education sector, it is pondered by Billett (2016) whether education should continue to measure performance in this way or whether it ought to focus on creating the necessary experiences required for learners to excel in the workplace. I personally believe there is a third option, an option which can drive learners towards a measurable performance, through assessments and degree classification whilst still taking individual needs into account through a hybrid pedagogy which promotes student-led learning, as demonstrated by this study itself.

In conclusion, the need to develop soft skills within undergraduate students is paramount. This study offers a range of practical ways for higher education

institutions, teachers and learning designers to develop soft skills through experiential learning. The area of skills development within experiential education has been in need of further research for some time (Thornton Moore, 2010) and it has previously been argued that an interactive approach to learning may be able to foster the development of higher order critical thinking skills (Graham, 2004) yet it is my assertion that a more refined approach must be designed to truly foster those skills and an even wider range of other soft skills.

5.3 The first contribution to knowledge is the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – The IntEx Wheel. A diagram which tentatively highlights how practitioners can tailor a range of experiential approaches to suit their requirements.

The first contribution to knowledge offered by this study is the potential for universities to embrace Integrated Experiential Education, as demonstrated by the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel – IntEx – illustrated within Figure 6.4 in chapter 6. This tentative, descriptive diagram can begin to fill the gap in the literature. The diagram gathers the strengths of a range of experiential teaching approaches and fuses them together to deliver a teaching model which allows for experiential learning, student-led learning, knowledge building and soft skill development. The diagram is equally suitable for students enrolled on traditional degree courses or for degree apprentices as it offers students the opportunity to fuse knowledge-based learning with real-world authentic experiences in order to learn, to develop soft skills and to enhance their prospects of employability and success once employed.

The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) is a guidance tool for experiential learning designers to consider which experiential approaches they will combine in order to deliver necessary learning outcomes for their students. Whilst the wheel itself does not offer explanation as to the parameters or necessary requirements of the seven types of experiential learning, it is envisaged that teachers and learning designers would use the wheel as a starting block for their own research into the methods associated with those approaches, thus familiarising

themselves with the varying experiential education methodologies and more pertinently with what is required within their classrooms in order to build suitable and effective learning experiences. The overlapping nature of experiential approaches is one that I encourage educators to appreciate and use to their advantage as they fuse together suitable attributes from the various pedagogies contained within the wheel. The Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) aides that.

5.4 The second contribution to knowledge is the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct. This diagram ensures that teaching practitioners are focused on the design of student-led, autonomous activities which can prompt soft skill development

A further contribution to knowledge made by this study is the relevant importance of the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct. Namely, the four continua which learning designers and teaching practitioners must be considerate of when creating experiential learning: the task; the location; the student group; and the focus of the project. Whilst any experiential education can lead to some soft skill development, it is when the students move further towards the bottom end of the taxonomy that the greater developmental benefits begin to be realised. Teachers, both in their role as learning designer and as activity facilitator, have, I believe, a responsibility to guide students towards that side of the continua, but the importance of student engagement, motivation and desire to push their boundaries and work outside of their comfort zone should not be underestimated.

5.5 The third contribution to knowledge is the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning – the SLL; this diagram actively encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning

Whilst learning designers and teachers are responsible for designing and facilitating the experiential approach, via the IntEx, and the experiential activities, via the ExpAct, students also are partially responsible for the facilitation of their own learning and the inputs they make towards autonomous, reflective practice. Students have

the opportunity to choose where they sit within the continua of the SLL and must be urged to take responsibility for their own choices to this regard.

5.6 The fourth contribution to knowledge is the demonstration of the relationship between the IntEx, ExpAct and SLL and the output of SSD (soft skill development). Allowing students the time and space to lead their own learning, autonomously, will lead to greater and deeper soft skill development

The final significant contribution to knowledge offered by this study is the importance of student-led learning to the development of soft skills within an experiential learning framework. Students who are afforded more autonomous opportunities to lead their own learning activities, to negotiate their workload and roles and to work with high levels of reflexivity within an experiential project are more likely to develop a wider breadth and depth of soft skills. As the model contained within Figure 6.1, chapter 6 shows, an ExpEd (Experiential Education project) leads to greater SSD (soft skill development). The study uncovered a relationship between SLL (student-led learning) and SSD (soft skill development) and concludes that if students are afforded the time and space to lead their own learning, autonomously, it will lead to greater and deeper soft skill development.

5.7 The ExpEd Diagram as a practical tool for the utilisation of learning designers, teachers and students

The ExpEd Diagram emerged as a clear benefit to students throughout this study; particularly those students who were willing to position themselves on the bottom end of the continua within ExpAct and SLL, which may have been outside of their natural comfort zone. It also became clear, through the observations made and feedback gathered from student reflections and actions within the project period, that experimenting with different approaches, which were not often practiced in traditional teaching settings, did prove advantageous, particularly to the development of

student's soft skills. Therefore, the ExpEd Diagram is a step towards the creation of a practical tool for the utilisation of three key stakeholders within the Higher Education setting: learning designers; teachers; and students.

Figure 7.1 is a diagram derived from the original ExpEd framework, which is demonstrated in its full format in Figure 6.1 of chapter 6. Figure 7.2 is a tentative step towards a practical ExpEd Guide (for learning designers, teachers and students). It clearly outlines three inputs which converge together to create the output of the development of soft skills within students. The diagram could be a practical tool for learning designers to actively consider the experiential approach(es) which they will take in order to reach desirable outcomes – via the IntEx Wheel; using experiential methods not in silo, but in combination, as appropriate. The framework also aids teachers with their design and facilitation of experiential activities, via ExpAct; in order to create tasks and activities which are student-led, practiced not only within a classroom setting and project - rather than merely assessment - focussed. Finally, the diagram places a direct onus upon students; which can be highlighted by teachers at the start of a project, or the term; in order to outline and embed the psychological contract of student's taking responsibility for their own learning so that it is: student-led; so that reflexive practice occurs; and so that students understand the benefits to their soft skill development of demonstrating learning practices which fall at the bottom end of the continua.

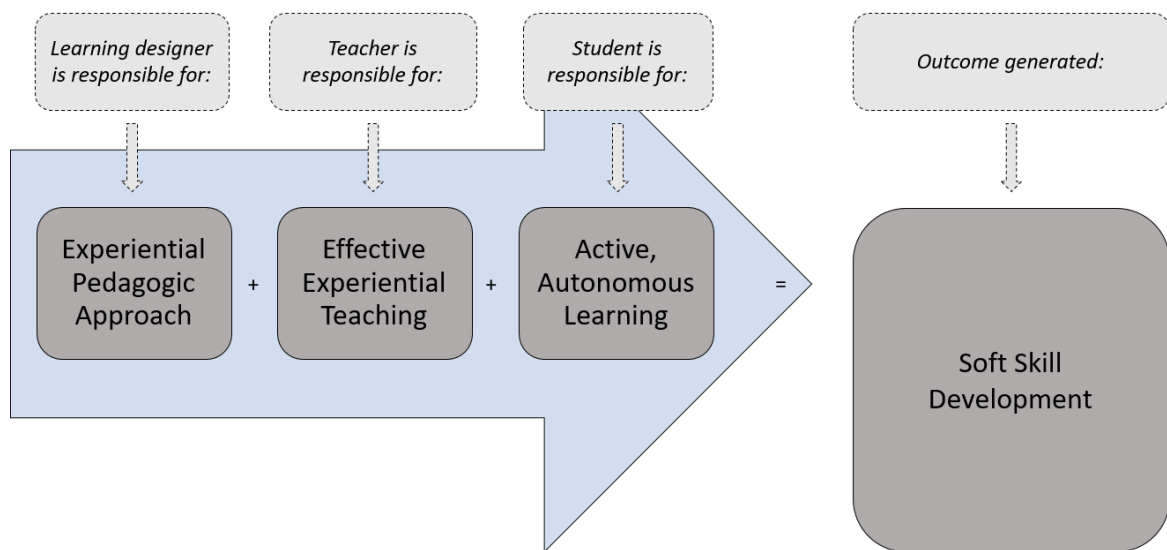


Figure 7.1 The tentative, initial ExpEd Guide

Figure 7.2, The ExpEd Tool (for learning designers, teachers and students), is a suggested extension of Figure 7.1, designed in order to make the Diagram even more practical. Further refinement of this model would be beneficial to practitioners in order to complete each of the sub-models – IntEx, ExpAct and SLL with actual, practical approaches, tasks, activities and actions which can be utilised by learning designers, teachers and students in order to aid the development of soft skills. The practical, pedagogic possibilities of these models are wide and varied, however, and I feel that they need further clarification and research in order for this further extension of the model to be completed as a practical offering for those three stakeholders.

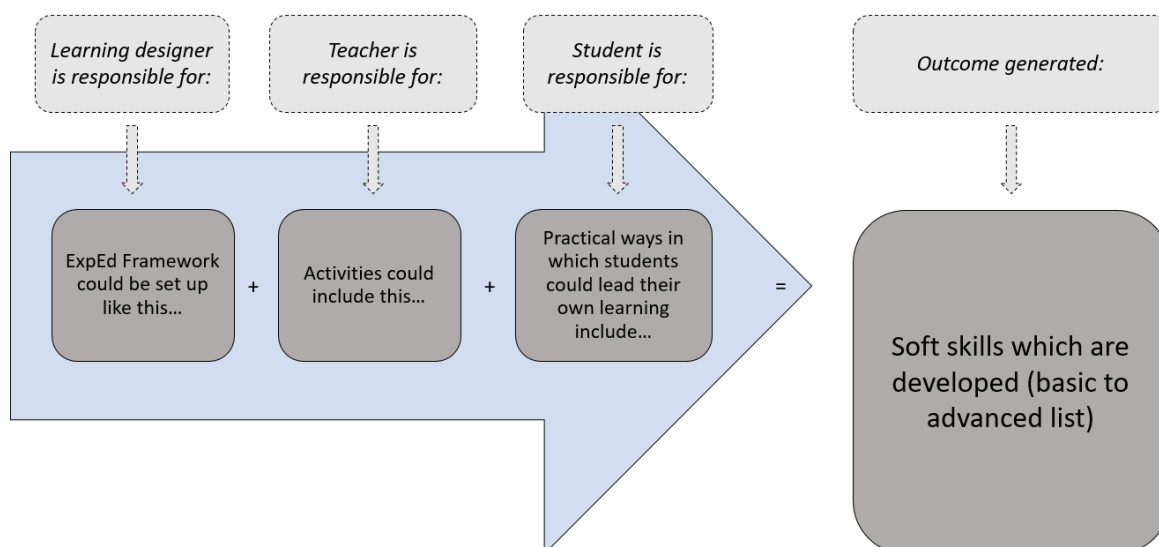


Figure 7.2 - The tentative initial ExpEd Tool

5.8 Review of contributions to knowledge

This chapter has presented five key contributions to knowledge, which have emanated from the research study. The overarching ExpEd Diagram is a step towards the creation of a practical tool for experiential educators, which builds upon those which currently exist within the field. The ExpEd Formula (Figure 6.2, chapter 6) offers a clear formula which can be used as a framework for learning designers and teachers to build suitable experiential learning opportunities through which soft skills can be developed. Utilisation of the ExpAct and SLL models can facilitate good, experiential practice within teachers and students alike; both of whom are contributory influencers upon the development of student's soft skills. This study contributes several key hypotheses to the field of experiential education and will aid further research in this area – particularly with regards to the practical application of experiential learning in traditional, classroom settings.

The following section builds upon these contributions to knowledge to offer a range of recommendations for future research opportunities to the field.

6. Recommendations

The findings, and limited nature of this study, leads to a number of recommendations for future research.

Naturally, for a doctoral study, it was not possible to answer all questions that are currently unanswered within the field of experiential learning and soft skill development amongst students; thus, it was necessary for this study to focus, quite deliberately and narrowly upon one setting; two small groups of student participants and a practical limit to the number of questions which the study sought to answer. This has opened the possibility for further research in a number of areas which I believe are key areas of within the field. These will now be addressed. To better understand the implications of the findings, future studies could address, but not be limited to, any of the following five areas:

Firstly, one limitation of the study is the limited knowledge of the participants that was gained prior to the research being undertaken. It would have been possible to introduce additional methods in order to ascertain a detailed appraisal of students' demographic backgrounds, prior learning and ethnicity. I deliberately chose not to focus on these questions within this study for two reasons: pragmatism; and a clear focus on the link between the experiential teaching methods and the development of soft skills. The potential for ascertaining further details regarding the personality types (by using a test such as Discover Insights or Myers Briggs), strengths (using a strengths analysis tool) or previous levels of soft skill (through methods such as questionnaires or surveys) are possible and I would welcome an opportunity to collaborate on such research.

Secondly, it would be beneficial to research the proportion of student-led learning (SLL) that was necessary in order to impact upon soft skill development (SSD). This could be undertaken through a timing and causality through observational data method; where the time students spend engaged in SLL is measured and then compared with the qualitative data generated that outlines their soft skill development. Whilst this is a complicated causal approach to measure, it may offer

insights into the proportion of time teachers should spend in allowing their students to engage in SLL versus the amount of time that should be teacher-directed.

Thirdly, the groups within this study were both given the same task and assessment. This was a necessary part of the study for two reasons: firstly, it afforded each set of students an equal opportunity for success and did not discriminate against either group; and secondly, it allowed for a direct comparison between two distinct sets of students – the degree apprentices and the UCAS students – in order to minimise the differences between them to strengthen the final findings and comparison between the sets of students. Further research on how groups respond to different types of assessment is achievable and suggested in order to better inform the field. For instance, whilst those students on the lower side of the taxonomy were project focused, those on the higher side were assessment focused. It would be interesting to see whether this would have changed if the final end of term assessment had been an examination or a piece of individual coursework and whether more students may have been assessment-focused if they did not have to work within a group setting for the final presentation which, presumably, heightened the need for a collaborative approach throughout the entire period of the project.

Fourthly, given the importance that students placed upon the roles they took within the projects, I believe a study into what roles are contained within experiential projects, how they emerge and who performs better in assessments depending on what their roles are, how specific their responsibilities are and who assigned the role, would be beneficial. Within this study clearly-defined roles afforded students structure and allowed them and their groups to benefit by ensuring that each student took individual responsibility for their own workload. This knowledge may offer teachers and students who are embarking upon experiential learning an advantage in the future as, by setting these roles from the very beginning of a task, work could be completed more quickly and more effectively.

Finally, this project explored the effect of experiential education within the context of a level four Business Management programme. This is a subject which traditionally had been at least partially taught through the use of experiential teaching methods,

albeit largely through simulations and case studies. Further research is needed to determine the effects of the Integrated Experiential Education Wheel (IntEx) into two alternative settings: one with no or little history of experiential education such as philosophy, where the incorporation of an ExpEd project is both more difficult and less expected by students; and one with a rich tradition of experiential education, such as healthcare, where students are both expected to learn and be assessed experientially. This comparison between courses could, potentially, widen the scope for use of experiential education in faculties which may not have previously considered it as a viable option.

In conclusion, it is anticipated that I shall enter into further research projects to build upon this study. I encourage other researchers within the field to develop and test these findings and welcome future collaborations with interested parties.

7. Implications to practice

This study offers, within a single setting, a proof of concept. Whilst the findings it makes are not generalizable, in this context it can be argued that experiential education had a positive impact upon the soft skill development of business management undergraduate students across two contrasting student cohorts: traditional full-time students; and degree apprentices. There is, on that basis, good reason to believe that the study offers insights and findings which may be valuable in other settings; and could potentially have wide implications to both the education sector and to industry. However, as a caveat, it should be noted that the research was not designed to be transferable or generalizable to other settings, so this proof of concept is limited unless and until further research is undertaken in alternative settings.

Education, particularly higher education within the UK has for too long remained unchanged. Universities are dominated by lectures and seminars, often taught in a dry, formulaic and unengaging manner with little regard for the development of skills. Rather, they have traditionally been the domain of rote learning and 'teaching to the

test'. This can have the outcome of producing good results from students who are able to memorise swathes of information and regurgitate them within examinations or coursework assignments. However, it does not necessarily produce work-ready graduates who are able to hit the ground running in their workplace; who are able to collaborate with colleagues; or are able to resiliently solve the problems that they will undoubtedly face.

Given that the volume of students set to enter university between now and 2030 is set to rise to an extent that universities are currently unable to accommodate, much needs to change within the HE landscape in the UK. Universities will soon need to make plans regarding: the suitability and size of campus'; the need for a consistent, happy and appropriately remunerated workforce which may look very different demographically from previous academic staff; and the drive from the government to widen participation, which will create a more culturally and educationally diverse student body than ever before. In addition, as universities compete with each other to grow their student numbers, they will also continue to ensure satisfaction, as measured by the National Student Survey; completion rates and value for money, as measured by the Office for Students; and engagement and effective teaching, as measured through the Teaching Excellence Framework. The shift is clearly towards more measurement and appraisal of performance, on both a macro and a micro level, and institutions cannot expect this to change in the short term. As such, universities must consider approaches and programmes which can be taught in innovative ways in dynamic settings by experiential facilitators rather than traditional lecturers. From my perceptions and experiences within higher education; both as a student, a teacher, a learning designer and a manager; whilst the lecture does solve the problem of how information can be dispersed to large student cohorts, it creates many other problems with regards to student engagement, the testing of learning, developing skills and creating strong relationships between teachers and students – all of which are made more difficult if they are expected to happen within a lecture theatre.

Despite the impossibility of this research being replicated in full in any other setting; further research into the effect of experiential education upon the development of

undergraduate business management students' soft skills may offer valuable benefits to educators and students, should this proof of concept be tested in future.

8. In conclusion

In conclusion, this research study explored the nature of students' soft skills development in the context of experiential education in contrasting business management undergraduate courses. The study found a clear link between the practice of a holistic, integrated experiential approach and the development of a breadth and depth of student soft skills within undergraduate students in this setting. The findings of this study, along with the original contributions to knowledge, offer lecturers who are unfamiliar with experiential pedagogy; novice or experienced experiential teaching practitioners, leaders and programme designers within higher education; and researchers, an insight into the potential benefits of experiential teaching, the effect of this pedagogy, and the development of soft skills.

Additionally, through the answering of sub-questions within the study, the paper discusses: the ways in which students who are taught using experiential learning activities participated within their learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom; the ways in which experiential learning activities can be supported by teachers; the specific soft skills which are developed in the context of experiential learning activities both inside and outside of the classroom; and, the relationships between experiential learning activities and soft skill development in the context of different course routes.

It can be concluded that experiential education can foster student-led learning which, in turn, can have positive effects upon a student's soft skill development, and that experiential teaching methodologies can be fused together to effectively integrate in order to build a pedagogy which will benefit students enrolled upon traditional degree programmes and also degree apprentices who split their time between a higher education institution and their workplace.

Having conducted this study, I firmly assert that higher education institutions have a duty to equip students with the skills they need to succeed in their future lives and careers. As such, it is the author's hope that experiential teaching practice will continue to grow and develop until it is seen as a more recognised teaching methodology within higher education. Business schools and entire educational institutions should develop a greater understanding of the pedagogic approach.

It is incumbent upon universities and higher education institutions to ensure teachers are equipped with the skills and attributes to deliver a modern, innovative teaching approach which offers a multitude of benefits to their students. To this regard, experiential education is a powerful tool for them to utilise and I urge institutions and learning designers to take action in order to equip graduates with the depth and breadth of soft skills which they will inevitably require during their uncertain futures.

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Appendices

Appendix 3i

Title: Principles of Business Module Overview

Principles of Business schedule - Semester 2 - 2016/17

Assessment A

Coursework/Business Report (Hand-in 4th January?)

Case Study – Stage one content 1800 words

Wk 11 – Organisational Behaviour (lectures to be pre-recorded by RB)

Wk 12 – Introduction to Management (lectures - RB)

Assessment B

MCQ Exam of Stage 2 material (Friday 16th February?)

Stage 3 – Simulated Placement: Business in Practice

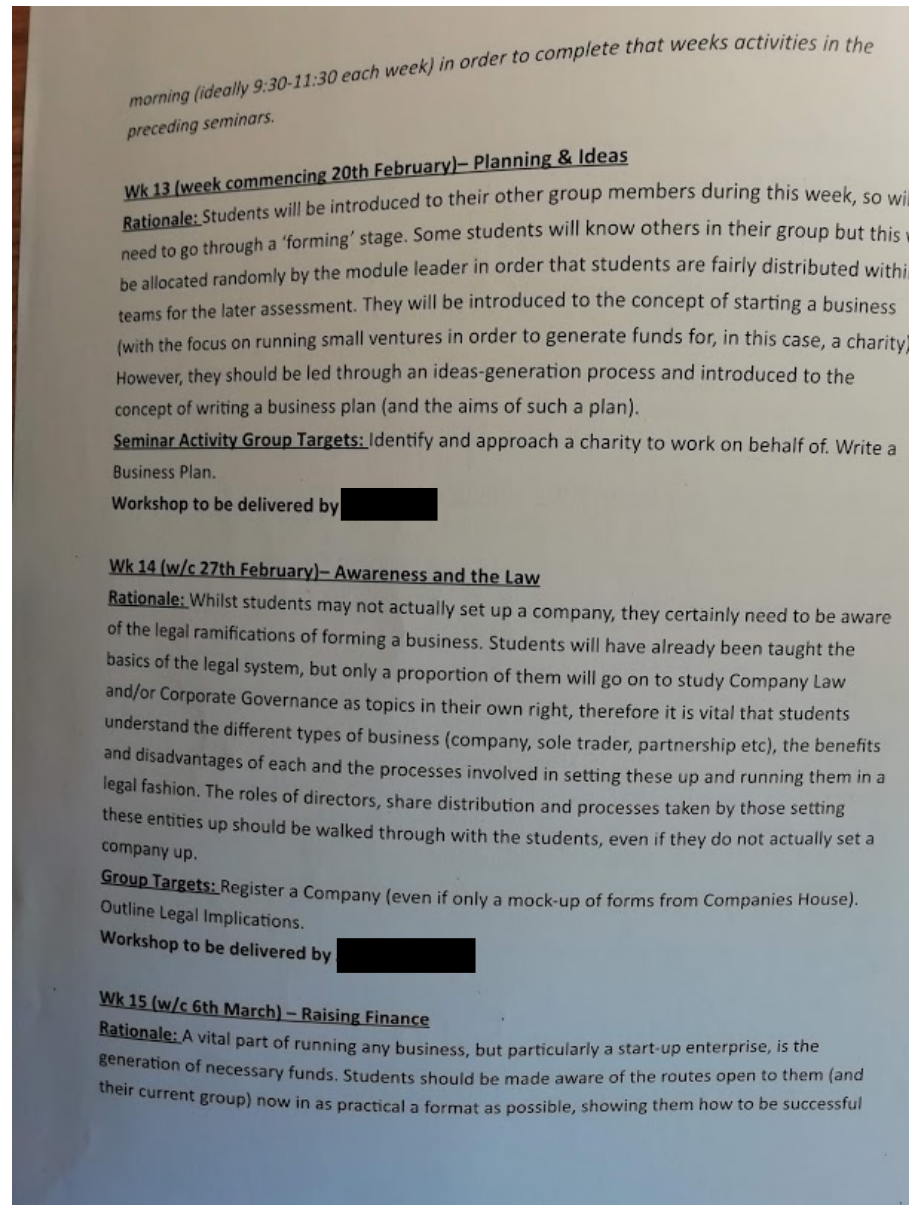
The following six weeks to include one 2-hour workshop per cohort (led by an industry expert) + two 1.5-hour seminars per group (with a 'lead tutor/mentor').

The aim of the six week period is to give students the opportunity to learn experientially in order to gain real-world understanding of the questions posed and challenges faced when starting and running a business. In order to provide some context and guidance students will be asked to meet certain minimum requirements within their weekly activities (see group targets) and will work on behalf of a charity of their choice in order to raise funds. How they go about raising funds and which charity they choose to work on behalf of will be determined by each group independently, though they will be advised of the difficulties that exist in working with larger charities. It is important for them to be in a position to generate funds and run through the variety of processes and procedures as smoothly as possible in order that they will have a range of learning prior to their assessed presentation which will take place shortly after the six-week period.

Below I have listed some rationale for each activity within the six-week stage, though it is important to note that the aim of the workshops is as much to inspire and motivate as it is to inform. Students should be able to use what they learn from the workshops on a Monday

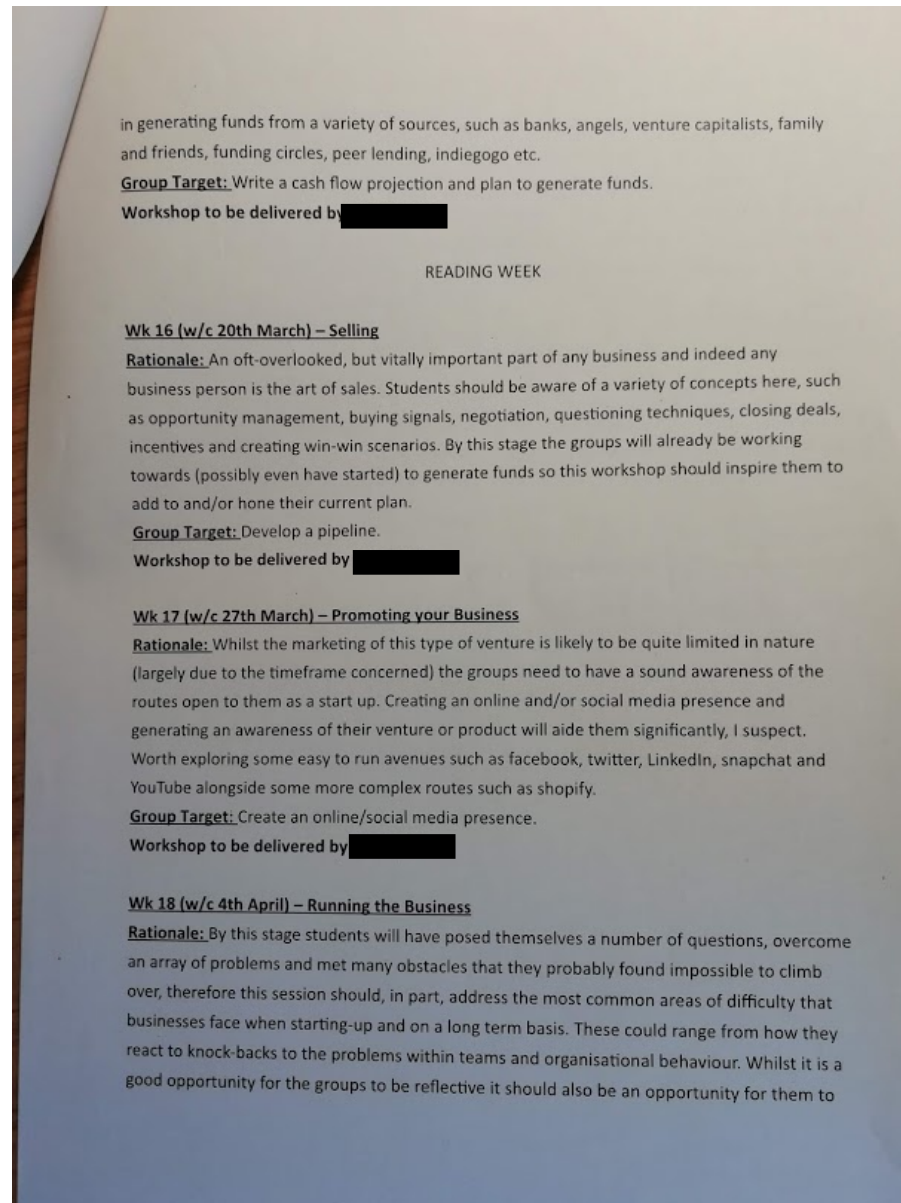
Appendix 3i

Title: Principles of Business Module Overview



Appendix 3i

Title: Principles of Business Module Overview



Appendix 3i

Title: Principles of Business Module Overview

begin to develop their presentations (on which they will be assessed) by learning about reporting, preparing live pitches (as to where they might take the business if it were to extend beyond this ringfenced period), measuring success (through KPI's and qualitatively) and considering changes they would make in future ventures.

Group Target: Prepare a detailed Business Report and Present Findings.

Workshop to be delivered by [REDACTED]

Assessment C

Presentation of Business Report (Date TBC)

Stage 4 – Reflection: Leading, Managing and Divesting

Wk 19 – Influencing Organisational Behaviour & Leadership RB

Wk 20 – Mergers & Acquisitions and The Cessation of Companies WH

Assessment D

Reflective Report (Date TBC following term end)

Appendix 3.ii

Title: Participant Information Sheet



Section A: The Research Project

Title of project:

'To what extent does experiential teaching support and impact on undergraduate degree level Business Management students?'

Brief summary of research.

This is a study of the use of experiential education teaching methods within a Business Management course at Higher Education level. I am interested in discovering if, how and to what extent experiential education impacts on students and their learning, engagement and enjoyment of the level 4 Principles of Business module.

Purpose of the study

This is part of my EdD Doctorate in Education study at Anglia Ruskin University.

Name of your Supervisor

Dr Robert Cawley

Why have I been asked to participate?

You are being approached and are invited to participate due to the fact that you are a level 4 student studying Principles of Business in the 2016/17 academic year and within a seminar group being taught by myself, Rod Brazier.

How many people will be asked to participate?

Students within two seminar groups are being invited to participate in the study. This equates to 46 students in total.

What are the likely benefits of taking part?

It is unlikely that there will be any direct benefits to you in participating, though the study may yield some useful information for you as a student in gaining some understanding of the processes taken by me within this piece of research.

Can I refuse to take part?

Yes, absolutely. You can refuse to take part in the research and do not have to give a reason for this refusal. You are not being coerced into taking part in any way. The study will protect the anonymity of all participants in the final write-up and in any published work but any individual is entitled to refuse.

As part of my research I will be carrying out field observations. Here I will note down anything of interest that occurs in lectures and/or seminars. This could contain (but is not limited to) words spoken by a student, the way in which an individual or group participates in an exercise, body language of an individual/group and questions raised within class. As part of each seminar students will also be given time to reflect upon the weeks activities. This reflective log will be shared with me and I will comment back on the log to offer my own thoughts on their reflections.

You will be invited to take part in a focus group following the end of experiential project and the findings from these will form my thesis write-up.

If you do not wish to participate in the research at all please write to me with your name, student ID number and signature and hand this to me or email me with these details to state that you wish to opt-out.

You will also have the opportunity to opt-out of the research at any time. By opting out you will not be included within my field notes and the research findings. The deadline date for this opt-out is two weeks following results for the Principles of Business module being released.

Has the study got ethical approval?

The study has ethical approval from an ethics committee at Anglia Ruskin University.

Has the organisation where you are carrying out the research given permission?

I have sought, and been granted permission from the institution at which you study and Anglia Ruskin University to conduct this research. This, though, is a general permission to approach participants. It is the decision of each individual student as to whether you would like to take part in the research.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The primary purpose of this study is to develop a wider understanding of experiential education in Higher Education in order to satisfy requirements of my Doctoral studies and to obtain a Doctorate in Education. The findings will be written up in a thesis and I anticipate that these findings will be shared within the academic community through journal articles and conference presentations.

Contact for further information

rod.brazier@pgr.anglia.ac.uk or 07711 388410

Section B: Your Participation in the Research Project

What will you be asked to do?

There are three ways I plan to gather data for this piece of research, as follows;

Field Notes

I will make field notes after each class has concluded. They will be a descriptive, reflective and personal account of what I have witnessed within the lesson, the behaviours students have exhibited and any observed phenomena.

I aim to capture data by observing the participants in the classroom and noting down interesting actions. I will observe this behaviour over the course of the six-week experiential teaching period, throughout all workshops and seminars for two seminar groups.

You will not need to take any special actions to be part of this research method. In fact, I urge that you are as natural as possible in order that the data captured is as accurate as it might be.

Focus Group Interview

I plan on asking participants questions about your experiences, your feelings and your attitudes towards experiential education, the degree to which it has or has not aided their learning and the extent to which it may aid them in future studies or their career. I plan on holding focus groups which will contain approximately five-six students per group. These students will be mixed purposively with other students they have worked with during seminars.

You will be invited to a focus group which will take place following the experiential project – you do not have to take part in this focus group but I would welcome the opportunity to gain as much open, honest feedback as possible from you. The interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes for each focus group.

Reflective learning journals

My own personal reflective learning journal will be completed within 48 hours after a class has taken place. This will enable me to digest field notes and to give thought to events in the intervening period. Students will be given the opportunity to also reflect

through either hand-written diaries, through online blogs or through typed journals or email correspondence with me, the tutor.

This will be completed by you, as an individual participant) and by me on a weekly basis, where I will set aside 15 minutes at the end of every seminar session in order to help facilitate this.

Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?

I would like to be clear about the distinction between confidentiality and anonymity. If something is confidential it is given in confidence i.e. it is secret or private and is usually marked 'confidential'. If something is anonymous, it means that an individual cannot be identified from the information. Statistical data is an example of anonymous information. I plan on writing up my findings in a doctoral thesis and then potentially in journal publications and to be presented at conferences, so the findings will not be confidential. They will, however, be anonymous as all names will be removed as will any indications of who individuals are within my write-ups. Your names will be anonymised (with fake names used in their stead) and there will be no reference to any personal data or identifying features.

My doctoral supervisors will have access to the data I collect, though this will be anonymised prior to them viewing it.

The results will be written up in anonymised format. Every attempt will be made to ensure anonymity, but it may not be possible to guarantee complete anonymity. It is possible that participants may be identified by their colleagues or peers if not by the general public.

Will quotes be used within the study?

I plan on using quotes from participants (both verbal and directly from written communications) in dissemination, which may increase the likelihood that participants could be identified by colleagues or peers.

Are there any possible disadvantages or risks to taking part?

There are no risks to your physical safety or well-being as you will be taking part in classroom activities in the same way as non-participants of the research will be. One

risk that you should be aware of is the use of your own time and the small effect this might have on you, should you choose to take part in one of the focus groups.

There is a risk to confidentiality, though I am mitigating against this risk by ensuring that field notes are not seen by anyone else other than in an anonymised format. Additionally, all participants will be given pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity as much as possible.

Additionally, agreement to participate in the study does not affect any of your legal rights.

Whether I can withdraw at any time, and how.

You can withdraw from the study at any time and without giving a reason. I understand that you may not feel comfortable in telling me directly that you would no longer like to take part in the research so I would be happy for you to email me or hand me a letter to inform me that you do not wish to be a participant.

Information that I may have collected up until that point might be useful to my study. You have the option to withdraw from the study and have your data removed or to withdraw, but still be happy for me to use any anonymised data that you I collected up to that point.

I must make it clear that you do not have to answer any focus group interview questions that you do not wish to answer, you do not have to reflect in any set format or even reflect at all and you have the right to be removed from my observational field notes.

Whether there are any special precautions you must take before, during or after taking part in the study.

I have sought permission for this study from both the Principal and Dean of the institution at which you study.

If there is any information that you may tell me that I would need to disclose to someone else (e.g. if I feel you are at risk or if you reveal anything of an illegal nature) you must be aware that I will need to take appropriate steps to inform the relevant person(s) such as the Head of Student Services or the Dean of the Business School.

What will happen to any information/data/samples that are collected from you?

All hard-copy, paper data will be securely held within a lockable drawer or locker at all times whilst not being worked on by me. All electronic data will be on password-protected computers or google documents shared only between you (as an individual participant) and myself as the researcher. All data (field/observation notes, hard and soft copy reflections and focus group recorded interviews and transcripts) will be kept until my doctoral studies have been completed and any journal articles or conference presentations have been written, though I will be limiting this to within 5 years, at which time the information/data/samples collected will be destroyed. After this point it will be deleted and destroyed. Personal identifiable information will be kept separately from the data as I will ensure that participants will be assigned a code number and identifying information separated from the data at the earliest opportunity following the focus group interviews.

Will you get to see the focus group interview transcripts?

Yes. I will be carrying out qualitative interviews with participants, and you will be shown a copy of the transcript as soon as is practical after the interviews. You will be free to question and amend any comments made by yourself or free to ask that the comment(s) be removed from the data.

Will you get to see a summary of research findings?

It is good practice to send participants a summary of research findings wherever possible, so I plan to do this following the entire data capture process. This would be a summary of the data collected overall rather than your individual results. You will receive this by email as soon as is practically possible following the data collection.

Contact details for complaints.

If participants have any complaints about the study, you should be encouraged to speak to me or my Doctoral Supervisor (Dr Robert Cawley – Robert.cawley@anglia.ac.uk) in the first instance. I also, however, enclose access to details about Anglia Ruskin University's complaints procedure, as follows;

Email address: complaints@anglia.ac.uk

Postal address: Office of the Secretary and Clerk, Anglia Ruskin University, Bishop Hall Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1SQ.

As a student your usual complaints procedure is still open to you. This can be found within the Student Handbook within the online learning environment (OLE).

Date 06.02.17

V2.0

Appendix 3.iii

Title: Participant Consent Form



NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

Working title of the project: *'To what extent does experiential teaching support and impact on undergraduate degree level Business Management students?'*

Main investigator and contact details: Rod Brazier rodney.brazier@pgr.anglia.ac.uk
or 07711 388410

Research supervisory team: Doctoral Supervisor (Dr Robert Cawley –
Robert.cawley@anglia.ac.uk)

1. I agree to take part in the above research. I have read the Participant Information Sheet (Date 06.04.17, V2.0) for the study. I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason.
3. I am free to ask any questions at any time before and during the study.
4. I understand what will happen to the data collected from me for the research.
5. I have been provided with a copy of this form and the Participant Information Sheet.
6. I understand that data collected through observations made by the researcher in class and any reflections made by me in my reflective journal may be used within the research.
7. I understand that quotes from me might be used in the dissemination of the research.
8. I understand that the focus group interview will be recorded.

Data Protection: I agree to the University¹ processing personal data which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such data for any purposes connected with the Research Project as outlined to me*

Name of participant

(print).....Signed.....Date.....

Name of person

witnessing consent (print).....Signed.....

Date.....

I WISH TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY.

If you wish to withdraw from the research at any time, please speak to the researcher or email them at rod.brazier@pgr.anglia.ac.uk stating the title of the research.

You do not have to give a reason for why you would like to withdraw.

Please let the researcher know whether you are not happy for them to use any data from you collected to date in the write up and dissemination of the research.

Date 6.2.17

V1.0

¹ "The University" includes Anglia Ruskin University and its Associate Colleges.

Appendix 3iv

Title: Braun and Clark Thematic Analysis' Phases

Phase 1 - Familiarising yourself with the data	It is important to understand that I arrived at the analysis with prior knowledge of the data, given that I collected it myself. I immersed myself in the data in an active way, familiarised myself with the depth and breadth of it, read the data in detail and searched for meanings and patterns as actively as possible. During this phase I took notes and begin to mark ideas for coding which I went back to later in the process.
Phase 2 - Generating initial codes	Here I organised my data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005) by identifying features of the data which appeared to be interesting in that it offered data regarding the exploration statement and research sub-questions, or a phenomenon at hand (Boyatzis, 1998). I approached the data with some specific questions that related to my proposed coding, but I was also mindful about letting the themes emerge naturally, as previously stated. This stage involved working methodically and systematically through the entire data set, giving equal attention to each item and identifying repeated patterns across the sets. The coding was undertaken manually through print outs of the data which were colour coded, cut and pasted onto themed coloured-card and then studied to ensure that I had identified appropriate codes and matched them correctly with data extracts. Crucially, I looked to code all data extracts, so as not to leave any data uncoded, for I did not want to miss any crucial findings which may emerge as important later on in the research process. Additionally, I noted that data was coded in as many themes as they fall into, irrespective of volume of cross-overs.
Phase 3 - Searching for themes	This involved sorting the codes into potential themes, for which I drew upon mind-maps and tables for assistance. Nothing was abandoned at this stage as extracts were not looked at in detail until the next stage, where it became clear whether themes need to be discarded, separated, refined or combined.
Phase 4 - Reviewing the themes	Braun and Clarke recommend two levels of review; level 1 required me to read all the collated extracts for each theme and consider whether they formed a cohesive pattern. If they did not, I was unable to move on to level 2, as no patterns were evident. This prompted me to consider if the theme itself might be problematic or whether the data extracts simply did not fit in the codes allocated. Level 2 considered the validity of themes in relation to the data set and whether the thematic map reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole.

	This prompted a re-reading of the data to ascertain whether themes worked and to code any additional data which had been missed in earlier coding stages, whilst also remembering that coding must stop at some point. IE. When the refinements are no longer adding anything substantial.
Phase 5 - Defining and naming themes	Here I identified the essence of what each theme was about and which aspect of the data each theme captured, to identify interesting elements. For each theme I wrote a detailed analysis and identified the story it was telling, whilst considering how it contributed to the broader narrative. I also started to name the codes to synthesise for the reader the meaning of the theme.
Phase 6 - Producing the report	When I had a set of fully worked-out themes my task was to develop an overarching narrative in an uncomplicated way, which convinces the reader of the merit and validity. It was important for this to be concise, logical, non-repetitive and interesting, with vivid examples that capture the essence of what it is I am demonstrating. It contains a write-up which enhances the data with a coherent argument related to the exploration statement and research sub-question.

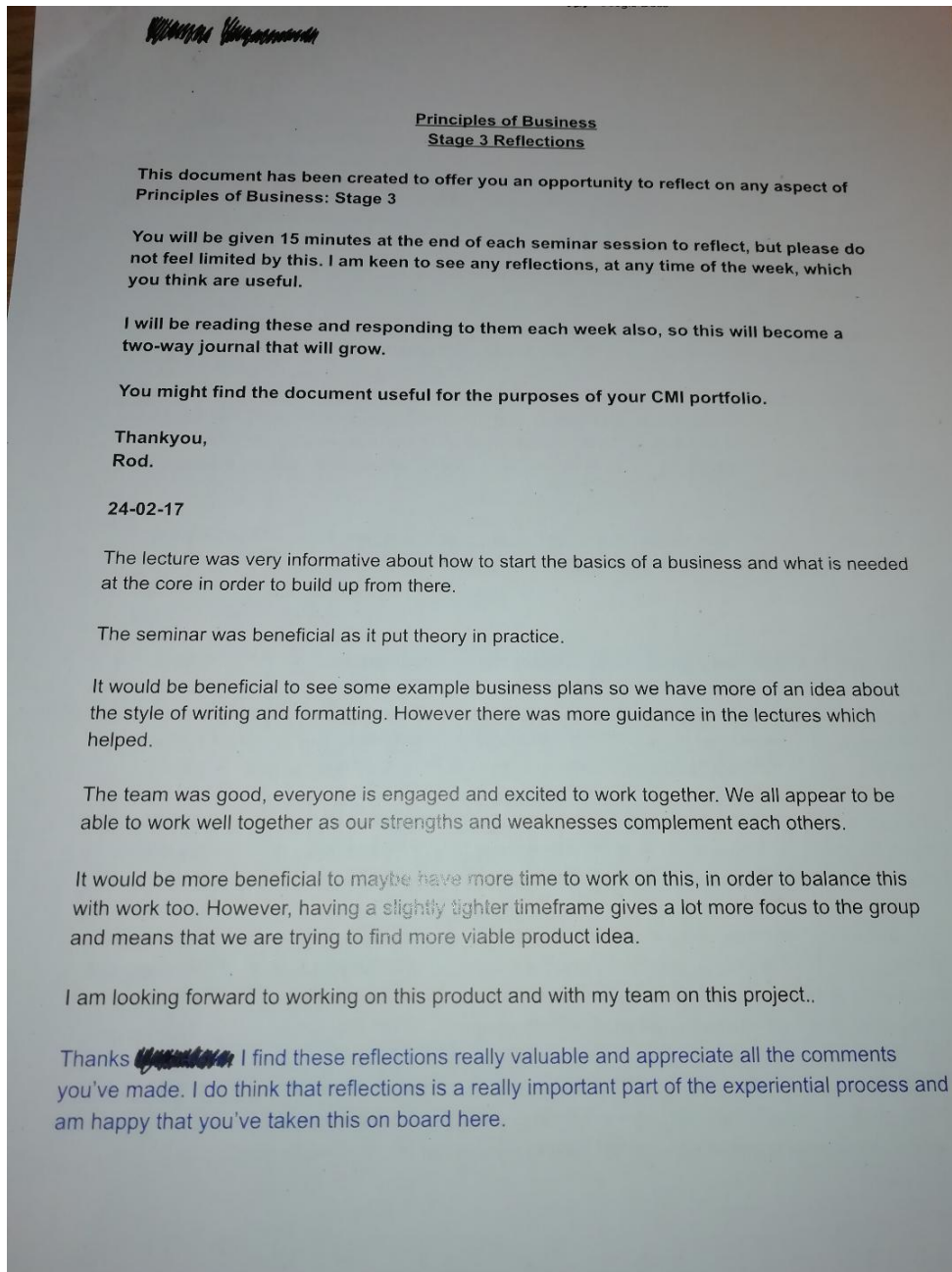
Braun and Clarke suggest a number of questions which a researcher may wish to ask towards the end phases of analysis; 'What does this theme mean?', 'What are the assumptions underlying it?', 'What are the implications of this theme?', 'What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?', and 'What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?' They recommend these questions guiding the analysis once a clear sense of the thematic map has been established. The researchers also list a number of pitfalls; the need to ensure that the data is actually analysed, not merely listed, being careful not to use the exploration statement or the research sub-questions as the themes and ensuring that analysis is strong, coherent and consistent. They also state one of the main advantages of thematic analysis as a method of data analysis is flexibility. However, this is also a disadvantage, as the researcher must take care to develop specific guidelines in order to identify which aspects to focus on. These questions and considerations were kept at the forefront of my actions when undertaking the thematic analysis

In summary, Braun and Clark argued that a rigorous thematic analysis can produce insightful analysis which explores the research statement and answers the research sub-questions and that the method is a flexible approach which can be used across a range of epistemologies, exploration statements and research questions.

Appendix 3v

Title: Sample of Data – Degree Apprentice Reflection

Sample of reflection from Degree Apprentice – print-out of reflective journal completed via google document online:



Appendix 3vi

Title: Sample of Data - Extract from Student Focus Group

is good at finance. You could pick your team that's good at doing certain things. It's more innovative, because you can get someone that is creative, someone who good at presenting and someone who's good at marketing they all help each other. If you allow everyone choose their teams you could just get a group of friends.

P2: Another thing that I've heard of other uni's doing is that you have to submit your presentation but also just the slides that you've done. So you submit a group one but also everyone's individual work as well. You get a group mark based on exactly what you have done

RB: To what extent do you think that helps the whole process?

P1: Better than like you get the points that you think you deserve. You're gonna do more for them [sic] slides.

P3: You'd have more accountables [sic]

P4: But are you marking that on the group as well?

P1: Yeah

P4: 'Cos if you're marking on the group you're want everyone in the group members to have a similar quality presentation.

P2: No you'd submit a presentation as a whole but then you'd submit separate ones if your slides that you did individually.

P4: But then I was thinking that when you put it together as one whole presentation... Say if we were a group and I'd done a poor couple of slides. That would pull the mark down for the whole presentation. So you'd want to help me slightly.

P3: But then you'd know who's done that ..

P4: Yeah you'd pick that up but then it's pull to group mark down as well. Which will affect you a slightly.

P2: Yeah, maybe if you had an individual mark as well as the team mark. But then the only issue with that is like, for example with our group we all did our individual work separately and then we came together and improved it collectively. So you still might have the situation where you are submitting work that other people might have done.

P5: But then you've also got to take into account that people might have been allocated a smaller part of the presentation, say if you were given two slides and someone might have done 5 slides, then it's gonna look poor on that person even if they've out in the same amount of work in them [sic] two slides.

Appendix 3vii

Title: Sample of Data - Extract from paper-based reflective journal submitted by a UCAS student

Thank you for taking my hackathon idea on! I think it went very well + there was a lot of valuable feedback given, awareness also boosted for everyone's project (including extra orders for us!

Next, we will develop social media & get another order in! The lecture was a great example of how we can develop this further, just need to make sure I chase up people so that they are in next week.

I can see that there have been some amazingly precise sends made by your group this week. Well done. I'm excited seeing the updates.

Remember to push forward any ideas or feedback that you have (like the hackathon). I'm always happy to try to make things work.

feeling quite frustrated this week. A lot of work has been put in to this project by a couple of the team, delegated work from previous weeks. Still hasn't been completed by other members or in ~~the~~ for. I have sent another final reminder and have had one reply that it will be done, ~~but not yet~~ which is positive but still leaves a significant amount outstanding. finding this a bit strange as the same has happened for multiple modules, leaving a significant amount to be done from multiple angles. Time to dig deep

Appendix 3viii

Title: Sample of Data - Personal observations made within project period

PoB My Reflections

Week 1 - Topic 13

Lecture

~~Bill~~ was fantastic, he outlined many key areas in a motivating and informative way, sometimes drawing on theory but more often than not drawing on his own experiences in the business world. He gave some models that the students might find useful for their group task this week (writing a business plan) and used the words business plan a lot! He really demonstrated how important it is to write plans and objectives and to keep to them.

It was noticeable how many students were present. More for this lecture than any other PoB lecture this year - this might have been helped by my announcement that there was going to be a register sent round and also that I expected them to be there (I stopped short of stating 'compulsory' or mentioning any ramifications about not going). Lots of active note taking and a few questions (though not many as Bill didn't stop for gaps too much). Some students there who I haven't even seen before.

Should do a % check of students attended, compare this to previous weeks (can do an estimate of last week) and future weeks also.

~~Bill~~ mentioned the assessment but only really in passing - it was more about the charity and the plan. Used a great symbol of a baby elephant as a theme that he drew upon throughout.

Seminar group 2

Two groups only had 2 people in at start and one only had 1 person. Allowed ~~Bill~~ to move groups to prevent him from being on own. This was also a problem in one of the other groups according to another tutor. I need to have a contingency plan for this and possibly move groups around slightly after this week when attendance and any other problems are known.

I found that rather than spending too long on the intro today I wanted to get quickly to the brainstorm phase as I am excited to know what the students will do, how they feel about an activity and learning being set out in this way. It really feels like my baby, that I believe in and something that could cause some great ripples for ~~the project~~ overall.

The ideas to come out of this seminar group included;

bowling night - they were aiming at 100 attendees for this - could be too high? But if they scale down it seems achievable.

Football match - for a child with a life threatening illness (like Bradley at Sunderland). Might need high profile names to make this a success? Should I lead them into thinking low key and making it Pearson College vs someone else?

Title: Sample of thematic analysis which themed data from focus groups, reflective journals and personal observations into themes found within findings chapter:



Title: Sample of complete thematic analysis of data following coding



Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
1	Creativity and Idea Generation			1	The ability of students to design creative solutions to the problems they faced and to generate ideas which would make the project a success in terms of raising awareness or funds for the charity which they linked themselves to.
2	Teamwork			1	The ability for students to work productively, harmoniously and collaboratively with other members of their group to meet objectives.
	"	1	Collaboration	1	The ways in which team members worked together to achieve a common goal.
	"	2	Relationships	1	The ability for students to form relationships with other members of their team.
3	Communication			1	The ability for a student or students to impart information through a variety of mediums, pertinently, in the case of this study, through written, oral, presentational and electronic means.
	"	3	Written and oral	1	The ability to impart information to peers, external partners and teachers through written and oral means.
	"	4	Electronic	1	The ability for the students to communicate through varied electronic means. These include, but are not limited to; emails, WhatsApp, google hangout, skype and conference calls.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
5	Education Methods			2	
	"	5	Effect of teaching methods - Lectures	2	The ways in which traditional lecture-style teaching impacted upon students
	"	6	Effect of Experiential Education Methods	2	The ways in which experiential teaching impacted upon students
	"	7	Experiential Education - Real World Learning	2	The ability of students within the project to demonstrate an understanding of the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical, real world knowledge and the methods of learning which aided the development of this – often termed as authentic learning.
	"	8	Learning derived from experiential education	2	The ways in which experiential education led to learning for the students.
	"	9	Assessment Focus	2	The ways in which students focused on their summative, end of term assessment instead of, or alongside, their learning activities within lectures or experiential seminars.
	"	10	Role of the teacher	2	The ways in which the teachers conducted their teaching practice within lessons.
	"	11	Freedom	2	The ways in which students were free to act, think or speak in any way they chose and the ability for them to control the destiny of their project.
	"	12	Student-Led Learning	2	The demonstration of learner autonomy and independence with students having the responsibility of their learning placed in their hands.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
6	Decision Making			3	
	"	13	Critical Thinking	3	The ways in which students objectively analyse and evaluate an issue in order to form a judgement
	"	14	Problem Solving	3	The ways in which students undertook a process of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues
7	People Management	15	People Management	3	The way in which students managed those around them, with particular pertinence to those within their project group.
	"	16	Delegation	3	The ways in which students undertook the act of giving control, authority, a job, a duty or a task, to another person

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
8	Project Management			3	The ways in which students undertook the application of processes, methods, skills, knowledge and experience to achieve specific project objectives
	"	17	Individual Roles	3	The ways in which students undertook tasks on their own and the way in which groups delegated tasks to specific individuals rather than working collaboratively in partnerships or small groups.
	"	18	A Structured Approach	3	The ability of a student to structure the management of their project and its associated tasks in a formulaic and organised way.
	"	19	Time Management - Short Timeframe	3	The ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively, regardless of the limited time-span of the project.
	"	20	Time Management - Reading Week and Breaks	3	The ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively during periods where they were not physically in the institution or in class.
	"	21	Time Management - A Personal Skill	3	The ways in which students demonstrated the ability to use their time effectively or productively throughout the project.
	"	22	The Impact of Jobs and Outside Interests	3	The ways in which students had to overcome conflicting priorities from their personal lives and the impact those had upon their working on the project.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
9	Business Skills			3	The ability for a student to recognise what traits, qualities or behaviours are needed within a business environment.
	"	23	Entrepreneurship	3	The ways in which students innovated and demonstrated the ability to be creative to generate new ideas for their business venture.
	"	24	Commercial Awareness	3	The ability for students to see commercial opportunities to make money or to grow their organisation.
	"	25	Digital Skills in the Workplace	3	The ways in which students demonstrated the knowledge and ability to determine information needs from digital technology sources, and to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to input, access, organize, integrate and assess digital resources as well as to construct new knowledge, create media expressions and communicate with others through digital means.
	"	26	Responsible, Ethical Behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility	3	The ways in which students demonstrated moral professional standards, honesty, responsibility to both their micro and macro environments and to show social responsibility whilst acting corporately.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
10	Personal Skills & Qualities			3	The ability for a student to show the skills that they have, or have demonstrated, which are pertinent to them personally. This encompasses character traits, attributes and individual soft skills.
	"	27	Independence, autonomy, ownership and accountability	3	The ability for a student to work on their own, to be pro-active in assigning themselves tasks and to be accountable for the tasks they are responsible for and the role they hold.
	"	28	Productivity/work ethic	3	The ability for a student to be productive, to work hard in achieving their goals or completing their tasks and to demonstrate the understanding that hard work is important to ensure success
	"	29	Drive and determination	3	The ability for students to have goals and/or a purpose and to resolve to do whatever is required to ensure those are realised.
	"	30	Resilience	3	The ability for students to handle and overcome pressure, to demonstrate grit, to fight challenges and to overcome adversity and to manage stressful situations effectively.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
	"	31	Flexibility and Adaptability	3	The ability for students to adapt to differing situations faced by their group, to not be too constrained by their tasks and to change direction either individually or as a group, should the landscape of the project warrant it.
	"	32	Handling Friction	3	The ability for students to work with people in a productive and efficient manner despite the interpersonal relationships demonstrating some friction between individuals within the group.
	"	33	Emotional intelligence	3	The capability of individuals to recognise their own emotions and those of others, as well as being able to discern between different feelings and then to label them appropriately, before using those labels to act appropriately and behave in a positive and influential way for themselves and those around them.
	"	34	Confidence	3	The ways in which students demonstrated a feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of their own abilities or qualities and/or in having a feeling or belief that they can have faith in or rely on someone or something
	"	35	Leadership	3	The ability for students to take the lead of a group, to take the lead with regards to the projects and to set a positive example to those around them.

Appendix 4i

Title: Table of Themes and Sub-Themes Emanating from Findings

Theme Number	Main themes identified from the data	Sub-theme Number	Sub themes Identified from the data	Research question to which theme/sub-theme relates	Definition of theme/sub-theme (within the context of experiential learning)
11	Reflexivity			3	The ability for a student to demonstrate reflective thought, to reflect both 'on' and 'in' action and to show personal and professional development and growth.
	"	36	Journaling & Reflections	3	The ability for a student to critically journal and reflect upon the actions they have taken and the consequences of such actions.
	"	37	Accepting Feedback	3	The ability for a student to listen to, accept and act upon feedback they have been presented with.
	"	38	Self-awareness	3	The ability of students to show understanding of their thoughts, impact of their actions and an appreciation of the position they hold within a group setting.
	"	39	Personal Growth	3	The ability for a student to demonstrate growth and development in an area of their lives, whether that be professionally, educationally or personally.

Appendix 4ii

Title: Business Mission and Vision

Aid a Change

About Us

Our business, mission and vision



Helping to raise awareness for smaller charities to Aid a change

At Aid a change we are dedicated to helping to raise awareness for the smaller charities who are not as well known. From stopping animals cruelty to helping support children with disabilities we believe no cause is too small. What's our mission? Simple to connect local communities to the charities around them. We believe firmly in the idea of nurturing community spirit and building long lasting networks in order to Aid a change.

Appendix 4iii

Title: Professional Portfolio

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Description of business and product / service	5
Market Analysis	6
Unique Selling Points	6
Competitor Analysis	6
High-level plan of how you intend to market the product /services	7
SWOT Analysis	8
Revenue projections - be prepared to justify your reasoning behind this	9
Consider creating business model canvas as a tool to aid in the presentation of your business model	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Legal	12
Cash Flow Projections	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Marketing Plan	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Develop a pipeline	15

Appendix 4iv

Title: Marketing Plan

Marketing Plan

Our marketing plan will be heavily dominated by social media and from this word of mouth. Market research has shown that word of mouth is the most reliable and successful form of marketing but also the most hard to guarantee. Through the use of social media we will be able to reach a large demographic and therefore have the greatest chance of word of mouth being consistent and positive.

We will focus on three main social media channels; twitter, facebook and instagram. As these are the most popular channels, fit in with our message and brand and will reach all members of our target market.

Why Instagram?

The demographic of Instagram users is young 14-30 year olds, meaning we will be able to target a youthful market through our posts.

Instagramming your food is becoming increasingly popular in modern society with scientific research even being performed in order to indicate why (cite source 1).

Hashtags with dedicated followings now make it easier to browse food and so by making use of these hashtags within our Instagram posts we will be able to garner a wide range of interest, increasing brand recognisability

How it Will Be Used

We will post both photos of recipes in the cookbook, reposts from followers that recreate the meals as well as new meal ideas that could inspire and encourage followers to cook. This methodology will be more inclusive of our customers, providing a continued user experience after purchase.

Posts will be varied, including single photos, videos, and multiple photos of the cooking process.

Why Facebook?

The average time spent on Facebook is 20+ minutes, and so posting case studies and more lengthy content will be better received on Facebook

The demographic of our Facebook following is likely to be older than the Twitter following and so the focus can be less light hearted and deliver more hard hitting messages without differing too far from our brand.

How It Will Be Used

Facebook will be used as a way to interact with our customers in a more personal way, with

Appendix 4v

Title: Social Media Plan

comments being used as a forum between both ourselves and other consumers, to discuss, ask questions or just chat.

Once the cookbook launches, we will promote the book by posting links to buy the book, and customer reviews. As well as the videos of our meals being cooked and links to selected recipes.

It will also be used to share and post messages, videos and news articles/reports from other source.

Why Twitter?

In keeping with the quick and short nature of Twitter we can promote and emphasise the cookbook as quick and simple meals, appealing to the fast past generation that will be using Twitter.

How It Will Be Used

This will be used to retweet and promote messages from our Charity partner, Magic Breakfast, any news articles or reports related to our area and any comical videos or tweets also related to our company.

This will generate a base following and will start to get our name out there and will be a quick and easy way to interact with our following.

About Our Website

We will have a dedicated member of the team constantly updating our website so it will have the most up to date information on our product, our charity partner and the company itself.

It will also have links to each of our social streams and give customers access to contact addresses and numbers for the company should they wish to get in touch.

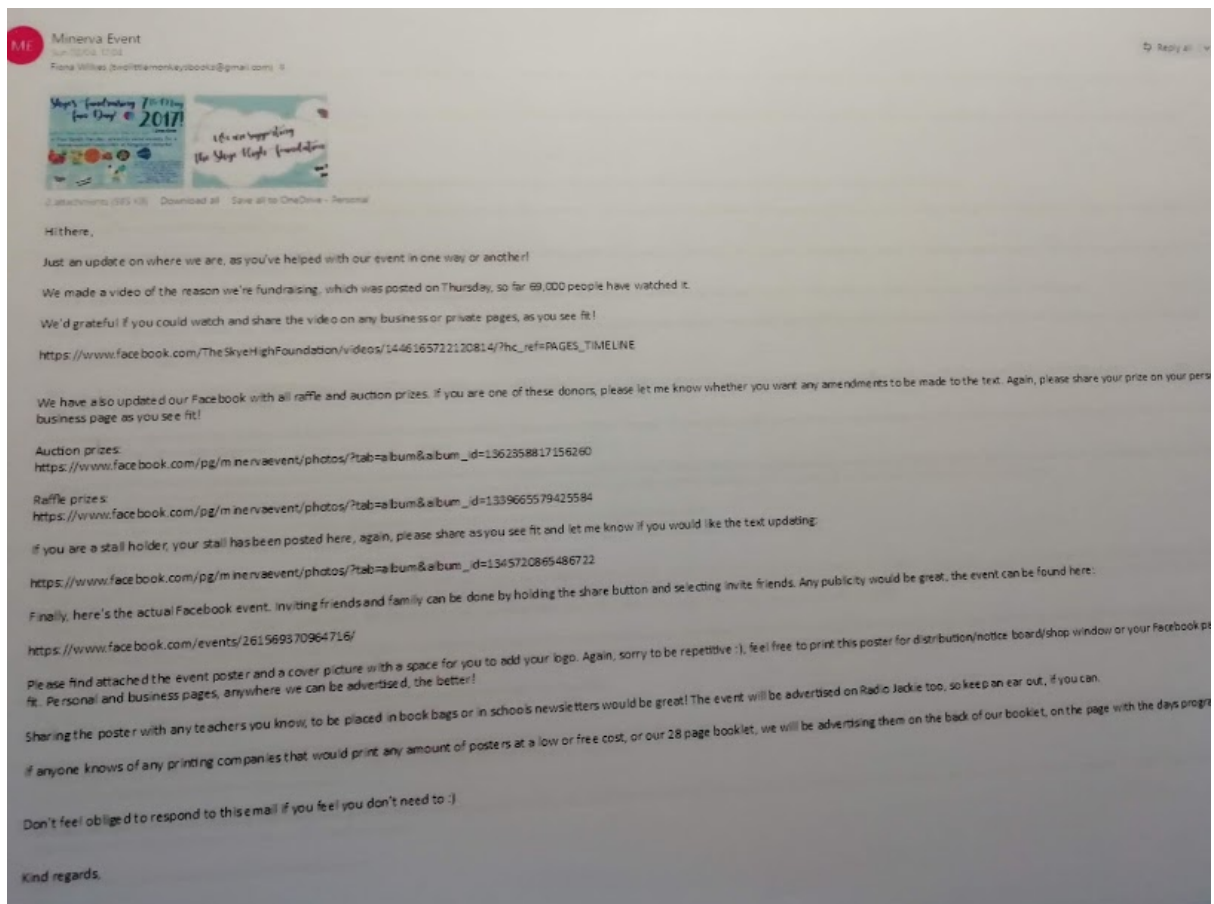
Please find attached a gannt chart, we decided to start promotions 50 days before the launch of the cookbook to ensure we can build a customer base without it being so far ahead it seems unreasonable.

We have planned the promotional activity until the day of launch as we first need to have an understanding of the popularity of the product and the market that are buying into it, so we can better adapt the strategy to them.

We will focus a heavy interest on the Magic Breakfast connection, bringing an emotional tie with the customer and product by using Magic Breakfast material as well as articles and statistics regarding childhood obesity, hunger and the implications of these.

Appendix 4vi

Title: Multipurpose email demonstrating communication skills



Assessment Overview:
<p>The assessment for this module is broken down into 4 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Part A will take the form of an individual coursework consisting of 1,800 words in total;- Part B will be a 2 hour multiple choice examination;- Part C will be a group presentation; and- Part D will be a reflective journal of a maximum of 1,800 words. <p>Each part is worth 25% of the overall grade. All four elements of assessment must be passed in order to pass the module.</p> <p>This assessment brief is for Part C of the module assessment only.</p>
Instructions:
<p>C. Group presentation (25% of total grade)</p> <p>In their assigned groups, students must deliver a 20 minute group presentation (15 minute maximum presentation with 5 minutes for questions) on a business proposition they have developed.</p>

October 2016

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Appendix 4viii

Title: Principles of Business Assessment Overview II

Before the presentation, the group should complete the following tasks:

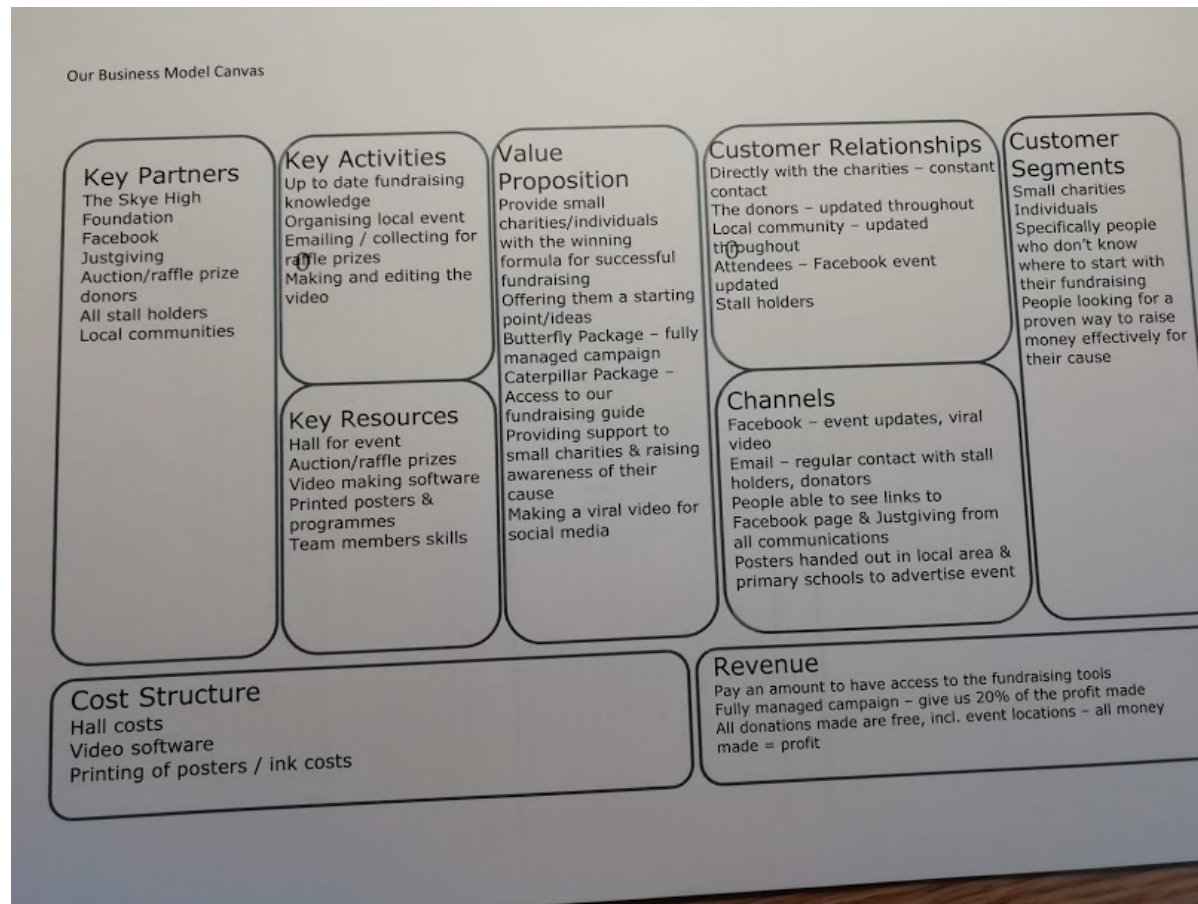
1. Describe the business plan underpinning the proposition
2. Register the company and outline the legal implications
3. Write a cash flow projection and formulate a plan to generate funds
4. Create an online/social media presence
5. Develop a pipeline

In the presentation, the group should then address each task above by reference to the following points and bearing in mind the marks each element might be awarded:

- 1. Describe the business plan underpinning the proposition (40marks)**
 - In your business plan you must cover the key areas:
 - o Mission Statement
 - o Description of business and product/service
 - o How your product/service is differentiated from other offerings in the market
 - o Market analysis – including competitor analysis; where your business fits; and what type of market share you believe you can secure
 - o High-level plan of how you intend to market the product/service
 - o SWOT analysis
 - o Revenue projections – be prepared to justify your reasoning behind this
 - Consider creating a business model canvas as a tool to aid in the presentation of your business model
- 2. Register the company and outline the legal implications (15marks)**
 - Evaluate the legal implications of registering a company
 - Critically discuss why you settled on your chosen legal structure
- 3. Write a cash flow projection and formulate a plan to generate funds (15marks)**
 - Develop a cash flow projection so you better understand what your needs are now and what they will be in the future
 - You should also discuss how cash flow could impact growth
- 4. Create an online/social media presence (15marks)**
 - Present the social media channels that you have chosen for your company
 - Discuss why these channels were chosen and how you intend to use them to promote your product/service
 - Present a high-level digital marketing strategy for your company

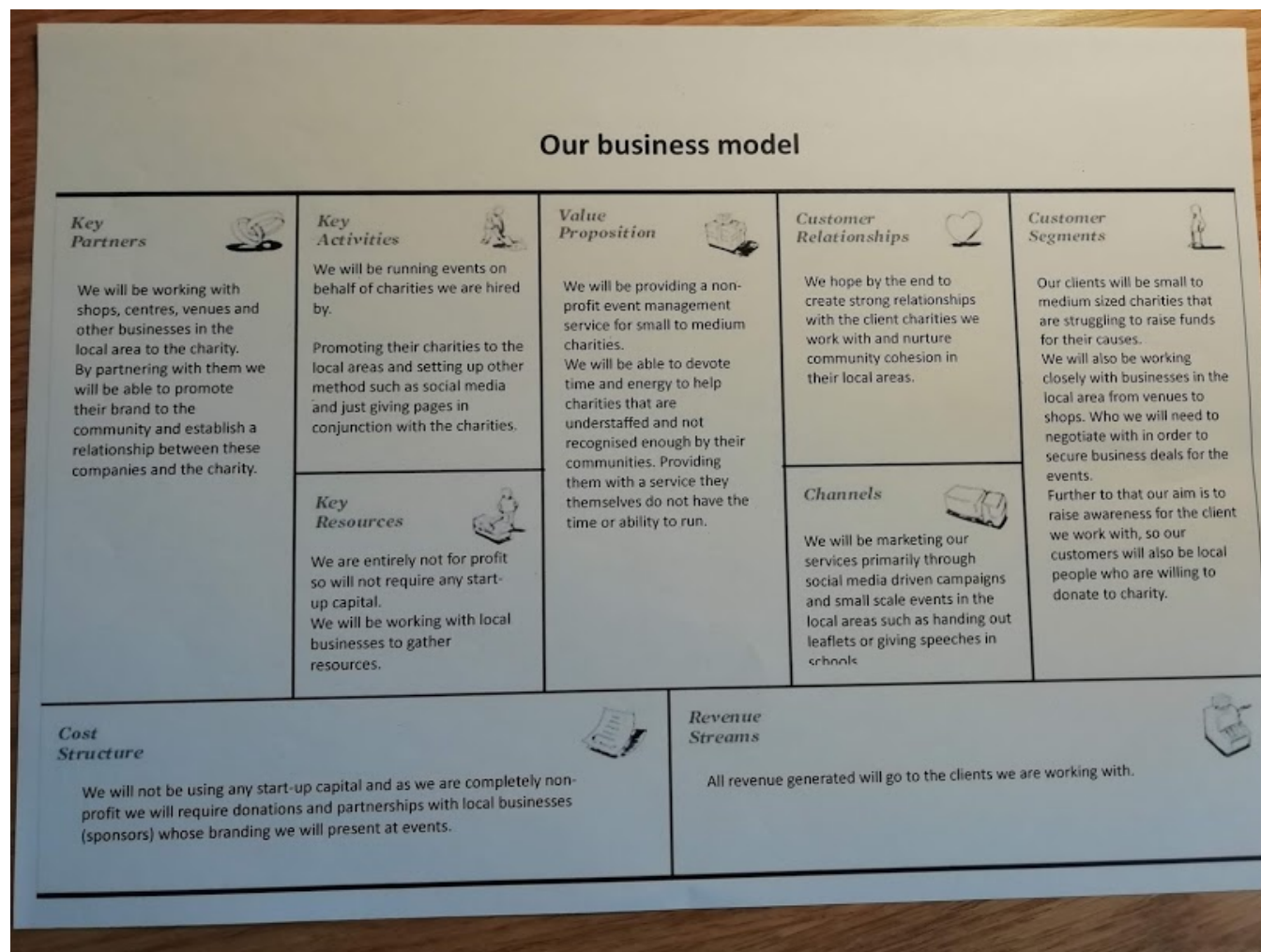
Appendix 4ix

Title: Students often made decisions through a structured approach



Appendix 4x

Title: Business canvass model aiding planning and structured approach



Appendix 4xi

Title: SWOT analysis allowed initial structured overview of group challenges

SWOT

Aid a Change and the events market

STRENGTHS

- We are entirely not for profit so don't cut into any funds raised for the charity
- All our employees including our founders are dedicated volunteers who bring a wealth of experience from a range of sectors and who care passionately about our business
- We work on a small scale so planning and logistics are easier
- We serve a niche area of the market and are well adapted to serving our clients

WEAKNESSES

We may find it difficult to market ourselves to potential clients given our size and this may present problems as we aim to grow. It will be possible to continue business on the same scale but should we decide to grow, we will need to reassess our values and business model to come up with a suitable strategy for expansion.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of small/medium charities around the UK who have lost touch with their communities so aid a change is in no shortage of clients. Additionally as the event market is one of continuing growth we are like to see a number of opportunities both to continue business and to expand should we decide to.

Given that we operate a free service we are likely to attract clients from the offset. Furthermore as the sector moves ever onward in the direction of cost management and efficiency, larger organisations are unlikely to work with clients such as ours who may not present ideal business opportunities for their scale.

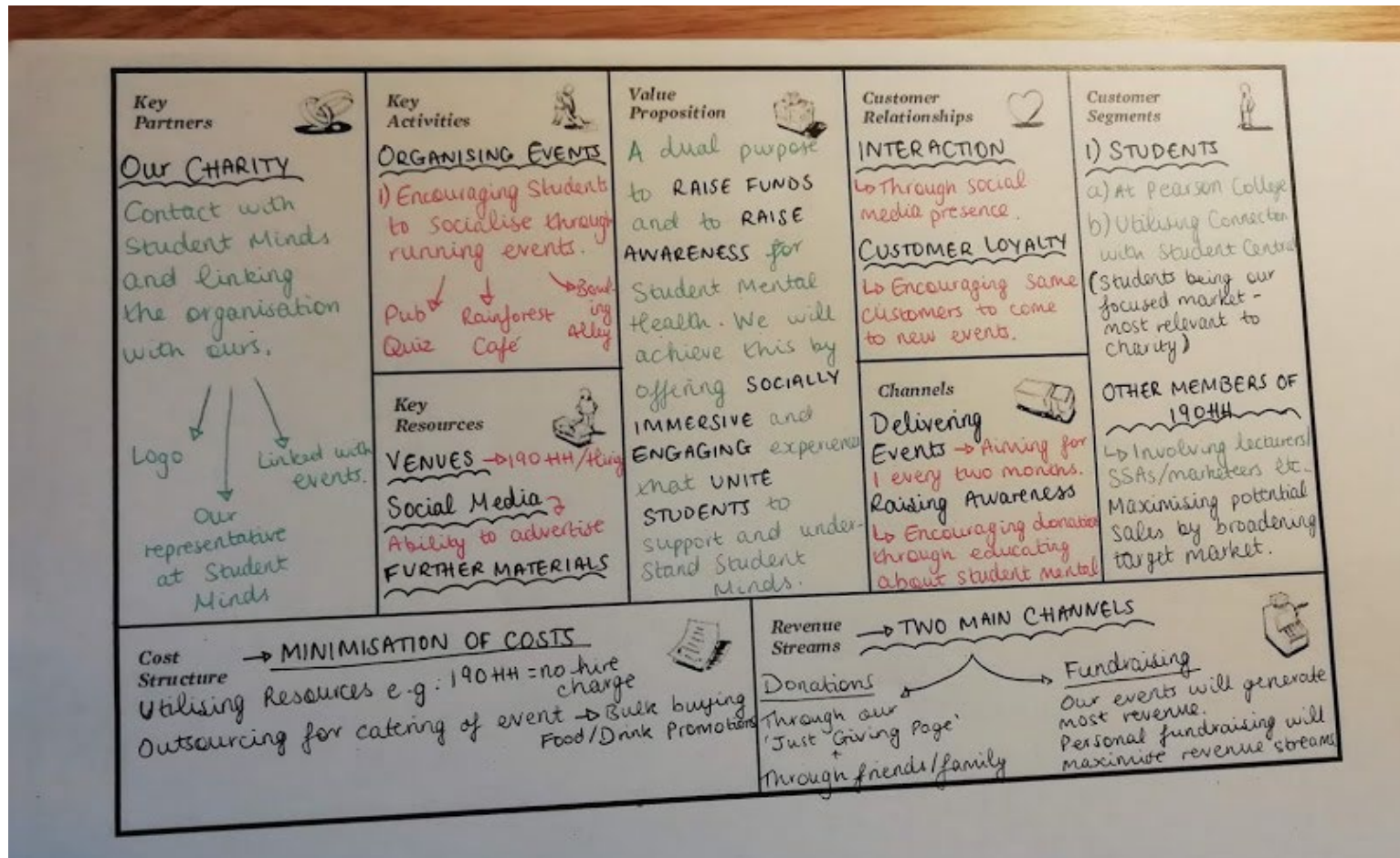
THREATS

- Other companies may see our business and offer similar services
- As the market has little to no barriers to entry competitors can pop up overnight
- Government policies in recent years which largely consist of cuts to the public sector and tax increases might result in people being less willing to donate to charities which will affect our clients and our business.
- The uncertainty after brexit and the US election could result small scale financial instability in the UK which would again decrease business.

1


Appendix 4xii

Title: Pragmatic use of business canvass model can lead to smooth, efficient projects



Appendix 4xiii

Title: Ambitious financial forecasts show entrepreneurial flair but are not always achieved

Bradley Lowery's Charity Match													
<p><u>Mission statement:</u> 'To raise money and awareness through an event to help a sick boy get the treatment he needs'.</p> <p>Tickets –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £10 each for adults • £5 for under 16s and OAPS • £7 for students • £25 for families (2adults, 2 children). <p>Revenue Projections -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average attendance at Sutton United: 1,619 • Capacity of Sutton United: 5,013 • Estimation for max total revenue: £37,500 • Estimation for average total revenue: £12,150 • Revenue from wristbands £3 each (600): £1800 • Revenue from programmes £3 (1700) £5,100 													
													
<p>Cashflow Forecast Bradley Lowery's Charity Match</p>													
	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	
Opening Balance	£ -	£1,020.00	£ 561.00	£ 20,146.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	
Money In													
Donation	£1,020.00		£ 900.00										
Sponsorship	£ 60.00	£ 710.00											
Loan													
Ticket Sales				£12,135.00									
Wristband Sales				£ 1,800.00									
Programme Sales				£ 5,100.00									
Raffle/Auction			£ 400.00										
Other				£ 50.00									
Total Money In	£1,080.00	£ 710.00	£13,735.00	£ 50.00	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	
Money Out													
Admin/Trav													
Stadium Hire	£ 60.00	£ 90.00											
Ticket Costs			£ 99.00										
Kiss Costs			£ 484.00										
Wristband Costs			£ 210.00										
Programme Costs													
Other		£ 4.00	£ 150.00										
Total Money Out	£ 60.00	£1,169.00	£ 150.00	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	
Closing Balance	£1,020.00	£ 561.00	£20,146.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	£ 20,206.00	
Sponsors –													

Appendix 4xiv

Title: Raffle prizes donated by local businesses



Appendix 4xv

Title: Completed Community Interest Company application form

Please ensure this form is placed at the top of your application when posted to Companies House.

CIC 36

Declarations on Formation of a Community Interest Company¹

Please complete in typescript, or in bold black capitals.

Company Name in full	Minerva Events LTD
	Community Interest Company

SECTION A: COMMUNITY INTEREST STATEMENT – beneficiaries

1. We/I, the undersigned, declare that the company will carry on its activities for the benefit of the community, or a section of the community². [Insert a short description of the community, or section of the community, which it is intended that the company will benefit below]³

The company's activities will provide benefit to ...
Small charities or individuals seeking to raise awareness and fundraise for a cause.

Appendix 4xvi

Title: Companies House registration form

In accordance with Section 9 of the Companies Act 2006.

IN01

Application to register a company

Companies House

A fee is payable with this form.
Please see 'How to pay' on the last page.

☒ **What this form is for**
You may use this form to register a private or public company.

☒ **What this form is NOT for**
You cannot use this form to register a limited liability partnership. To do this, please use form LL IN01. Do not use this form if any individual person with significant control is applying or has applied for protection from having their details disclosed on the public register. Contact enquiries@companieshouse.gov.uk to get a separate form.

For further information, please refer to our guidance at www.gov.uk/companieshouse

Part 1 Company details

A1 **Company name**

Check if a company name is available by using our name availability search:
www.companieshouse.gov.uk/info

Please show the proposed company name below.

Proposed company name in full **AID A CHANGE LTD**

For official use

Filling in this form
Please complete in typescript or in bold black capitals.
All fields are mandatory unless specified or indicated by *

Duplicate names
Duplicate names are not permitted. A list of registered names can be found on our website. There are various rules that may affect your choice of name. More information on this is available in our guidance at: www.gov.uk/companieshouse

A2 **Company name restrictions**

Please tick the box only if the proposed company name contains sensitive or restricted words or expressions that require you to seek comments of a government department or other specified body.

☐ I confirm that the proposed company name contains sensitive or restricted words or expressions and that approval, where appropriate, has been sought of a government department or other specified body and I attach a copy of their response.

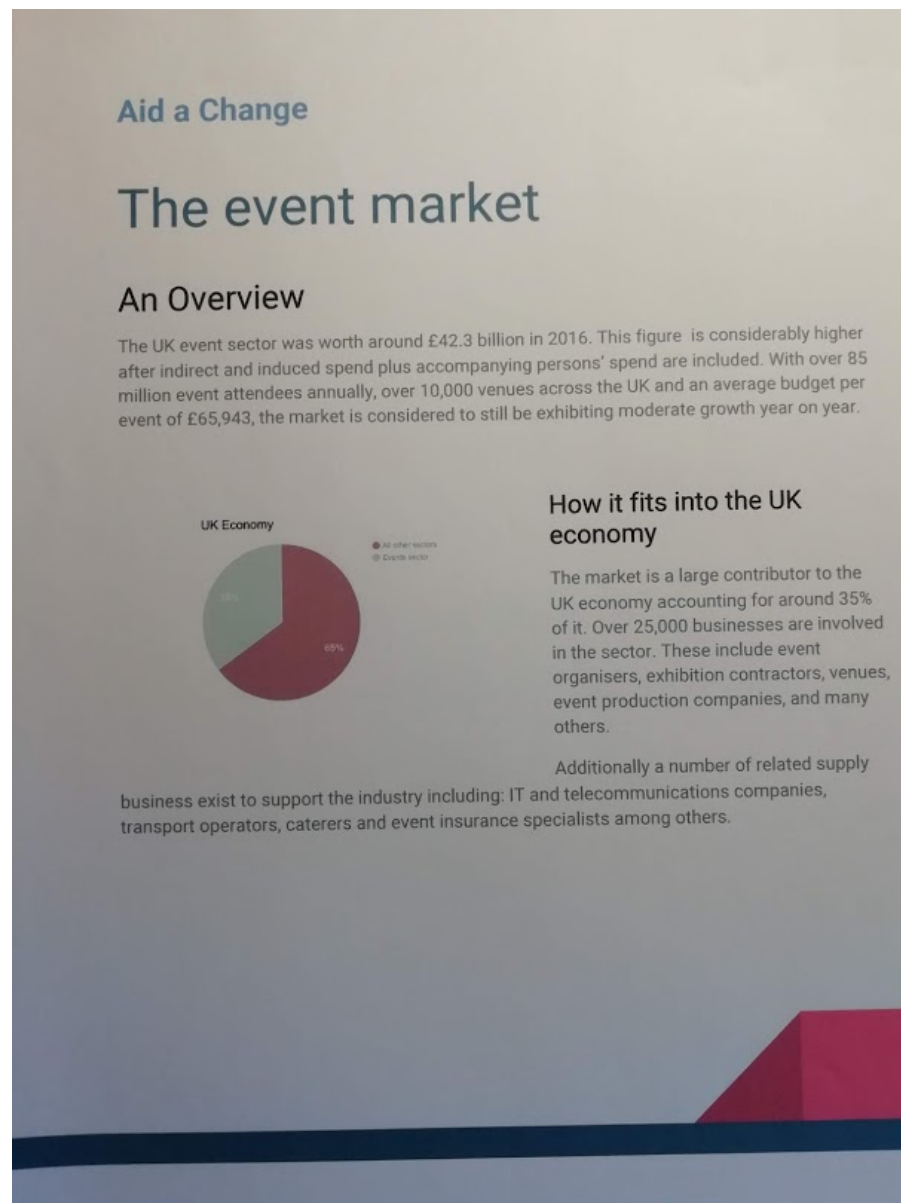
Company name restrictions
A list of sensitive or restricted words or expressions that require consent can be found in our guidance at: www.gov.uk/companieshouse

A3 **Exemption from name ending with 'Limited' or 'Cyfyngedig'**

Please tick the box if you wish to apply for exemption from the requirement to have the name ending with 'Limited', 'Cyfyngedig' or permitted alternative.

☐ I confirm that the above proposed company meets the conditions for exemption from the requirement to have a name ending with 'Limited', 'Cyfyngedig' or permitted alternative.

Name ending exemption
Only private companies that are limited by guarantee and meet other specific requirements or private companies that are charities are eligible to apply for this. For more details, please go to our website: www.gov.uk/companieshouse



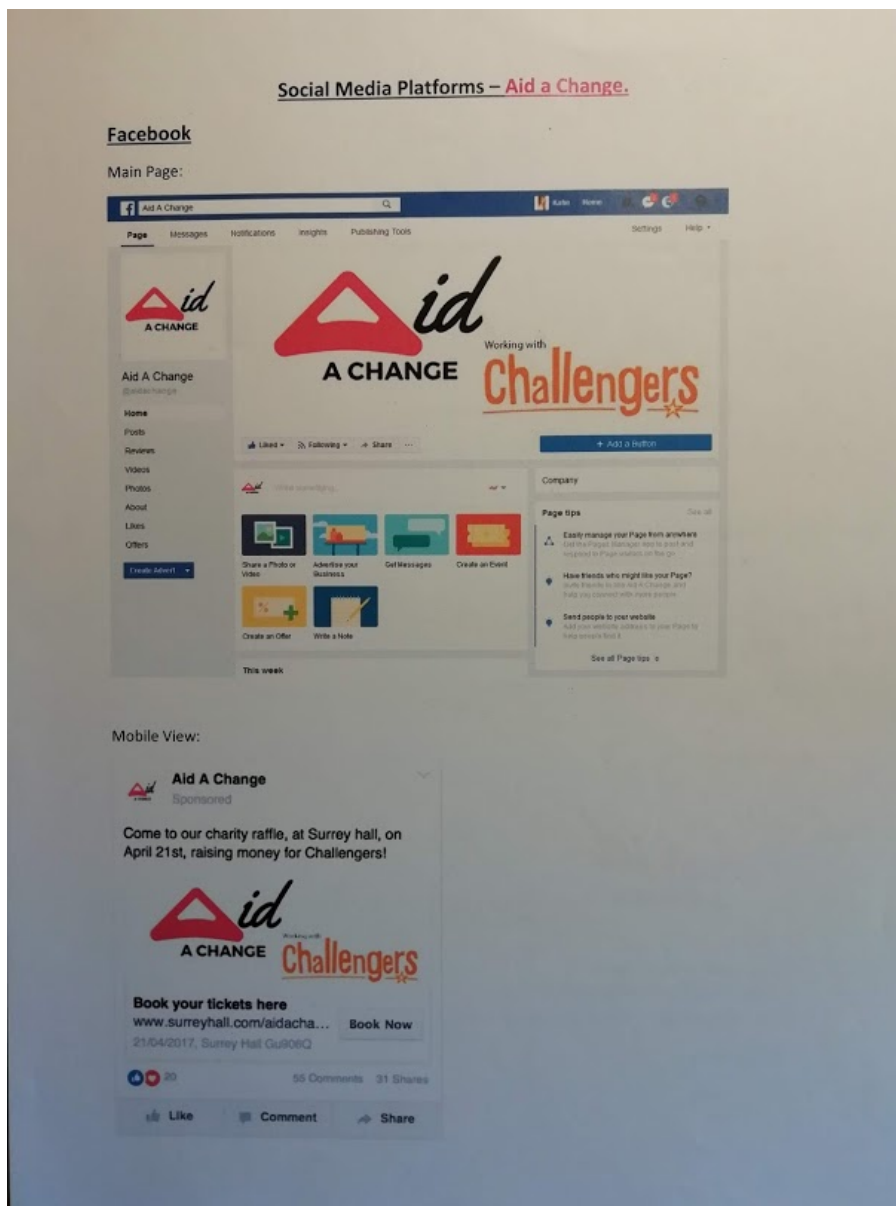
Appendix 4xviii

Title: Market analysis undertaken by groups (ii)



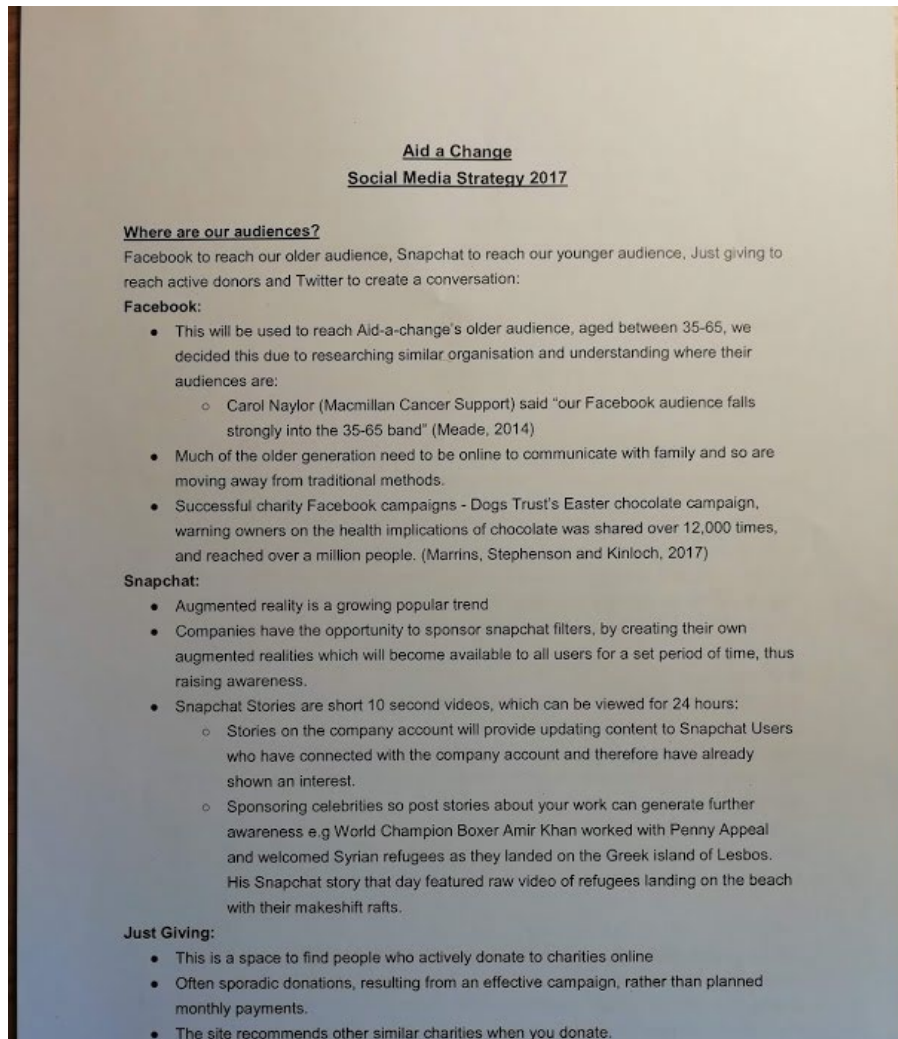
Appendix 4xix

Title: Social media platforms aided experiential projects



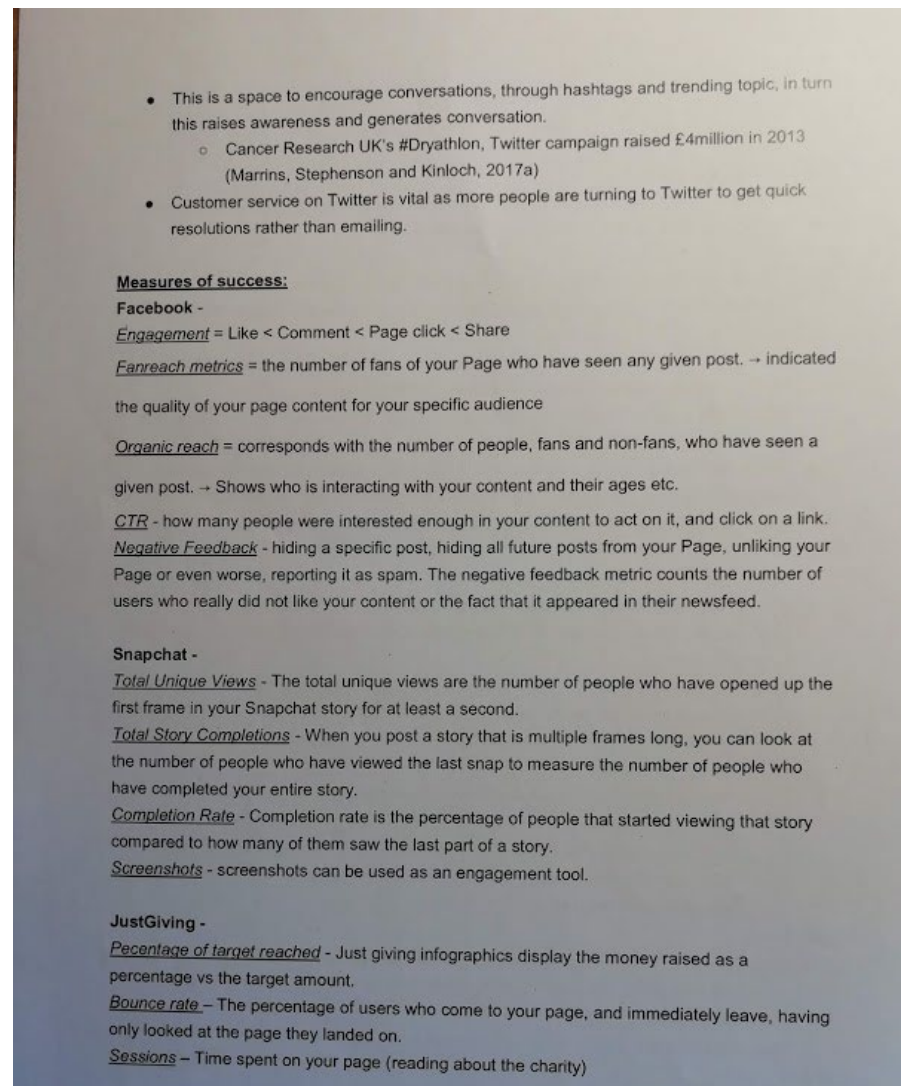
Appendix 4xx

Title: Social media platforms aided experiential projects (ii)



Appendix 4xxi

Title: Social media platforms aided experiential projects iii



Appendix 4xxii

Title: Social media platforms aided experiential projects iv

Twitter -

CTR - how many people were interested enough in your content to act on it, and click on a link.

Campaign Hashtags - Custom reports can be generated, based around specific keywords, hashtags, and URLs to track the progress of a specific ad campaign.

Quality of your followers - A Follower Retention report maps how many followers are still following you up to 12 weeks after initially following and beyond. This can give you an indication of how many followers you gained during your ad campaign, alongside any organic follows you may have gained during this period.

- 72% of Twitter users that follow a brand are more likely to purchase a product from that brand.

How will we use our social media platforms?

Account Usage	Twitter	Facebook	Snapchat	JustGiving
Curated content mixed with own content	YES	YES	NO	NO
Own content and marketing only .	NO	NO	YES	YES
Company Culture content	YES	YES	NO	YES
Personal mixed with business	NO	NO	YES	YES
Support	YES	YES	NO	NO
Announcements	YES	YES	YES	YES
Images or text heavy?	IMAGE	IMAGE	IMAGE	BOTH

Apps and software to create content:

Storify - Storify gathers stories, and shares them.

+ Great for capturing all the tweets and photos from a charity event that your charity organised.

+ The value of many charities lies in their relationships with donors, supporters and beneficiaries - gathering conversations had through social media into one place created shareable content, thus raising more awareness.

Thunderclap - Thunderclap is a tool that uses Facebook and Twitter to send messages out simultaneously from multiple accounts. We will set up Thunderclaps with a target for how many

Appendix 4xxiii

Title: Social media platforms aided experiential projects v

people they want to support it - if we meet the target, Thunderclap will blast out the timed Facebook Post or Tweet from all those who have supported it, which 'creates a wave of attention'.
+ It is a way to ask all those who support you to tweet on your behalf.

How will I optimize my messages for each social network?

Twitter

- Tweets must share useful share useful tips to help my audience do something better.
- It must have a 440 x 220 pixel visual image when appropriate.
- All messages must be between 70-100 characters.

Facebook

- Facebook posts must share entertaining content that engages my audience.
- It must have a 1200 x 630 pixel visual, or a video attached when appropriate.
- All messages should be 100 characters or less.

Snapchat

- Posts should be relevant content, this has be loosely related but must always link back to the charity.
- Images and video must both be used.
- All written images must be written in text and not drawn.

Reference Links:

Meade, A. (2017). *10 facts your charity needs to know about social media*. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/jul/21/10-things-your-charity-needs-to-know-about-social-media> [Accessed 5 Apr. 2017].

Marrins, K., Stephenson, K. and Kinloch, N. (2017). *Top 10 charity Facebook posts of 2013*. [online] JustGiving blog. Available at: <http://blog.justgiving.com/top-10-facebook-posts-of-the-year/> [Accessed 5 Apr. 2017].

Marrins, K., Stephenson, K. and Kinloch, N. (2017a). *Top 10 charity tweets of 2013*. [online] JustGiving blog. Available at: <http://blog.justgiving.com/top-10-charity-tweets-of-the-year/> [Accessed 5 Apr. 2017].





Appendix 4xxvi

Title: Minerva group event flyer (iii)





Appendix 6i

An outline of guidance for readers of the overarching descriptive model; ExpEd + SLL = SSD (illustrated within figure 6.3)

Introduction

This study presents one overarching tentative, descriptive model – the Experiential Education Diagram – the ExpEd. This descriptive diagram emerges from the convergence of four smaller, inter-related diagrams. Sub-diagram 1; the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx), sub-diagram 2; the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity (ExpAct), sub-diagram 3; the Taxonomy of Student-Led Learning (SLL) and, sub-diagram 4; the emergent Soft Skill Development (SSD).

This, I have contracted for convenience in Figures 6.1 and 6.2, into the following formula;

$$\text{ExpEd} = (\text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD})$$

The ExpEd diagram tentatively proposes three considerations for educational leaders, experiential lesson designers and teachers, namely: to invite consideration as to which experiential approach is advisable for them to take; what considerations should be accounted for during the planning of individual lessons and experiential activities; and how student-led learning can be encouraged and facilitated. The first of these three considerations is questioned when practitioners consider the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx), whilst the second is investigated through consideration of the Taxonomy of Experiential Activity – the ExpAct diagram. The final of the three sub-diagrams is for joint consideration between three key stakeholders within the ExpEd diagram; learning designers, teachers and students. However, the study proposes that students are primarily responsible for the decisions they make when considering how, when and if they will lead their own learning.

Consideration 1 – The IntEx Wheel

Readers of this study are advised to contemplate the first sub-diagram, the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) as an initial guide. The Wheel, as illustrated within Figure 3 of this chapter, should set in motion a series of questions surrounding the guidelines and principles of experiential learning, which may guide a learning designer towards ascertaining which approach best suits their class. For instance, a combination of work-based learning, active learning and authentic learning might be best suited to degree apprentices, whilst collaborative learning, service learning and authentic learning might be more appropriate to a scheme of work aiming to foster Corporate Social Responsibility within undergraduate students. The permutations for design which the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) affords a learning designer are plentiful. Additionally, the subjectivity involved in ascertaining which approach(es) are correct for different groups of students within different settings is designer-dependent. Therefore, this study will not attempt to outline the range of approaches, but merely offer the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx) as a starting point of consideration for anyone wishing to develop experiential learning within their institution.

Consideration 2 – The ExpAct

Once an approach, or set of approaches, have been determined via the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx), the reader should move onto the second sub-diagram – The Taxonomy of Experiential Activity (ExpAct). ExpAct offers a learning designer, and, perhaps more pertinently a teacher, a range of options set upon four continua: the task; the location; the student group; and the area of focus. Detail of these continua is covered further within chapter 6, but it is important to state the importance of ExpAct in creating experiential activities which allow for student-led learning, as noted within this study.

The importance of this is exacerbated when we consider the central element of the overarching diagram ($\text{ExpEd} = \text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD}$), which is the blue arrow upon which the three main sub-diagrams are sat. The arrow indicates the

responsibilities and inputs of the three main stakeholders within the design and facilitation of an ExpEd. Thus, that learning designers are responsible for ascertaining which approach(es) should be used from the IntEx, Teachers are, in the main, responsible for designing and implementing suitable learning activities; and students are primarily responsible for the decision over whether and how to lead their own learning. These three sub-diagrams work in tandem, chronologically, in order to provide the output of Soft Skill Development (SSD).

The two sides of sub-diagrams 2 (ExpAct) and 3 (SLL) are demonstrated by the running of a horizontal blue, dashed line. This is to indicate that, in general, activities and student actions which fall most frequently above that line - the top end of the continua – are more closely associated with the top end of sub-diagram 3; Soft Skill Development. This, effectively, indicates that those students which sit within the top end of the ExpEd diagram continua are more likely to develop basic, core soft skills. It also indicates that students who fall more frequently within the bottom end of the continua within the two sub-models are more likely to develop advanced soft skills within the SSD sub-diagram.

The hypothesis, proposed through the diagram and sub-diagrams which emerge from this research study is that all experiential learning can lead to a degree of soft skill development. A basic development of soft skills within undergraduate students occurs regardless of the approaches taken within the Integrated Experiential Approach Wheel (IntEx), or the activities designed through the Taxonomy of Experiential Activities (ExpAct). This demonstration is revealed through the findings of this study and is highlighted within sub-diagram 4, the Soft Skills Development Diagram, which outlines the range of soft skills that can be developed, whether activities and student led-learning falls most frequently within the top end of the continua, above the blue dashed line; or at the lower end of the continua, beneath the blue dashed line.

Consideration 3 – Student-led Learning (SLL)

Sub-diagram 3 (SLL), demonstrates the Impact of student-led learning upon soft skill development. It illustrates the crucial link between student-led learning and taught

activities which fall within the bottom end of the four continua of the Taxonomy of Experiential Activities sub-diagram (ExpAct). The SLL also offers further conclusions: that reflexivity is advanced for students who lead their own learning; and that student-led learning is also a causal factor behind the ways in which students actively negotiate their roles within project work. The sub-diagram further presents that actively negotiated and well-designed roles within experiential learning can lead to enhanced soft skill development, as demonstrated within the study.

Final guidance

In conclusion, it is imperative that whilst the sub-diagrams – IntEx, ExpAct and SLL - offer individual guidance and findings in isolation, for the over-arching model of $\text{ExpEd} = \text{IntEx} + \text{ExpAct} + \text{SLL} = \text{SSD}$ to be fully understood, the model should be read in the order outlined within this section. Namely, linearly from left to right; IntEx, then ExpAct, then SLL. These three outline potential inputs which form the ExpEd Diagram under which Soft Skill Development – SSD – is the fourth and final sub-diagram, the output and the sub-diagram which is therefore read last. This will enable the reader to fully ascertain the diagram's implications and to draw conclusions from it.

