An Organizational Perspective on Experiential Education in Ontario Higher Education

by

Emerson LaCroix

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

Supervisor	Dr. Janice Aurini, Associate Professor Department of Sociology & Legal Studies University of Waterloo
Reader	Dr. John McLevey, Associate Professor Department of Sociology & Legal Studies University of Waterloo
Reader	Dr. Stephanie Howells, Associate Professor Department of Sociology & Anthropology University of Guelph
Internal-External Examiner	Dr. Kelly Anthony, Continuing Lecturer School of Public Health Sciences University of Waterloo
External-External Examiner	Dr. Laura Wright, Associate Professor Department of Sociology University of Saskatchewan

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Experiential education has long been appreciated for its pedagogical value. There is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that students reap particular benefits when 'learning by doing' and engaging in practical learning experiences. Though, change is underway. In Ontario, experiential education has been incorporated into strategic funding metrics by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and thus subsumed in the neoliberal tradition of quantification and measurement. Universities are now required to ensure all students have at least one experiential learning opportunity before graduation and are required to measure and report where these opportunities are in their programs. This transformation prompts many questions about how organizational change takes place, and how different constituencies within and across Ontario universities are reacting to these changes. Rather than taking a conventional pedagogical view, in this dissertation I analyze experiential education through an organizational lens. I ask questions about the ongoing organizational change, drawing on a variety of organizational theories to capture institutional, organizational, and actor-level perspectives. The first research chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on the field-level dynamics of experiential education in Ontario via the Strategic Mandate process. Using three cohorts of Strategic Mandate Agreements between 2014 and 2025, I uncover how experiential education has evolved over time at the discursive and policy level. The second and third research chapters draw on 132 survey responses from faculty across the province, and 47 interviews from faculty at six Ontario universities. In the second research chapter (Chapter 4), I examine how faculty have experienced the changes to experiential education. This chapter captures recoupling in action and considers how faculty have experienced a changing organizational conception of experiential education. The final research chapter (Chapter 5) draws on the same qualitative sample but takes a more micro-level view of faculty sensemaking, delineating the various lenses through which faculty have made — and continue to make — sense of experiential education. Together, these chapters contribute a gradual narrowing from meso-level dynamics down to micro-level sensemaking to understand how a particular organizational change occurs, instigates responses, and spurs actor-level sensemaking. By taking an organizational approach, I uncover a much more nuanced understanding of experiential education and its relative complexities. My thesis concludes with policy recommendations, and implications for future research.

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Proposition 3: sensemaking is an ongoing and retroactive process where actors rationalize past behaviour. In this regard, faculty will make sense of experiential education use and non-use retrospectively as a way to rationalize pedagogical decision-making. *134*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The picture of Canadian higher education, with respect to student enrollment, continues to be one of expansion. Over the last twenty years there has been an 82% increase in full-time university enrollment, which has been strongly driven by increasing employer requirements for applicants to come degree-in-hand (Usher & Balfour, 2023). As more students enroll in university, it brings about some existential questions regarding the purpose of higher education. For example, Pizarro Milian et al. (2019) note that ongoing social transformations (i.e., the continued enrollment growth and transition to a knowledge-based economy) have altered the value of university degrees. At the same time, others note that the 'promissory note' of higher education still holds: that learners are well-prepared to enter the workforce and socially engage as democratic citizens (Weingarten, 2021).

Although the higher education system is stable, change is afoot. Increasingly, new student cohorts demand engaged learning opportunities, sometimes not appreciating the practicality of this form of learning with the realities of large class sizes and traditional lecture-style format. These student motivations are also coupled with claims from industry that universities are not producing the kind of work-ready graduates they need, given current economic demands (Grant, 2016). Despite Canada having a world-renowned post-secondary system, Canadian universities have been unable to shake employer concerns over the work-readiness of their graduates (Munro et al., 2014). While Canada boasts some of the highest education attainment rates among OECD counties (Usher, 2022), concerns about a skills gap have been an enduring feature of our post-secondary discourse (Gingras & Roy, 2000).[1] These concerns are framed broadly as a misalignment between changes to the labour force and how universities are preparing their

[1] For a counter position, see Wheelahan et al. (2022).

students to enter it (Fissuh et al., 2022; Hodnett, 2021). Universities are right to be worried if, despite their education and credentialling mission, students are not being equipped with the skills in demand by employers (see Cukier et al., 2023). The enduring nature of these employer concerns presents a serious legitimacy threat to the Canadian university system.

Research on the relationship between the academy and industry suggests that concerns about labour-readiness are not new (Munro, MacLaine, & Stuckey, 2014). Recent reports highlight areas of misalignment between higher education institutions and the needs of the labour market (see Grant, 2016). The changing nature of work (e.g., increased automation, 'knowledge work', precarious employment; see Standing, 2011) has significant implications for the way post-secondary institutions operate and prepare their graduates. What this speaks to in particular is the larger vocational shift in higher education that some view as standing in contrast to more traditional baccalaureate-style education (for a review of this tension, see Côté & Allahar, 2007; 2011). Universities thus find themselves at what Schroeder (2021, n.p.) calls the "intersection of students and employers". In essence, the institutional problem is universities balancing demands from their students and industry connections to have more applied learning for the transition to work after graduation, while operating under confines of the traditional academic system structure.

Experiential education has been highlighted as one educational philosophy to help better prepare students for the working world and ease employer concerns. Myriad forms of experiential learning[2] have been touted for their enhanced curricular learning outcomes (Coker et al., 2017; Coker & Porter, 2015), and as beneficial for easing school to work transitions (Martin

[2] Throughout this thesis I distinguish between curricular, co-curricular, and work-integrated learning. I do this for the sake of specificity, and delineating established forms of experiential learning. In practice, these forms are often discussed more generally, or even interchangeably under the banner of "experiential learning".

& Rouleau, 2020). In Canada, though, experiential education has not been subject to robust empirical investigation, especially from a sociological lens. Less is known about how experiential education 'plays out' within universities, and the impact this has for the individuals who inhabit those institutions. Accordingly, this research project is framed by the following research objectives:

1. Identify how experiential education has been integrated into the institutional priorities, programs, and practices of Ontario universities.
2. Examine the process of coupling between provincial mandates and university responses to experiential learning, and what oversight and accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure objectives are met.
3. Analyze the institutional (e.g., habits, norms) and organizational (e.g., formal objectives) conditions that shape how post-secondary education responds to and adopts experiential education mandates.
4. Delineate the dynamic and recursive relationships among organizational actors (faculty), institutions (e.g., habits, norms about how education is 'done') and post-secondary education organizations with respect to experiential education (see Hallett & Hawbaker, 2020).

This research hones in on the organizational and institutional implications of experiential education for Ontario universities. The first of its kind in Canada, this research approaches experiential education from an organizational standpoint. Unlike existing research that approaches experiential education by drawing on pedagogical theory and learning models (e.g., Dewey, 2015; Kolb, 1984), I ask questions about the organizational implications of experiential education, the professional considerations for faculty members, and how organizational effects might be nuanced by institution 'type' and academic discipline. Throughout, I ask the following research questions:

1. How have Ontario universities responded to the institutionalization of experiential education in the field of post-secondary education?
2. How have faculty experienced the shift toward fostering experiential education?
3. How has experiential education impacted faculty perceptions of their professional roles? How do faculty make sense of this impact?

This research makes significant contributions across several fields of literature, and the broader conceptualization about experiential education. First, the theoretical standpoint shifts the empirical focus on experiential education away from a pedagogical lens and toward and organizational lens. In doing so, this allows me to ask questions about experiential education as an institutional process and how it has come to be sedimented in Ontario universities (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Without taking the current state of the field for granted, asking organizational questions about experiential education yields data and findings about the 'slow creep' of institutionalization, and how universities have adjusted to formalize experiential education in their institutions over time. Second, this research is aligned with contemporary organizational theorizing that sees organizations as inhabited by actors, rather than being nested in an institutional environment (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Understanding how actors inhabit organizational spaces also requires researchers to pay attention to sensemaking (Sutcliffe, 2018; Weick, 1995) and the process of bricolage, through which actors interpret and enact organizational routines. Perhaps most significant, by 'going to the data', the policy implications and voices of faculty participants are foregrounded in the research findings.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is a multi-method research study about experiential education. Specifically, the data are drawn from the Ontario research context. While other provinces are well on their way to more formally requiring universities to foster experiential education (Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of Manitoba, 2022), Ontario's policy landscape is further along. My dissertation is composed of four core chapters and a general research conclusion.

In chapter 2, I review the existing literature on experiential education and some of the developments in the field. I outline conceptual debates like the distinction between experiential education and experiential learning. Such debates indicate that experiential education is becoming a field unto itself (see Roberts, 2012, 2018), and requires further theorizing in order to lay the groundwork for more robust empirical investigation. Indeed, one of the noted limitations of the existing pool of literature is that it is siloed by discipline, focusing more on one-off implementation studies than a broader empirical approach to studying experiential education as such (e.g., Cornell et al., 2013; Windsor & Carroll, 2015). Heeding the advice of scholars like Seaman (2008), the literature review reveals some conceptual holes that lay the groundwork for the current empirical project (e.g., absence of faculty perspectives, broader policy implications).

Chapter 3 focuses on the meso-foundations of experiential education in Ontario universities. I take a wide view of experiential education across the province's universities and the gradual development of experiential education over time. In this chapter I ask: how have Ontario universities responded to the institutionalization of experiential education in the field of post-secondary education? To answer this question, I rely on three cohorts of Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) to explore how experiential education has been institutionalized in Ontario higher education, and how universities have framed their responses. Strategic Mandate Agreements are funding agreements between the Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities and all the publicly funded universities in the province. These funding agreements are two-sided, where the government signals key priority metrics to universities, and universities respond in-kind by highlighting key institutional initiatives unique to their institution. While each SMA is useful for understanding the unique educational concerns and priorities at a particular point in time, using all three cohorts allows me to weave a thread through time. Relying on

institutionalization (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996) and frame theory (Benford & Snow, 2000), I find that universities have developed a considerable amount of institutional infrastructure and initiatives to support the expansion of experiential learning, and these efforts has been framed in relation to current discourse about graduate skill readiness. Knowing that organizations are experts at disguise, or ceremonial compliance (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), this is a cautious interpretation. Nonetheless, the framing of these developments is done in relation to ongoing discussions about the skill-readiness of graduates and the need for more work-integrated opportunities. While the SMA analysis represents the 'official accounts' universities produce about experiential education, this does little to explore the micro-foundations. This perspective is explored more fully in chapters 3 and 4.

As an organizational process, experiential education has micro-foundations: the ways that individual actors come to think about it in reference to their professional routines. A noted limitation of existing literature is that there is no coverage of faculty as participants- of individuals as the focus of research. To help close this gap, in Chapter 4 I ask: how have faculty experienced the institutional shift toward fostering experiential education? As the key organizational actors tasked with implementing the teaching, research, and service missions of universities, faculty represent an important organizational group for fostering experiential education. I report on the findings from 132 qualitative survey responses and 47 interviews with faculty across six disciplines and eight universities. Drawing on inhabited institutionalism (Hallett, 2010a; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), I unpack the general process of recoupling that has taken place in the province with respect to experiential education. Recoupling is the process of creating tighter organizational linkages between organizational units that were previously loosely related. Here, faculty interviews revealed a process through which experiential learning has

become more tightly defined and measured at their institutions, rather than 'looser' and pedagogically driven philosophy. To be sure, this has not been a seamless process. What I document is recoupling 'in action'. I find that tensions occurred when the everyday practices and pedagogical understandings of faculty conflicted with organizational efforts to recouple experiential learning initiatives with a specific range of activities and outcomes. In relation to the findings from Chapter 3, the misalignment between how universities and professors conceptualize experiential education has implications for the way universities can demonstrate that experiential learning is being developed and implemented.

Chapter 5 delves deeper into the faculty perspectives on experiential education. The need to 'round out' these perspectives is that experiential learning is being recoupled and reimposed in the academic domain. Accordingly, Qualters (2010a) notes that across the university there will be parties that all make sense of experiential education differently. In this chapter I ask: how has experiential education impacted faculty perceptions of their professional roles? How do faculty make sense of this impact? To answer this question I draw on organizational sensemaking literature (Sutcliffe, 2018; Weick, 1995). Using the same sample of surveys and interviews as Chapter 4, I distill four lenses of sensemaking: disciplinary, institutional, pedagogical, and professional. These frames act both individually and referentially to create a 'prism of sense' through which faculty interpret the rise of experiential education. Importantly, faculty do not make sense of emergent phenomenon in static roles (see Ashforth et al., 2008; Brown, 2017). Teasing out the distinct lenses of sensemaking contributes some theoretical refinement by delineating particular frames of meaning, and the process of bricolage through which faculty liaise between these frames.

I end the thesis with concluding remarks about the project overall. I also lay out some policy recommendations based on the findings derived across the research chapters, as well as some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential education is becoming increasingly prevalent in higher education discussions of teaching and learning, especially with respect to preparing students for school to work transitions (Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills, and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 2018; Government of Canada, 2019). The literature on this topic is vast; certainly, it is too vast to adequately summarize without a full systematic review. Though there have been some attempts to take a wider gaze at the field (e.g., Burch et al., 2019; Seaman et al., 2017; Vespia et al., 2012), these reviews have their own struggles over inclusion criteria, breadth of scope, and methodological detail. While experiential education and experiential learning are not new concepts, they are often misunderstood (see Vespia et al., 2012). Often, the misunderstanding comes from a lack of engagement with the conceptual foundations of these terms, and as a result they become used interchangeably. Though some effort has been made by scholars such as Roberts (2012) to establish experiential education as a field unto itself, the majority of empirical studies are siloed by discipline, and are often one-off examples of implementing experiential learning modalities in courses without broader engagement or contribution to the field. Empirical discussions of experiential learning often revolve around implementation studies (e.g., Akella, 2010; Chavan, 2011; Cornell et al., 2013; McClellan & Hyle, 2012) to show 'how' experiential learning can be done within specific disciplines or with respect to particular skills (e.g., conducting interviews, working with community partners). Sometimes, these studies are framed in a 'do and report back' format, where they show how approaches to experiential learning are commensurate with particular academic disciplines, as a way to entice colleagues to consider using such approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., McCarthy, 2016; Windsor & Carroll, 2015). Though, these commentaries stop short of contributing more substantively to experiential education as a research topic. Some of

this is understandable. Practically speaking, experiential education is often digested by interested faculty members who 'give it a go' in their courses, and then reproduce the kind of scholarship that they referenced. While these studies may signal to colleagues that experiential learning is possible in their courses, repeat implementation studies run the risk of stagnating the field, devoid of theoretical and methodological contributions to studying experiential education as a subject, as opposed to a pedagogical strategy.

This literature review, therefore, pieces together *some* of the main currents and contemporary discussions on experiential education. It is not a catalogue of every empirical application of experiential learning. Nor is it an index of every possible mode of experiential learning.[3] What this review does contribute is an overview of the concept and some key developments in its application and relevance to higher education. I begin by offering a commonly referenced definition of experiential education, and present some discussion on how experiential education is distinct from experiential learning. I review the conceptual foundations of experiential education, and current approaches to developing a stronger conceptual understanding of the term. I then discuss its presence in undergraduate studies and its association with student-centred pedagogy.[4] I conclude with a discussion of faculty perceptions of experiential education, given the larger focus of this dissertation. Together, this coverage will give readers a sense of the field, specifically regarding conceptual foundations, some current lines of inquiry, and scholarly potential to re-orient the concept within a sociology of education that considers the organizational and institutional context more fully.

[3] For indexing discussion, see Thornton Moore (2010). See also the MAESD Guidelines of Experiential Learning (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2016).
[4] Discussions of experiential education and experiential learning are predominantly geared towards undergraduate studies. For an exception, see McClellan and Hyle (2012).

Defining Experiential Education: More than 'Learning by Doing'

Definitions of experiential education and experiential learning transcend boundaries between scholarship, professional associations, and academic institutions. While experiential education is sometimes referred to as 'learning by doing', experiential scholars have endeavoured to move past this convenient, and relatively unspecific conception (see Reardon & Saija, 2014). One of the most pervasive definitions of experiential education is by The Association for Experiential Education (n.d.), where experiential education is

> a teaching 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.

This definition establishes experiential education as a pedagogical philosophy that is distinct-from, yet informs, various methodologies of learning. The Association definition therefore distinguishes between experiential *education* and experiential *learning*. A similar approach is taken by Roberts (2012) who perhaps has done the most 'conceptual weight lifting' to disentangle experiential education from its false twin, experiential learning. While these two terms are often used interchangeably, Roberts (2012) contends that education is "a process of both individuation and socialization" that is rooted in philosophical queries about the nature of the self and society, whereas experiential learning is a "method" or "technique" that can be used to meet instructional goals (p. 4). Later, Roberts (2016) attempts to add more practicality to the distinction between the two terms, labelling experiential learning as "informal", whereas experiential education involves a "systematic pedagogical process" (p. 24). The embeddedness within a pedagogical process, therefore, becomes what distinguishes learning from an experience (e.g., missing the bus) as opposed to an *educational* experience (i.e., that which is housed in a pedagogical context).

Various commentaries on experiential education have acknowledged that because the term blends together different theoretical currents (e.g., pragmatism, phenomenology, critical perspective), there are ontological complexities which can result in lines of research that talk past one another, or which may take contrary positions based on those ontological differences (Roberts, 2012; Seaman et al., 2017). Roberts (2008, 2012) suggests that instead of getting lost in the weeds about adhering to the proper ontological position, researchers should consider experiential education as a field made up of various philosophical origins and various modes of understanding (i.e., forms of experiential learning). This accomplishes two things: 1) it de-homogenizes experiential education from being considered merely 'learning by doing'; and 2) by doing so, it protects the field from being "vulnerable to cooption and trivialization" (2012, p. 8). With this flexibility and more practical orientation, he suggests that experiential education can then be considered more fully in relation to developments in higher education, such as how it interacts with neoliberal transitions (or neo-experientialism).

It is also worth mentioning that academic institutions will often have their own institutional definition of experiential education, though not always clearly distinguishing it from experiential learning. While these are too numerous to list, they commonly wholly adopt, re-brand or reorganize the wording of the Association definition of experiential education, though some will also come up with entirely institution-specific definitions.[5] Provinces have also waded into the discussion on experiential education, with some developing guiding principles for what constitutes experiential learning within their jurisdiction (see Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2016), as well as incorporating experiential learning within provincial

[5] For cursory examples, see the University of Guelph: https://www.uoguelph.ca/experientiallearning/about-el/experiential-learning-definition-and-inclusion-criteria, or the Lakehead University: https://www.lakeheadu.ca/faculty-and-staff/faculty-resources/cn/experiential-learning/node/67676.

funding mandates (e.g., Government of Ontario, 2021). With this discussion on defining experiential education in mind, the next section discusses the conceptual foundations of experiential education.

Conceptual Foundations of Experience and Education

Despite pervasive references to experiential education, and the extent to which it is increasingly featured in institutional discourse, there are relatively few who engage with the core assumptions and foundational philosophy of the term. In fact, as will be discussed, the work of John Dewey is often time incorrectly referenced as the founder of experiential education. This may have the reductive effect of experiential education becoming more of a pedagogical fad, or otherwise subject to a more commercialized logic.

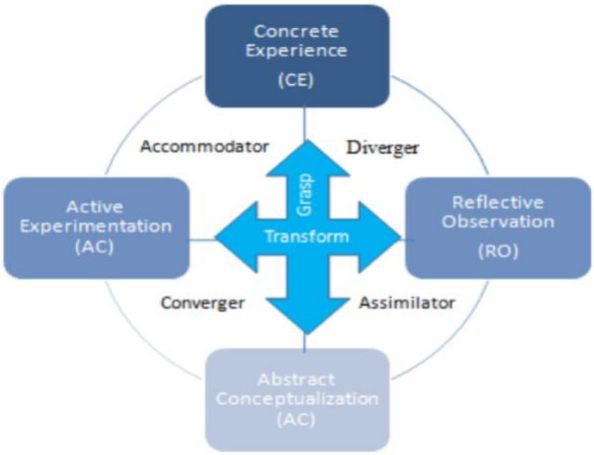
Early Foundations of Experiential Education

Dewey's (2015[1938]) association with experiential education comes from his canonical text *Experience and Education*, in which he offers a critical analysis of 'traditional' and 'progressive' education, and the capacity for building in educational experiences to enhance student learning. Core to this analysis is that "experience and education cannot be directly equated to one another" (Dewey, 2015[1938], p. 25). Rather, introducing the idea of experience requires an understanding that not all experiences are necessarily educative. Educative experiences are established on two categories: 1) the category of continuity, meaning that experiences form 'habits' or learnings that are derived from the experience and which also shape future experiences; and 2) the category of interaction, which recognizes the external and internal conditions which shape responses to experiences (i.e., that which is more affective to the student and their lived experiences). While Dewey therefore spoke about the educative value of experiences, he was positioning this in the context of exchanging ideas of how education should be done (i.e.,

traditional vs progressive), and *not* developing a value position either way, *nor* developing a 'theory of experiential learning'.

Another classic reference in experiential education literature is David Kolb (1984), whose influential text rebranded experiential education from a philosophical idea to a pedagogical model for teachers to use in implementing modes of experiential learning into their instructional practices. As outlined in Figure 1, the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle is a model which outlines four key stages to learning through experience, and four learning styles.

Figure 1: The Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle[6]



As depicted by the model, there are two dialectic processes occurring in Kolb's model. For Kolb, the importance of these two processes pertains to the creation of knowledge. Kolb (1984) states, "knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it" (p. 41). Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) are stages where learners grasp

[6] Direct from McCarthy (2016, p. 92).

and work to make sense of the experience they have been exposed to. The Active Experimentation (AE) and Reflective Observation (RO) stages are where cognition and sense-making abilities are required in order to transform and utilize the information they have gathered through the CE and AC stages. A more detailed description of the various processes is included in Table 1.

Table 1: Stages of The Experiential Learning Cycle[7]

Concrete Experience (Do)	Learner engages in direct and practical experiences.
Reflective Observation (Observe)	Learner reflects on their experiences, the perceived experiences of others, and the connection between the two.
Abstract Conceptualization (Think)	Learners are presented with, or develop, a theoretical position or model to generalize what was observed.
Active Experimentation (Plan)	Learners plan how to best test their position or model on a new experience, or prepare for a new experience.

Learners can enter the cycle through any stage, but it is only by working through all stages of the cycle that knowledge is created and made useful for future applications to experiences, action, and sensemaking. As well, the more times students go through the cycle, the more they are able to build critical connections between classroom knowledge and 'real world' practice.

Together, Dewey's categories of experience, and Kolb's model form a fuller picture of how experience can be conceptualized, and how it can be implemented into teaching practices. On the one hand, Dewey provides the philosophical foundations of 'what constitutes experience', and Kolb shows how experience can be 'done'. At the same time, this line of thinking is not without its critiques. An early critique offered by Bell (1993) cautions scholars to think more

[7] Adapted from Healey and Jenkins (2000), and Konak, Clark, and Nasereddin (2014).

critically about what actually constitutes an 'experience'. Coming from a critical epistemological standpoint, the foundation of Bell's critique is that when ideas (in this case experience) become well-established they become "common sense" and are "rarely examined critically" (p. 20). Encouraging scholars to remember the subjective element of Dewey's philosophy (i.e., the category of interaction), experience cannot be objectively thought of as 'concrete' in the Kolb model. Instead, Bell (1993) suggests that experience is subject to the interpretations students bring from their lived experiences, and that "there is no generic clone for "the experience" which [applies] to everyone" (p. 20). Bell's early critique is reproduced in more contemporary studies (e.g., Lund Dean & Wright, 2017, p. 656; see also Seaman, 2008) which acknowledge that "students bring their past learning modes and learning experiences with them", and thus it is a fallacy to think that students otherwise lack experiences.

Dewey and Kolb are still considered as the forebearers of building experience into education. Working on uneven conceptual footing, though, has presented challenges for the way experiential education is discussed and implemented in higher education. As discussed below, others have gone to greater lengths to reorient conceptual understandings of experiential education, and re-establish theoretical ties to the concept.

Towards a Stronger Conceptual Understanding of Experiential Education

Following the conceptual foundations established by early experiential theorists, there have been more contemporary efforts to refine scholarly thinking about experience and education. Often, these discussions engage with Dewey to a fuller extent in attempts to re-establish linkages between current approaches and conceptual foundations. Seaman (2008) sees this as particularly valuable, as "researchers and practitioners might no longer unconditionally accept the definition of experiential learning as a sequence or a cycle" (p. 14). Rather,

experiential education could be more of an educational ideology. Later works, (e.g., Seaman & Nelsen, 2011, p. 7) echo this sentiment, acknowledging that while experiential education is a "polysemic term", this has the disadvantage of "having no coherent essence", and results in researchers projecting their own essence onto it. In effect, experiential education becomes a more flexible term than it was intended. At times, this takes the form of 'run on catalogues' of various forms of experiential learning (e.g., classroom simulations, internships, applied learning projects, research assistant positions; Thornton Moore, 2010), which has the reductive quality of framing experiential education as merely 'learning by doing'. Seaman and Nelsen (2011) claim that the discussion on experiential education needs to be reframed:

> experience, when applied educationally, should be interpreted in light of Dewey's larger effort to establish democratic controls over an increasingly corrosive social, economic, and psychological order brought about by industrial capitalism (p. 5).

In this way, such claims re-introduce core theses of progressive education and anti-oppressive pedagogy (see Freire, 1970), where the value of experiential education is its capacity to challenge existing knowledge and power structures, placing the learner and their subjective experience as central.

In addition to re-hashing the philosophical and ideological position of experiential education, others have built off Kolb's (1984) strategy to introduce guiding pedagogical models. While Eyler (2009) acknowledges *The Power of Experiential Education*, she notes that notions of experience are often separated from core academic pursuits (i.e., within the curriculum), and this misses out on the transformative power of experiential education, or the capacity for students to take what they have learned and apply them in appropriate new contexts. Eyler (2009) proposes several strategies for developing skills for lifelong learning, central to which is the place of reflection and feedback in experiential learning. Underlying such recommendations is

the understanding that instructors do not naturally come with these skills, and instructional training and support is needed to use experience as a "text" in their courses (Eyler, 2009, p. 31).

Laden in these pedagogical discussions is the position of reflective exercises. Reflective practice emerges as one of the critical elements that distinguishes experiential education from learning by doing (Estes, 2004; Eyler, 2009). Vespia et al. (2012) find that merely participating in an experience does not constitute learning, just as Dewey (2015[1938]) suggested that not all experiences are educative. What constitutes experiential education is for students to develop abstract ideas "on the basis of their reflections" so that they may actively test those ideas in the future (Vespia et al., 2012, p. 77; see also Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The purpose of reflective practice is for students to build critical connections between observations and knowledge developed during the experience to their existing body of knowledge. Reardon and Saija (2014) liken this to students building connections between what Geertz (1985) called "local knowledge" with the 'expert knowledge' they have been exposed to in the course of their studies. Pedagogically, this encourages student engagement, such that they move from being "passive consumers" of existing theories to "active participants" in knowledge creation (Reardon & Saija, 2014, p. 3). Put another way, experience helps students to build a body of 'practical knowledge' or phrónêsis[8] to make 'real world' use of the academic body of knowledge they have accumulated (Reardon & Saija, 2014).

While, together, this section of the literature has worked to inform a more concrete conception of experiential education, Seaman (2008) notes that more work needs to be done with

[8] Experiential education is, essentially, an exercise of building practical wisdom, and a process of combining theoretical (epistemé) and technical (techné) knowledge. A full engagement in Aristotelian knowledge traditions is beyond the scope of this review. For a some applied examples, see Massingham (2019); see also Tsoukas and Cummings (1997).

respect to theorizing experiential education. He concludes that there is a need to develop stronger conceptions of experiential education and stronger methods of studying it that do not limit theorizing or repress the experience and learning process. Rather, what is needed are theories that take seriously the social and cultural context in which experiences and education take place, and which are aligned with standards of scientific inquiry, as opposed to institutional lore.

The theoretical foundations of experiential education are relatively concise in principle. While there is potential for ontological challenges, a second side to the literature is on design and implementation. This branch focuses more exclusively on experiential education as student-centred pedagogy, and how it can be successfully integrated into undergraduate studies.

Experiential Education as Student-Centered Pedagogy, and Design

Student-centered approaches to education change the 'rules of the game' with respect to the structure of curriculum and pedagogical roles. Similar to Freier's (1970) goal of turning education into a collaborative process between teacher and learner, experiential education has been framed as a student-centered approach to take learning beyond the walls of the classroom (Breunig, 2017; Estes, 2004; Schwartz, 2012). Schwartz (2012) contends that experiential education is built upon constructivist learning, meaning that it lends itself to de-walling the classroom to mimic the kind of learning that takes place in the 'real world'. Students become central to the learning process, in that they are responsible for managing their own learning in a curriculum whose goals may not be formally defined (Schwartz, 2012). Katula and Threnhauser (1999, p. 239) state that experiential education has changed higher education by breathing new life into what was supposedly a "jejune environment". At the same time, this change is not without its challenges for meaningful design and implementation.

Designing Experiential Education Programs

Experiential education has the potential to produce powerful learning outcomes (Burch et al., 2019; Eyler, 2009). But, some have expressed concern that these learning outcomes are at risk within the current institutional environment that seems to be moving toward a model of 'experience for experience's sake', and which divorces experience from the philosophical foundations previously outlined (Breunig, 2017; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999). Such an approach runs the risk of reorienting experiential education to teacher-centred pedagogy, as well as helping to facilitate a transition of the university itself into a partner of the corporate world, "providing cheap labour for it and subordinating the educational needs of students to the needs of business and industry" (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999, p. 252). Faulty design also has negative implications for blending curricular and experiential learnings. For example, Qualters (2010b, p. 95) states that

> unless experiences outside the classroom are brought into the classroom and integrated with the goals and objectives of the discipline theory, students will continue to have amazing outside experiences but will not readily connect them to their in-class learning.

Some distinctions have been made with respect to designing experiential education programming from an institutional standpoint. Cowart (2010) distinguishes between novice experiential education programs and integrative programs. Novice experiential programs are 'young', in that they do not have any formal institutional mechanism for delivering experiential learning (Cowart, 2010). These programs lack core institutional resources such as personnel, budgets, and other resources to foster experiential learning. Instead, experiential learning courses might exist on campus, but they are provided by faculty members who believe in these pedagogical practices and continue to deliver these courses, despite the lack of institutional support. These programs face challenges related to internal networking where faculty may struggle to 'find one another',

as well as convincing administration and students about the value of experiential learning. Integrative experiential programs, meanwhile, are characterized by student and faculty support for experiential learning, formal institutional mechanisms (e.g., committees, campus offices), as well as funding (Cowart, 2010). The critical distinction between these two programs is the degree of formal institutional support for experiential education. Others, such as Coker and Porter (2015) have worked to develop best practices of experiential education. They suggest that to improve teaching and learning related to experiential education institutions must: 1) provide a spectrum of experiential learning opportunities; 2) frame experiences for broad liberal-learning outcomes; and 3) provide all students with access to each type of experience. While student motivations with respect to experiential learning typically surround career goals and programs of study, the authors suggest that reframing experiences is needed. Indeed, students may approach different forms of experiential learning with misconceptions based on stereotypes (Coker & Porter, 2015). For example, in their study they found students had the impression that applied research opportunities were only valuable for those considering graduate studies, and study abroad was just about learning about different cultures. Such misconceptions were more reflective of 'cherry picked' messages about each form of experiential learning. Part of this, they found, was attributed to institutional siloing around particular forms of experiential learning, in which faculty handled research, internships were facilitated by career centres, etc., and "each group tends to drift toward a message that fits that group's expertise and reward structures" (p. 71). If institutions are looking to expand experiential education, it was their recommendation that more work needs to be done to disabuse students from these stereotypes. This may also be beneficial in addressing student barriers for accessing experiential learning, in which some students have stated that they simply run out of time when it comes to becoming involved in

experiential learning opportunities, as well as feelings of being unprepared or inadequate (Coker & Porter, 2016; Cornell et al., 2013).

On balance with designing experiential education programming is the issue of depth and breadth in undergraduate studies. With concerted efforts to expand the amount of experiential learning opportunities in higher education (Breunig, 2017; Heinrich & Green, 2020; Katula & Threnhauser, 1999; Lund Dean & Wright, 2017; J. Roberts, 2008), Coker and colleagues (2017) suggest reframing the narrative around the depth of these learning experiences. While a breadth of experiences has positive implications for soft-skill development (i.e., relational gains), experiences with greater depth are associated with higher order thinking (i.e., cognitive gains) (Coker et al., 2017). Their recommendation is to be less obsessive about quantifying the number of experiences students may have, and to instead reframe the narrative about the depth and quality of experiences. Such an approach mirrors classic concerns about duration of experiences (e.g., Kolb, 1984), and may also work for repositioning experiential education as a student-centred approach, less concerned with external constituents such as industry pressure (Katula & Threnhauser, 1999).

Despite a broad expansion of experiential education, less has been done to capture the perspectives different institutional groups have on the matter. Below I outline some emerging discussion on faculty perspectives, which are often missing from broader empirical and policy literature. This literature is relatively ‘green’, in that faculty perceptions remain an understudied element of experiential education.

Faculty Perspectives on Experiential Education

Literature covering faculty perceptions of experiential education is surprisingly sparse. Much of the empirical literature on experiential education ‘studies down’, where instructors

write pedagogical articles on the ways they included experiential learning in their courses and the resulting benefits to student learning. Fewer studies have taken the task of 'studying sideways' to look at how faculty peers view experiential education. This is especially significant, as Qualters (2010a, p. 57) notes that different parties to experiential education across universities will all have "burning questions" about how experiential education impacts the realms they inhabit within universities. Some (e.g., Rosenstein et al., 2012; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017) have attempted to look across disciplines to uncover faculty perceptions of experiential education. Unfortunately, the findings of these studies do not delve much into any disciplinary nuances, and are otherwise restricted to survey methods. Resulting claims are that faculty acknowledge the value of experiential education, but that most still rely on "traditional" instructional methods such as lecturing (see Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).

Another approach, such as Peters and Academica (2012) has been to review faculty perceptions of particular modes of experiential learning. In this case, faculty perceptions of work-integrated learning (WIL) were reviewed. While, again, faculty acknowledged the value of WIL, they were less convinced about the need to increase the level of WIL taking place at university.

Together, these bodies of work have noted some collective challenges faculty members face when it comes to experiential education. These challenges include not having enough time to implement experiential learning techniques, lack of financial resources, balancing experiential learning with other curricular course requirements, large class sizes, classroom structure, ensuring quality student placements, and experiential education not being recognized in tenure and promotion decisions (Peters & Academica Group Inc., 2012; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).

While these challenges are noteworthy, missing are considerations of disciplinary nuance, as well as consideration about how stages in academic career might influence perspectives on experiential education (e.g., sessional vs. tenured). Considering such positions might also contribute previously unconsidered or unnoted challenges in the sparse literature. The door is open for studies to address these gaps, while also bringing in rich sociological theorizing and methodological approaches.

Conclusion

This review highlights some of the core aspects of experiential education, and its relevance to higher education. Experiential education has some strong theoretical and philosophical foundations. Inherent to these is that blending experience with learning in a sustained pedagogical context has the power to enhance student learning outcomes (Eyler, 2009; Roberts, 2016). While there are numerous empirical studies that operationalize different modes of experiential education (e.g., Chavan, 2011; Cornell et al., 2013), there has been expressed concern that these repeat accounts of implementation fail to meaningfully add to experiential education as a research topic (Seaman, 2008). Rather, what is accomplished through these is cyclical acknowledgement that experiential learning can be 'done' in various disciplines. More work is needed to add robust theorizing and methodological rigour to further interrogate experiential education as a field, or research topic, rather than taken-for-granted institutional lore.

With enhanced discussion about the value of blending applied learning into university curriculum, and exposing students to the 'real world', researchers have gone to work establishing best practices for developing experiential education programming (Coker & Porter, 2015; Schwartz, 2012). Valuable in these discussions is the need to avoid experiential 'cherry picking'

jargon. Instead, expansion of experiential learning opportunities needs to 1) be accompanied with communication that disabuses particular stereotypes about different modes of experiential learning; and 2) be reoriented to include a focus on the depth of experiences being offered to avoid simple counting exercises that can otherwise reorient experiential education to a teacher-centred pedagogy. These are critically important given other student barriers to experiential education, such as feelings of inadequacy, time, and money (Coker & Porter, 2016; Cornell et al., 2013). As discussions continue about how to incorporate more experiential education into universities, such recommendations are critical for the development of experiential programming and implementation strategies.

Despite these pervasive discussions on the value of experiential education, and how best to design experiential programming, absent is literature capturing the nuances of faculty perceptions. This remains surprising, given the central role faculty play in developing and implementing experiential learning opportunities (Eyler, 2009; Peters & Academica Group Inc., 2012). There remains a conceptual gap with respect to how faculty perceptions may vary across disciplinary lines, and whether tenure status impacts attitudes toward experiential education. Also, important to consider is the perspective of non-users- those whose perspectives are on 'the other side of the coin'. Such perspectives are important to consider as expansion efforts are underway, as faculty buy-in will be critical for achieving support for experiential education. Further research is also needed that considers the institutional and organizational context of experiential education.[9] While some literature does consider design and development of experiential education, more could be done to consider how it 'plays out' within universities.

[9] While there are two notable exceptions (see Isaak et al., 2018; LaCroix, 2021), these do not constitute enough of a substantive focus to be as relevant to this overview of the literature.

PREFACE TO CHAPTER 3: MESO-FOUNDATIONS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION[10]

Experiential education is rife with organizational complexity. Despite some emerging attention to experiential learning as an organizational process, it remains entrenched as a pedagogical, rather than an organizational, topic. This not only has an impact on how experiential learning is conceptualized, but it also limits our ability to take a broad view of organizational change within the university sector. To examine experiential education as an organizational process, I qualitatively analyze three cohorts of Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA) in Ontario to see how conceptions and communications of experiential learning have changed over time and address how Ontario universities have responded to institutional pressure. The SMA process is the provincial government's accountability and transparency framework, which communicates government priorities to universities, and universities respond with implementation plans. Drawing on frame analysis, I find that universities have developed a considerable amount of institutional infrastructure and initiatives to support the expansion of experiential learning, and these efforts have been framed in relation to current discourse about graduate skill readiness. However, these outward signaling responses are not necessarily aligned with internal organizational processes (e.g., expansion of co-curricular learning). In practice, this means that experiential learning has achieved a level of institutionalization within Ontario universities, rather than being a process of ceremonial compliance. These mandate agreements represent official accounts of institutional priorities, which leaves the door open for future research to examine the experiences of the faculty and staff inhabiting these institutions.

[10] This chapter has been published in the Canadian Journal of Higher Education. The article is available at the following link: https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/view/190053/186659.

CHAPTER 3: MESO-FOUNDATIONS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION IN ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE PROVINCE'S STRATEGIC MANDATE AGREEMENTS

Introduction

Experiential education is a concept that has become diffuse in academic institutional language. Often blended with discussions on the skill-readiness of undergraduate students (see Munro et al., 2014), experiential education is touted as facilitating the kind of skill development employers are looking for. In contemporary applications, the "experience" component of experiential education has been increasingly applied to particular *forms* of learning, and has been increasingly discussed in vocational terms (e.g., Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada, 2021). In Ontario, these distinctions have broadly been between curricular and work-integrated learning (see Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2016). In 2016, the provincial government produced some institutional principles on experiential education, in which experiential learning was discussed as helping students to get "hands-on learning that helps them transition to employment", with the added benefit to employers that students can "hit the ground running" (p. 1) once employed. These principles emerged out of a report authored by the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel. In *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility* (Government of Ontario, 2016a), the Panel recommended that Ontario commit to "ensure that every student has at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate from post-secondary education" (p. 27).

Skill-readiness for the world of work is not a new topic in education discourse, nor policy discourse. As Wheelahan, Moodie, and Doughney (2022) trace, there has been rich discussion on 'skills'. They contend that the preoccupation of skills is akin to a commodity fetishism (see Marx, 1990[1867]), where the concept of skill "has become reified as existing independently of

the bodies of those who exercise skill and of the social relations in which skills are embedded and through which skill is developed, exercised and recognized" (p. 2). There has been a range of sociological perspectives which have also contributed to these discussions. For example, Human Capital Theory (see Becker, 1964), credentialism (Collins, 2019[1979]), and signaling perspectives (e.g., Arrow, 1973; Spence, 1974) (for an excellent review, see Pizarro Milian et al., 2019). Policy discourse has been preoccupied with trying to identify exactly what skills are most needed for the future (e.g., Macpherson & Rizk, 2022; Royal Bank of Canada, 2018), and the economic impact of skill vacancies in the Canadian economy (Gabler & Gormley, 2022). While sociological literature has been concerned primarily with theoretical foundations and building an empirical understanding of the labour connections between schooling and the economy, policy discourse often 'reinvents the wheel' with respect to further refining and re-defining what skills are beneficial for future labour market success (Government of Ontario, 2016b). For example, foundational skills have included critical thinking and problem solving, with RBC (2018) mapping occupations into skill "clusters" to map the skills most needed for job mobility. Macpherson and Rizk (2022) took a different approach based on consultations with "education and skills stakeholders"[11] and grouped skills into three categories: foundational skills (e.g., literacy and numeracy), social and emotional skills (e.g., "soft skills" or "21st century skills"), and employment readiness skills (e.g., technical skills). The discourse on skills is a conceptual rabbit hole that can have researchers sifting through literature that seems to rehash descriptions of skills, often concluding that there is a 'skills gap' among new and recent graduates. Despite these efforts there is a persistent concern that universities are not preparing graduates well

[11] Stakeholders included employers and professionals working in government, post-secondary institutions, professional associations, and non-profit organizations across Canada.

enough for the demands of the labour market (Busteed, 2019; Gismondi, 2021; Government of Ontario, 2016b; Times Higher Education, 2021; for a counter position see Colyar et al., 2022).

The relevance of skills to the current research project is that experiential learning is often held out as providing opportunities for skill development and remedying the skills gap before students enter the workforce. This development can help ease the transition of undergraduate students into economically productive workers and socially responsible individuals (Agnew, 2022; Macpherson & Rizk, 2022; Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2016). The 'skills gap' and associated need for universities to reconsider their role in preparing the workers of tomorrow has spurred new considerations for how universities react to the pressures to 'skill' their students in order to better equip graduates with twenty-first century skills (Coker et al., 2017; Kuh et al., 2008). This shift has placed new organizational demands to foster experiential learning as a mechanism to transmit those skills.

There has been a plethora of pedagogical discussion on the value of experiential learning (for examples, see Coker et al., 2017; see also Council of Ontario Universities, 2014), and there have even been musings of introducing "rich transcripts" which would denote experiential learning opportunities students had taken and the skills they have developed (Berdahl, 2022). The pre-occupation with experiential learning presents an opportunity to study how universities have responded to the organizational pressure within their environment, and how they frame their institutional responses to this pressure. Ironically, the educational and policy discourse on skills has meant that the associated discussion of experiential learning has been both uncritical and overlooked from an organizational standpoint. Until recently, experiential education had not been subject to organizational analysis, though it has been found to be a complex organizational process (see LaCroix, 2022) as opposed to a 'silver bullet' pedagogical approach for skill

development and other learning outcomes. The analysis presented in this chapter forwards experiential learning as an organizational process in Ontario.

This chapter addresses the following research question: how have Ontario universities responded to the institutionalization of experiential education in the field of post-secondary education? I qualitatively address this research question through textual content analysis of the province's Strategic Mandate Agreements, where experiential education has become a formalized funding metric. I draw on frame theory to analyze how experiential education is framed within these agreements, and how institutions have articulated their implementation of experiential learning practices. Grounded in social movements literature, frame theory is used to analyze how the process of meaning making (i.e., framing), is used to achieve a degree of resonance and mobilize collective action. While useful, there has been scant crossover between frame theory and organizational perspectives. Leaning on previous tenets of organizational studies, I hypothesized that institutional responses would be merely ceremonial in nature, rather than sedimented changes at the core of the institutions. What the data show, in fact, is that Ontario universities have undergone a concerted effort to foster experiential education, a process which has gone beyond mere ceremonial compliance. These institutions have developed core infrastructure to support experiential learning, and greatly expanded their efforts over time. Interestingly, while there is a broad development of different forms of experiential learning, universities often frame their expansion around work-integrated learning, and the above noted skills-tension in current discourse.

Situating Ontario's Strategic Mandate Process

The Strategic Mandate Agreement (SMA) process began in 2012 amid provincial discussions on differentiating the post-secondary landscape in Ontario (Buzzelli & Songsore, 2022).

Although Ontario has some diversity to its higher education system (e.g., colleges, universities, religious institutions), there were policy concerns about how *different* these institutions were from each other. For example, how truly different are the University of Waterloo and University of Guelph from one another? The differentiation debate emerged while trying to balance access to post-secondary, while also imbuing some degree of distinction between existing institutions (for a review, see Piché & Jones, 2016). Discussions on differentiation have an established policy history in Ontario, both in terms of scholarly research (Buzzelli & Allison, 2017; Hicks & Jonker, 2016; Piché, 2015; Piché & Jones, 2016) and institutional/government reports (Clark et al., 2009, 2011; MTCU, 2012, 2013; Weingarten & Deller, 2010; for a review, see Pizarro Milian et al., 2016). The idea of Strategic Mandate Agreements originated in a report by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), in which differentiation was touted as a beneficial process that could be accomplished by the creation of accountability agreements between each publicly funded university and the government[12] (Weingarten & Deller, 2010). The conclusion of the report was that a more differentiated higher education system would be beneficial to students and the public, and it provided a four-step "roadmap to differentiation" (p. 17). Included in these steps were multi-year accountability agreements signed between universities and the province (step 3), and an incremental funding design that tied funding to desired outcomes (step 4). The recommendations of this report were influential, leading to the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities' (MTCU) *Differentiation Policy Framework* (2013), which identified differentiation as a primary policy driver for post-secondary education transformation, and which would require universities to align their mandates with government priorities. It is in this report that the strategic mandate process is outlined as the mechanism

[12] While the focus of my doctoral research is on universities, readers should be aware that this process was, and remains, inclusive of Ontario's public colleges as well.

through which government priorities will be outlined and responded to by the universities, all with the goal to ensure the quality of public higher education in Ontario "in the face of increasing enrollments and diminishing resources", as well as meet the needs of Ontario's post-secondary students (HEQCO, 2013, p. 7). The SMA agreements all have a 'shelf life' of five years, and are renewed toward the expiry date of each cohort. Gradually, each cohort has changed in terms of the structure of the document, becoming less open-ended over time. In the most recent cohort the government introduced a "made in Ontario" performance-based funding model that is focused more on student and economic outcomes (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Mirroring the development of the province's differentiation and accountability framework has been a wide-ranging interest in experiential education. Beginning in 2012, the Ministry highlighted experiential learning as a valuable avenue for strengthening the university system, and this was favourably endorsed by the Council of Ontario Universities (2014). Experiential learning was rationalized for having a positive and strong impact on the job readiness of students after graduation by providing both job experience and access to professional networks. Even within the original MTCU (2013) policy statement there is mention of further developing experiential education in the university sector. In the most recent iteration of the SMA process experiential learning became one of six "skills and job outcome" performance metrics (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Below I outline the structure of each of these SMA cohorts[13]. On its own, this exercise will give readers a sense of how these documents have evolved over time in terms of structure, and the kinds of government priorities these structural changes signal. I begin by situating each

[13] As a bibliographic note, I cite each cohort as SMA1, SMA2, and SMA3 respectively. Each cohort is publicly available through the Ministry website: https://www.ontario.ca/page/all-college-and-university-strategic-mandate-agreements.

cohort of mandate agreements, hereafter referred to as SMA1, SMA2, and SMA3. These policy documents operate on a recursive relationship between the provincial government and each institution. While the province dictates funding priorities, universities respond in kind, and in ways that are advantageous to their existing operations. Through this overview, it will be apparent that experiential education has become one of the province's funding metrics used to determine, in part, how much public funds a university may receive. As the province's steward of post-secondary education, the government has increasingly emphasized experiential education as an educational priority. The question, though, is how universities have responded to this process.

SMA1 (2014-2017)

The MTCU website outlines that SMA1 highlights institutional priorities of each of the province's 45 publicly funded colleges and universities, and that each agreement outlines 1) the strengths of each institution, and 2) how the government and each institution can work together to build on these strengths. Specifically, the government suggests one of the ways these parties can work together is by "reducing overlapping programs between schools" (MTCU, 2021, n.p.). SMA1 begins with Ontario's vision for postsecondary education, which reads:

> *Ontario's colleges and universities will drive creativity, innovation, knowledge, and community engagement through teaching and research. They will put students first by providing the best possible learning experience for all qualified learners in an affordable and financially sustainable way, ensuring high quality, and globally competitive outcomes for students and Ontario's creative economy* (SMA1, p. 2).

The government vision statement is followed by the institution's own vision statement, and a preamble to the remainder of the document. This preamble outlines that the agreement is between the government and the institution; it outlines the institution's current role in the post-secondary education system; and, that government will help to build on the institutional vision

while also driving system-wide diversity. These SMA priorities are followed by a statement about the extent to which the government respects the institution's "autonomy with respect to its academic and internal resource allocation decision" (SMA1, p. 2) and that the university acknowledges the role of the government as the provincial steward of the PSE system.

The remainder of the document largely outlines the ways in which the institution is unique, and potentially can be differentiated from its PSE counterparts. The areas of differentiation are 1) jobs, innovation, and economic development, 2) teaching and learning, 3) student population, 4) research, 5) program offerings, and 6) institutional collaboration to support student mobility. End matter of this document includes space for the institution to provide data tables related to undergraduate growth, and graduate expansion. Thus, SMA1 ends with some of the future aspirations for the student composition of the institution.

SMA2 (2017-2020)

SMA2 is the second cohort of agreements, and becomes much more targeted than SMA1. The MTCU outlines these agreements as encouraging institutions to "work with the government to help build a highly skilled workforce and also put an emphasis on collaboration and openness" (MTCU, 2021, n.p.). The SMA template provides dual space for institutions to reiterate what they said in their SMA1, and how things will stay the same or change for SMA2. Much like SMA1, SMA2 begins with a vision for Ontario's PSE:

> *Ontario's colleges and universities will drive creativity, innovation, knowledge, skills development and community engagement through teaching and learning, research, and service.*
>
> *Ontario's colleges and universities will put students first by providing the best possible learning experience for all qualified learners in an affordable and financially sustainable way, ensuring high quality and globally competitive outcomes for students and Ontario's economy* (SMA2, p. 1)

If institutions were changing their vision statements from SMA1, they were asked to provide a mandate statement, a mission statement, and a vision statement.[14]

The preamble for SMA2 outlined the role the institution currently performs, and "how it will build on its current strengths to achieve its vision and help drive system-wide objectives and government priorities" (SMA2, p. 2). The preamble is followed by a section outlining shared objectives and priorities, asking institutions to report on past, present, and future initiatives which will help further areas of differentiated strength related to 1) student experience, 2) innovation in teaching and learning excellence, 3) access and equity, 4) research excellence and impact, and 5) innovation, economic development, and community engagement

SMA2 expanded the enrolment section, and asks for institutions to report proposed enrolment midpoint and enrolment headcounts for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as international students. In this section institutions are also asked to lay out their international enrollment strategy and collaboration, strategic areas of program strength, and outline financial and other sustainability metrics.

SMA2 ends with a section on institutional collaborations and partnerships, where institutions are asked to outline how they are working with other institutions to create a "range of opportunities in a coordinated system" (SMA2, p. 19).

SMA3 (2020-2025)

SMA3 is the most recent cohort of agreements and is currently in place for all public colleges and universities in the province. The MTCU outlines that the SMA is part of the government's

[14] The institutional mandate statement identifies an institution's current role within Ontario's postsecondary education system, as it relates to establishing legislation and current strategic plan. The institutional mission statement describes how priority activities undertaken at an institution help to further its mandate. The institutional vision statement indicates how an institution's future aspirations align with the government's vision for higher education, skills development and differentiation priorities (see SMA1).

"accountability framework for the post-secondary education system", which includes the government's accountability and transparency objectives, as well as the institution's priorities. There are a number of noted differences between SMA3 and its predecessors. The first is that SMA3 introduces "a new 'made in Ontario' performance-based funding model" (MTCU, 2021, n.p.) which is more focused on student and economic outcomes, such as graduate employment earnings, experiential learning, and skills and competencies. This means that the funding which used to be tied more toward enrollment numbers will gradually shift towards performance on these metrics. This funding model is purported to enhance accountability and transparency by ensuring "that the funding postsecondary institutions receive results in positive economic outcomes" (MTCU, 2021), and will ensure graduates are set up for success by encouraging institutions to be more efficient at what they do best.

Unlike SMA1 and SMA2, SMA3 does not begin with a provincial vision for PSE. The preamble sets out some of the core functions of the SMA, including establishing the new performance metrics, establishing a corridor midpoint that will be used to form the basis of enrolment-related funding over the SMA period, and outlines the provincial objectives and priority areas for the PSE system. The provincial objectives reflect the spirit of this SMA, which is "focused on promoting accountability through transparency and a focus on performance outcomes" (SMA3, p. 3). Broadly, the objectives reflect a more neoliberal approach to higher education governance, focused on accountability and performance outcomes, alignment of programming with labour market needs, and incentivizing differentiation to reduce inefficiencies in the system and its institutions.

Following the SMA objectives is the institutional profile, where institutions are asked to "describe how your institutional mission supports the priority areas of the Ontario government"

(SMA3, p. 4). The SMA then outlines the performance/outcome-based funding model, which asks the institution to report on the annual allocation of performance/outcomes-based funding (as calculated by the ministry), and to break down the institutional weighting strategy for the funding metrics. Institutions can decide for themselves how each of the metrics will be weighted with a maximum of 35% and minimum of 10% for 2020-21, maximum 30% and minimum 5% for 2021-2022, and then maximum 25% and minimum 5% through to 2025. This gradual overall reduction is due to the Skills and Competencies metric being assigned an automatic 5% beginning in 2022.

There are three core priority areas that institutions are asked to respond to, demonstrate competencies in, and assign metric weightings to. The first priority area is on skills and job outcomes, which "seeks to measure and evaluate the university's role in supporting student and graduate outcomes and alignment with Ontario's economy" (SMA3, p. 6). This priority area has six metrics for institutions to report on: graduate employment rate in a related field, institutional strength/focus, graduation rate, graduate employment earnings, experiential learning, and skills and competencies.

The second priority area is community and economic impact, which "seeks to measure and evaluate the university's role in supporting Ontario's economy" (SMA3, p. 6). This priority area has four metrics for institutions to report on: community and local impact, institution-specific metric (economic impact), research funding and capacity based on federal tri-council awards, and innovation: research revenue attracted from private sector sources.

The final priority area is on productivity, accountability, and transparency. This priority area includes data on faculty workload and compensation. These are not a part of the 10 funding metrics and will not be tied to performance-based funding.

SMA3 ends with an enrolment profile which establishes a corridor midpoint for the distribution of enrolment related funding, and asks institutions to project funding-eligible enrolment and international enrolments for the duration of the SMA3 timeframe.

The addition of experiential learning to the funding metrics signals to institutions that the government wants to see students engaged in skill-developing experiences during their studies. However, no study has yet investigated the extent to which experiential learning has become institutionalized across Ontario's universities; nor, how the broad implementation of experiential education is rationalized by these institutions. These two factors open the door to scholarly research from an organizational perspective, investigating how institutions frame their development of experiential learning.

Theoretical Foundations: Institutionalization and Frame Theory

To consider the diffusion of experiential learning across the university sector, and the ways in which institutions foster it is a matter of institutionalization and framing. Institutionalization is the process by which organizational patterns become entrenched, both within an organization's structure and across and organizational field (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Tolbert and Zucker (1996) outline the process of institutionalization that moves from habitualization (i.e., where policies become formalized), to objectification (i.e., the development of structures to support an initiative, and which become accepted by individuals), to sedimentation (i.e., where these structures persist over time). If there is direct, or coercive (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) pressure from the government telling universities that they must 1) be implementing experiential education, and 2) be able to articulate where and how it is happening, this may give an indication that typical organizational buffering processes like ceremonial compliance may not be effective at warding off organizational scrutiny (see Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The SMA process provides

an opportunity to study organizational responses to accountability mechanisms and analyze how organizations attempt to legitimize their responses. Complementary to this process, is the way in which experiential education is being framed within the province, and how this framing influences organizational responses/discussions.

Frame theory is a popular theory within social movements literature (e.g., Benford, 1997; Snow & Benford, 1992), providing analytic tools to understand how collective action is likely to occur (Snow & Benford, 1992). With its sociological origins in the micro-foundations of everyday life (Goffman, 1974), the frame concept was originally conceptualized along lines of "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21), or individual-level references to help make sense of situations and spur social action. Social movements scholars have worked to expand framing from an internal individual process to the level of collective action. In essence, frame theory considers the process of framing, the "active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and connection and the level of reality construction" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614). This constructive process creates interpretive frames that are meant to influence collective action, referred to as "collective action frames" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). To achieve resonance with social actors, there are certain core framing tasks to build consensus and inspire collective action. These tasks include a 1) diagnostic element, whereby an event or aspect of social life is identified as needing change; 2) a prognosis, or proposed solution to the identified event; and 3) a motivational component that is used to rationalize participating in corrective action (Snow & Benford, 1988). While these processes help to create the interpretive frames that social actors can draw on, it is critical they resonate with these actors in order to achieve uptake. Frames that are seen as credible and salient to social actors are more effective in mobilizing collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). When there is a greater degree of consistency between the frame and

the beliefs and values of social actors, and when there is a greater degree of "empirical credibility" (i.e., alignment between the frame and the 'real world'), it is more likely that the frame will achieve the necessary social 'buy in' needed to mobilize action.

As a power-laden process (Carragee & Roefs, 2004), frame analysis can address not only how meanings become constructed, but also consider the roles of different social actors in that process. For example, Davies (2002) discusses the idea of "narrative fidelity" when puzzling the diffusion of 'progressive education' in Ontario. He found that progressivism endured as popular language in education because it resonated with the values of modern schooling- or the "narrative fidelity" of schools' organizational realities. More recently, Björnehed and Erikson (2018, p. 113) have attempted to merge frame theory with institutional perspectives, forwarding the idea of "frame institutionalization" as a process in which a frame gains both influence and regulative function. They develop a four-step model for how frames become institutionalized and exert a greater deal of regulative control. When frames become institutionalized, it means that they become expressed in formal institutions and exert influence on social actors.

In a way, institutional theory and frame theory talk past one another. While "frame institutionalization" is being touted as something new, institutional theory has long considered how organizational actors make sense of their position, new messaging, and reconcile institutional pressure. At the administrative level, Meyer and Rowan's (1981; 1991) work suggests ceremonial responses. Classic discussions by Scott and Davis (2003) convey how in open organizational systems there is a cultural-cognitive pillar through which information flows and actors develop a stock of knowledge about 'how things are done', including what their own role in the organization is. Coburn's (2004) work on rethinking the interaction between institutional environments and technical cores of organizations states that "action is based on

how people notice or select information from the environment, make meaning of that information, and then act on those interpretations, developing culture, social structures, and routines over time" (p. 214), and that sense is 'made' by placing new information into existing cognitive frameworks (see also Oliver, 1991). The distinction between these two theoretical perspectives is that frame theory focuses on how meanings (i.e., frames) become constructed over time and allows researchers to consider the various stages in this process (e.g., Björnehed and Erikson's model).

Nonetheless, applying the core tenets of frame theory to an organizational context allows for theoretical extension and application. Using frame theory to analyze a meso-organizational process like the diffusion of experiential learning in the Strategic Mandate Agreements contributes to an understanding of how organizations 'frame' their actions in relation to pressures from and within their external environment, and how these actions are rationalized.

Methods

The strategic mandate agreements are formal documents developed by the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU, 2021), and which create binding agreements about how much public money will be sent to the universities, as well as how this money will be prioritized by each institution. To analyze the extent to which experiential learning has become institutionalized and articulated in the Ontario university system, and how this process has been responded to, I engaged in qualitative content analysis.

Content analysis is grounded in the German tradition of hermeneutics, as an approach to achieving verstehen, or the 'understanding' of texts (Joas & Knöbl, 2014). As research method, content analysis has not been immune to dichotomous thinking around qualitative versus quantitative methodology. Early approaches to content analysis were quantitative in nature, and

followed a heavy positivist tradition of trying to uncover objective truths in the way language and communication conveyed the 'true' intentions of the communicator (for a classic text, see Berelson, 1952). Favouring quantitative approaches to language as more scientific, content analysis would measure the frequency of units and symbols within a particular category, or could otherwise be used to classify content "in more precise, numerical terms" (Kaplan & Goldsen, 1949, p. 83). Qualitative proponents, as noted by Holsti (1969) have argued that frequency cannot be used to infer importance of units, symbols, or categories. Indeed, a single word or phrase may be much more significant and important for interpreting a text than those which are more plentiful (Stemler, 2001). Instead, Holsti (1969) encourages analysts to think more pragmatically about content analysis, and ask themselves "what is the theoretical relevance of the measures I am using?" (p. 8). Heeding this advice, I rely on Roller and Lavrakas (2015), who define content analysis as a systematic and process-driven method of inquiry, involving "the systematic reduction of content, analyzed with special attention on the context in which the data were created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations" (p. 230). Taken together, and regardless of methodological paradigm, content analysis should be objective and systematic, appreciate and acknowledge the context to which content is connected, and produce data that can be interpreted to enhance empirical knowledge.

The Sample: 3 Cohorts of SMAs Across Ontario (2014-2025)

The Government of Ontario has signed SMA agreements with 21 universities across the province (MTCU, 2021). My sampling approach was to retrieve and download all the SMAs across the three date cohorts. I made the strategic decision to include all institutions except for the Université de Hearst, as I was working within the Maclean's university ranking system to explore distinctions in the institutionalization of experiential education across institution type. Given its specialized and highly focused institutional scope (i.e., Francophone only), it was

excluded from the sample. This approach also follows existing approaches to analyzing Ontario's SMAs (see Buzzelli & Songsore, 2022). With this exclusion, the sample comprised three SMAs for each of Ontario's remaining 20 institutions, or 60 agreements total.

The SMAs were accessible through the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities website. Each cohort was downloaded from the website and uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data management system. In order to keep track of the agreements, I developed a simple naming convention which took the form 'Institution(1)' for the first SMA, 'Institution(2)' for the second SMA, and 'Institution(3)' for the third SMA. Given that there were 60 agreements to analyze, this simple naming convention helped to keep the agreements organized, and also helped to facilitate a smooth coding process. Every institution was created as a 'case' in NVivo, and assigned two case attributes. The first case attribute was "generation", which allowed me to classify the SMA document by SMA1, SMA2, or SMA3. The second case attribute was "university", which assigned the SMA document to its respective institution. This process was important to perform at the data import stage because these classifications would later be used to run analytic queries based on institution and SMA cohort.

Each institution's agreement varied in length, both individually and across the three SMA cohorts. As outlined in Table 2, the total page count for the SMAs was 852 pages of text. SMA1 averaged approximately 12 pages in length per institution, SMA2 averaged approximately 20 pages per institution, and SMA3 averaged approximately 10 pages per institution.

Table 2: SMA Page Lengths by Institution and Cohort

Institution	SMA1	SMA2	SMA3	Sum of SMA
Algoma	10	19	9	38
Brock	12	18	9	39
Carleton	14	25	11	50

Guelph	13	22	10	45
Lakehead	15	33	12	60
Laurentian	15	18	11	44
McMaster	11	16	11	38
Nipissing	13	16	9	38
OCAD	12	16	10	38
Ottawa	14	23	9	46
Queen's	14	12	10	36
Ryerson	12	19	10	41
Toronto	11	14	10	35
Trent	15	22	9	46
UOIT	12	13	10	35
Waterloo	12	19	9	40
Western	11	20	9	40
Wilfrid Laurier	12	19	11	42
Windsor	11	29	12	52
York	13	26	10	49
			TOTAL	852

Data Analysis

The content analysis was performed in two coding cycles. While these broadly followed a process of descriptive coding into analytic coding, there was a considerable amount of 'in-between' coding processes given the number of documents. To begin, once the SMAs were imported into NVivo I engaged in the process of familiarization, where I read several of agreements for the same institutions across SMA1, SMA2, and SMA3. For convenience and comparability, I read Algoma, Brock, and Carleton (i.e., the first three institutions). This process of data familiarization allowed me to learn about the structure of these documents, the uniqueness of the structure for each SMA, and to get a general feel for the writing style. During the stage of familiarization, the researcher immerses themselves in the body of materials they have gathered, and set any hunches they may have about the data "firmly in context by taking

stock and gaining a feel for the material as a whole" (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002, p. 310). This process involved reading these agreements in their entirety, not just the sections which covered experiential learning. This process was particularly valuable, because although there were sections of each agreement that were more oriented to experiential learning, the concept 'experiential learning' appeared in many places throughout these documents. It was also important to read the agreements of a few institutions to become familiar with how different universities approached the SMA task. At the same time, the breadth of topics covered in these documents made it clear that the analysis process would not be one of a simple first-cycle, second-cycle coding scheme. Rather, there would be lots of back and forth to create a reliable coding framework- a classification scheme that "encompasses a collection of categories and a set of rules on how to attribute data to these categories" (Madden et al., 2013, p. 699; see also Silverman, 2005). For clarity, below I categorize the analysis into 'first' and 'second' cycles. However, the data analysis did not proceed in a purely linear fashion. The breadth of the topics covered in these documents made it necessary to continually move back and forth between documents and re-read sections to gain confidence in the codes I was creating and ensure that each was sufficiently saturated with data (Morse, 2015).

First Cycle Coding

Following the process of familiarization, I began my first round of coding. Given that one of the goals of my thesis research is to uncover *how* experiential education has been integrated into Ontario universities, I made the analytic decision to code the SMAs by cohort. In essence, round one of coding meant analyzing SMA1 for all institutions, then moving on to SMA2, followed by SMA3. To begin, I re-read the first SMA agreement for Algoma, Brock, and Carleton, making jottings of inductive codes to use as a classification scheme. This process is what Creswell (2013) refers to as 'winnowing' the data. These preliminary codes were all 'top-

level' codes, with no child or grandchild codes. The codes were more descriptive in nature. Examples of the codes were "Challenges associated with EL",[15] "Forms of EL", "Future of EL", and "Rationalization of EL". Aligned with the principles of coding in general, and content analysis specifically, each code had an accompanying definition to ensure they were being applied consistently and objectively to the SMAs. NVivo is also helpful for keeping track of the number of references to each code in the content of the SMAs. Altogether, round one consisted of 9 top-level codes that were applied to all the SMAs. By the time I had read all of the SMA1 agreements, no new codes were added to the codebook, and the codebook was then used to code SMA2 and SMA3.

The codes that were developed during this stage were more descriptive in nature, allowing me to understand what was currently being done with respect to experiential learning, as well as some future goals. The relatively small number of codes may standout to some as too restricted to a project of this scale. While there is no 'prefect number' of codes for qualitative research projects, it has not stopped methodologists (e.g., Saldaña, 2016) from suggesting that projects could end up with hundreds of codes depending on the analytic approach. As an analytic strategy, I coded broadly to capture as much data as possible. Given that the coding process was going to take place across the three cohorts I decided that it was best to cast a wide net that could later be analytically refined during subsequent rounds of coding. In this way, I was what Bernard (2011) refers to as a 'lumper', or someone who creates "summative codes that capture the essence of a segment of text" (Aurini et al., 2022, p. 258). For example, the code "Forms of EL" was used as a catch-all code to record examples or forms of experiential learning that were mentioned (e.g., classroom simulations, co-op, internships). This 'lumping' process was not

[15] In the coding process, EL is an abbreviation for Experiential Learning.

without a level of systematic-ness, as the definitions of each code also served to establish exclusion criteria. In the "Forms of EL" code, no references would be added unless they were specifically held out as experiential learning in the agreements. Having inclusion and exclusion criteria for each code help to reduce researcher bias, as I was not imparting my own interpretations of experiential learning. Rather, the point of this exercise was to see how the universities themselves were thinking about and communicating experiential learning.

Given the exploratory nature of this research project, and to keep the spirit of inquiry forefront in the analytic process, some code definitions were phrased as questions. For example, the definition for the "Institutional Initiative Related to EL" was "How have institutions shifted their operations to expand or develop EL?". I found this helpful for the exploration phase of the analysis, as it kept me curious throughout the first round of coding and helped me identify more references that could be lumped together.

The lumping technique was advantageous for another reason. Pragmatically, and practically, 852 pages of text is quite a bit of document content. As well, the structure of the documents changes depending on which SMA cohort is being analyzed. Adopting a 'lumped' approach to round one meant that the later analytic refinement could be done from within the winnowed data itself, as opposed to having to start anew for each SMA cohort.

While I was focused on the portions of the SMAs that the institutions themselves wrote, it was also noteworthy that experiential learning became more prominent in the formal structure of SMA2 and SMA3. For example, in SMA2 the instructions for each institution to "please include your institution's definition of what would be included in 'Experiential Learning'" (p. 4). As well, in SMA3 experiential learning appears in several places of the document, such as the metric ranking section, and in the Skills and Job Outcome section where institutions are asked to

discuss the "Number and proportion of graduates in programs, who participated in at least one course with required Experiential Learning (EL) component(s)" (p. 9). Noting these examples, it became clear that experiential learning was becoming more of a formalized government priority over time, and something that the institutions would need to respond to. This also suggested that a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate to analyze the data, as a more quantitative approach (e.g., frequency queries) could risk counting elements of Ministry-provided text and potentially skew interpretations.

Second Cycle Coding

After no new codes were developed, and the final SMA3 document was analyzed, I began second-cycle coding. In this stage, I focused on analytic refinement. While I am delineating two broad processes of coding (i.e., first and second cycle), this should not imply that these were two general processes. Within the second cycle, the codebook and the data were continuously revisited and refined over several 'waves' of analysis. Whereas first cycle coding was characterised by 'lumping', the second cycle was characterised by 'splitting' (Bernard, 2011). Working toward analytic refinement, splitting allowed me to break down the large bunches of text data to "differentiate each idea expressed in the text" (Aurini et al., 2022, p. 259). This process allowed me to refine the names and definitions of codes, and create child and grandchild codes which more adequately captured the complexity with which experiential learning was discussed across the SMAs. This process resulted in a codebook with 11 top level codes, 47 child codes, 31 grandchild codes, and 2 great-grandchild codes.

Taking a 'splitter' approach meant that the initial codebook was revisited, and each code was individually re-evaluated for nuances, internal disagreements, and even the name of the code. For example, in the first cycle coding I created the code "EL as foundational to

institutional mission", but in re-evaluating the references contained in that code it became clear that the code should be renamed "EL as core value to the institution". The rationale for the change was that experiential learning was not *foundational* to the mission of the university. Indeed, no institution mentioned being founded in part to facilitate experiential learning. Rather, experiential learning was emerging as a core institutional value through the different iterations of the SMA process, often being framed by institutional commitments to continue growing and fostering different forms of experiential learning.

Other codes were both renamed and redefined. For example, above I mentioned "Institutional Initiative Related to EL". Following a second round of analysis, and identifying that many institutions talked about creating new offices or professional roles related to experiential learning, this code was renamed as "Institutional Initiative or Infrastructure Related to EL" to capture the infrastructure changes in relation to experiential learning.

During this process there were two major analytic decisions that needed to be made. The first was about how the code "Forms of EL" would be split. "Forms of EL" underwent considerable refinement in the second cycle of analysis. Not only did I refine the code by identifying the specific forms of EL that were discussed (e.g., classroom simulations, co-op, internships), I thematically grouped these as aggregates to one of three thematic child codes: Co-curricular forms of EL, Curricular forms of EL, and Work-integrated learning. So, as a Form of EL, internships was classified under Work-Integrated Learning. The critical analytic decision was how the aggregated references would be distinguished from two other top-level codes: Expansion of EL, and Future Goals of EL. To accomplish this, I refined the definitions of the top-level codes, as these codes captured broadening experiential learning opportunities on-and off-campus (i.e., Expansion of EL), identifying the various types of experiential learning

modalities being offered in the university system (i.e., Forms of EL), and distinguishing *future* plans for expansion that were not otherwise underway in any of the SMAs (i.e., Future Goals of EL). Essentially, this was about distinguishing 'what' was happening (Forms of EL) from 'how' it was happening (i.e., expanding or future planning). This required paying careful attention to how the discourse was being communicated in the SMAs, and how each reference to a form of experiential learning was framed.

The second, and arguably more difficult analytic task was appreciating that what could be coded as a Future Goal of EL in SMA1 might then become Expansion of EL in SMA2 or SMA3 if it had been fully implemented since it was proposed earlier on. While this was a rare occurrence, it was nonetheless noteworthy from a methodological standpoint. In these cases, refences were assigned to their appropriate code (e.g., Expansion of EL or Future Goals of EL). As well, often institutions would repeat examples of experiential learning across the different SMA cohorts. In these instances, all references were still coded as they demonstrate how the institutions communicated 'tried and true' examples of experiential learning. This required a great deal of attention and going back and forth between different SMA cohorts to ensure expansion was adequately and reliably captured.

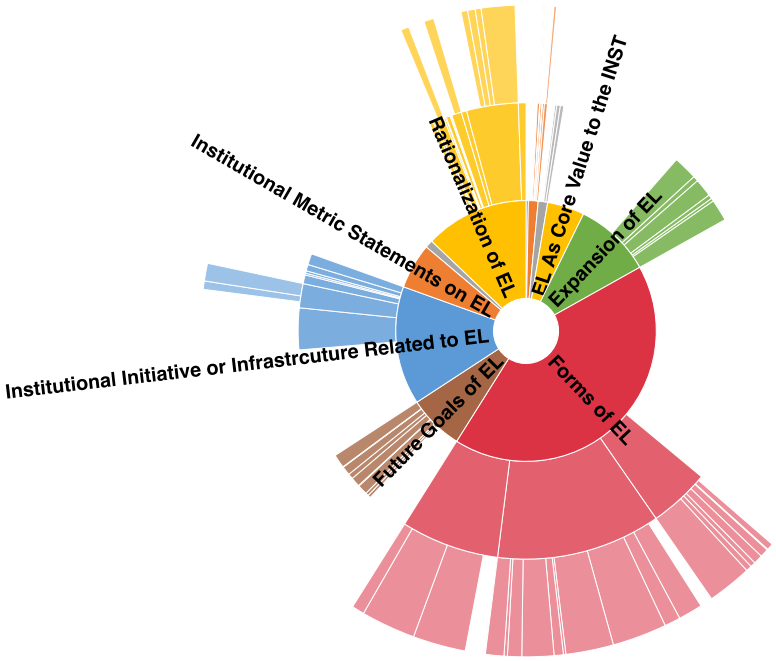
Following several 'waves' of refinement in the second cycle of coding, it became clear that not only were universities expanding experiential learning on their campuses and across their programs, but that this expansion effort was not merely ceremonial as I had hypothesized. Rather, there expansion efforts were accompanied by concerted efforts to improve infrastructure related to experiential learning. Where expansion was happening was also surprising. Given all the public discourse about the incongruence between graduates and the needs of the labour market, I expected that work-integrated learning would be the form of experiential learning that

was expanding the most. Contrary to this assumption, co-curricular forms have experienced the broadest expansion.

Post-Coding Data Visualization

After completing the coding process, I was left with an extensive codebook with approximately 1, 922 text references across the SMAs. I used NVivo's data visualization tools to visualize what this coding spread looked like in abstract form. Data visualization allows researchers to view their data in non-numeric terms which can be particularly relevant for qualitative content analysis. Visualization techniques allowed me to move past some of the quantitative leanings of content analysis, and appreciate the spread and depth of the coding references instead of 'counting references'. NVivo offers several options for researchers to visualize their data. As shown in Figure 2, the most prevalent codes were Forms of EL, Institutional Initiative or Infrastructure Related to EL, Rationalization of EL, and Expansion of EL.

Figure 2: Sunburst Visualization of Codes Compared by Number of References



The sunburst visualization technique is a hierarchy chart, or a radial tree map of the coding spread of my analysis (NVivo, 2022). In terms of structure, the inner most rings are the parent codes, and each successive ring is another generation (i.e., child, grandchild). This is also visually indicated through the lighter colour shades of each successive ring. The relative size of each ring demonstrates the spread of the code across the data, or the number of references contained in each code relative to one another. For example, Figure 2 shows that Forms of EL has a greater spread (i.e., more coding references in the data) than EL As a Core Value to the Institution. Considering both the spread of the codes included in the data, universities are not only focused on communicating what forms of experiential learning is taking place on their campuses and in their programs, there appears to be a concerted effort to ensure that expansion of experiential learning is resourced and rationalized.

While Figure 2 highlights the broad themes in the data, this tool merely shows the spread of coding across the data based on the number of references in each code. It is limited in its capacity as an exploratory tool to make sense of the data. Figure 2 served as the foundation for the next round of analysis and pointed me in the direction to explore each of these areas in greater depth through analytic queries. There were several analytic queries conducted to further explore the data. The analytic queries were run to further investigate expansion of experiential learning and the initiatives and infrastructure across the universities in the sample. To help organize the analyses, I began by analyzing the data across each institution individually, and then considered how the level of 'comprehensiveness' of the institution might play into the analysis. In doing so, I relied on the Maclean's university ranking system. The Maclean's (2020) university ranking system divides Canada's universities into three categories: medical/doctoral, comprehensive, and primary undergraduate. This sorting system has been used for case selection

in previous organizational research (see Buzzelli & Allison, 2017). Medical/doctoral institutions offer a range of research opportunities, Ph.D. programs, and medical programs. Comprehensive universities balance a significant amount of research activity with a broad range of undergraduate and graduate programs. Primarily undergraduate universities offer relatively few graduate programs, and instead focus on undergraduate education. I used this ranking system to organize the results of the queries for both expansion of experiential learning and the development of institutional resources.

Analytic Queries: Expansion of Experiential Learning

The first set of analytic queries were cross-tabs on the expansion of experiential education. Based on the scope and hierarchy of the data in Figure 2 I used a cross-tab analysis technique to further explore how experiential learning has expanded in the province over the SMA cohorts. I conducted three cross-tab queries for the expansion of experiential learning, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Analytic Queries for Expansion of Experiential Learning

Query	Primary Code	Comparison Attributes
Query 1	Expansion of Experiential Learning	University & SMA
Query 2		Institutional Type & SMA
Query 3		Forms of Experiential Learning & SMA

The cross-tab query is used for exploring the spread of coding across particular cases in NVivo. As each SMA document was assigned two case attributes, I was able to run queries that would explore the spread of coding across the SMA documents, and the findings would be broken down by institution and SMA cohort. This allows the data to be presented by institution or SMA cohort, and to compare the prevalence of the code over time.

Analyzing the expansion of experiential learning at a structural level is valuable for understanding where in the university system this expansion is happening, and gives clues about the potential relationship between experiential learning and the institutional priorities of these institutions. What this comparison does not reveal is what this expansion looks like with respect to the various forms of experiential learning. The top-level code "Forms of Experiential Learning" has many child and grandchild codes. In this cross-tab query I analyzed the expansion of experiential learning by the child codes "co-curricular opportunities", "curricular experiential learning", "work-integrated learning" (WIL), and "graduate experiential learning". With respect to work-integrated learning, I created an aggregated grandchild code for "work placements", as some institutions used this term instead of more common forms of WIL (e.g., co-op, internship). This was an analytic decision, as co-ops and internships have specific rules and guidelines which constitute one form over the other, and I did not want to haphazardly place these references in a code that was not appropriate. Although this may be a weakness of the 'splitting' approach by creating a more superficial code, these references nonetheless contribute to an understanding that work-integrated learning is continuing to expand. Given that the institutions did not mention how placements were distinct from the other forms of WIL, I believe this analytic decision is sound.

Curricular experiential learning is comprised of experiences that take place within a curricular context, and which often time award some kind of academic credit or certification. This form of experiential learning was the most complex in terms of coding, with 10 child codes and 1 grand-child code. Child codes included applied research projects, capstone projects,

community-engaged learning, field school (with the grand-child code "teaching placement"), high-impact practices,[16] lab work, practicum, simulations, studio work, and study abroad.

While the discussions on experiential learning in the SMA documents are almost exclusively on the undergraduate degree level, there were some instances of graduate education being discussed. I therefore include graduate education in this query to highlight that there is some scant discussion of graduate experiential learning taking place.

Analytic Queries: Developing Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure Related to Experiential Learning

The second set of analytic queries were cross-tabs on the development of institutional infrastructure and initiatives related to experiential learning. I used cross-tab analyses technique to further explore the particular initiatives on university campuses that would support the expansion efforts in the first set of analytic queries in Table 3. I conducted three cross-tab queries for the infrastructure and initiatives, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Analytic Queries for Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure Related to Experiential Learning

Query	Primary Code	Comparison Attributes
Query 1	Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure	University & SMA
Query 2		Institutional Type & SMA
Query 3	Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure Child Codes	SMA

[16] High impact practices (HIPS) have their own inclusion categories (see Kuh et al., 2008). While often held out as best curricular practices, some institutions referred to them in relation to experiential learning survey efforts on campus (e.g., Algoma SMA2).

As shown in Figure 2, the code “Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure Related to Experiential Learning” had several child and grandchild codes, and sizeable spread across the coding references in the SMAs. This code captures the development of institutional supports to foster experiential learning, such as new hubs or centers, and professional roles. Aggregated, this code had 353 references in the sample of SMAs. The sequence of analytic queries outlined in Table 4 allowed the development of these initiatives and infrastructure to be explored based on individual universities, as well as grouped by SMA cohort, as well as their degree of comprehensiveness.

Associated with the expansion of the different forms of experiential learning has been an expansion of institutional supports for such endeavors. During the coding process I identified 7 common developments in infrastructure and initiatives related to experiential learning. In the case of digital resources, I further split this code into certificates related to experiential learning, and the creation of experiential learning records (e.g., co-curricular transcripts). These examples were 1) centers/hubs for experiential learning, 2) development of digital resources, 2a) certificates, 2b) experiential learning records, 3) experiential learning tracking systems, 4) faculty supports, 5) institutional funding for experiential learning, 6) professional groups related to experiential learning, 7) professional positions related to experiential learning. During the coding process I made note of each of these examples, and created child and grandchild codes capturing the breadth of what institutions held out as resources and supports for experiential learning. These spread of these child codes were further explored in the third analytic query.

Findings

The preceding analysis highlights three main findings with respect to experiential learning in Ontario universities. First, experiential learning has greatly expanded across the

province's universities since the inception of the SMA process. In particular, experiential learning appears to have resonated more with Ontario's comprehensive universities. Second, this expansion has not merely been ceremonial in nature, but has in fact been accompanied by an institutional resources and infrastructure to support the expansion. Third, there were several analytic frames for how universities were framing their approaches to experiential education. Institutions have rationalized this expansion primarily in relation to the discourse around graduate work-readiness, and therefore have framed experiential learning as a viable option for addressing and remedying concerns about skills-shortages and graduate competencies. Though, as will be discussed later, these frames are not necessarily aligned with expansion efforts related to co-curricular learning, suggesting that these frames are more outward signaling in response to the organizational environment than internal organizational processes.

Expansion of Experiential Learning in Ontario Universities

A general trend in the sequence of the SMAs is that experiential learning has expanded across the province. Comparing the spread of coding across the SMAs, it is evident that universities have been talking about experiential learning more over time. As shown in Figure 3, there are some discernable spikes in coding references to expansion over time, but there is no clear pattern across the institutions. Brock University, for example, had no mention of expanding experiential learning in SMA1, but in SMA2 states that "Brock is expanding its experiential education opportunities" (Brock SMA2, p. 4), and that they were implementing some new tracking systems to keep track of where experiential learning opportunities existed on campus,

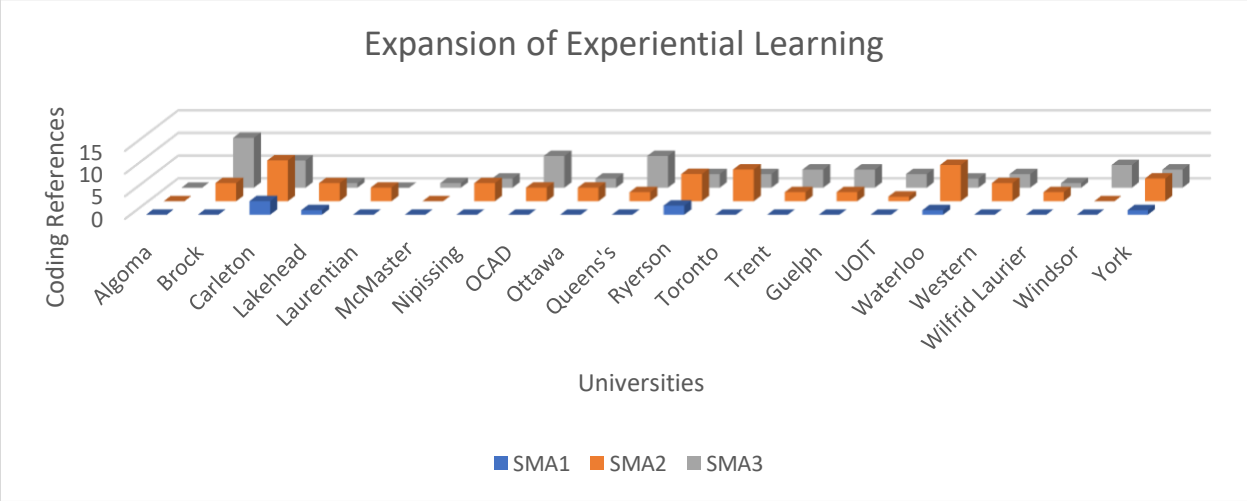
> *We are implementing a new tracking system for 20 types of academic, research and community-based experiential learning in all undergraduate and graduate courses and programs across the University, thereby building capacity and choice in the breadth of curricular experiential learning offerings for students* (Brock SMA2, p. 4).

In Brock's SMA3, the number of references grew in relation to the earlier two agreements, with many references to how experiential learning has expanded at the university. For example, the university now has a list of experiential learning opportunities across campus,

> *Brock has also expanded the range of experiential learning opportunities that are available to students as they complete their studies. This list now includes 20 curricular and 7 co-curricular activities, recognized by Brock's Senate as fulfilling an experiential learning component of a degree program. Today, Brock has experiential education opportunities in 100% of its programs* (Brock SMA3, p. 5).

With respect to the coverage across the SMA cohorts, there is much more discussion of expanding experiential learning in SMA2 and SMA3 than there was in SMA1.

Figure 3: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Institution and SMA Cohort



When expressed as a table, Table 5 shows the expansion in SMA2 and SMA3 more clearly, as there are 69 coding references for SMA2 and SMA3, compared to 8 coding references in SMA1.

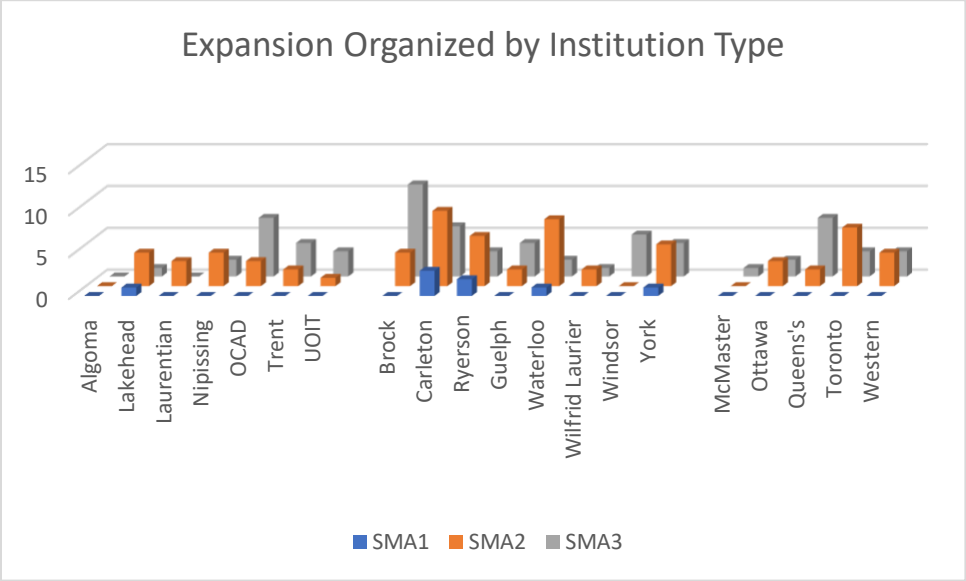
Table 5: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Institution and SMA Cohort

Institution	SMA1	SMA2	SMA3
Algoma	0	0	0
Brock	0	4	11
Carleton	3	9	6

Guelph	0	2	4
Lakehead	1	4	1
Laurentian	0	3	0
McMaster	0	0	1
Nipissing	0	4	2
OCAD	0	3	7
Ottawa	0	3	2
Queens's	0	2	7
Ryerson	2	6	3
Toronto	0	7	3
Trent	0	2	4
UOIT	0	1	3
Waterloo	1	8	2
Western	0	4	3
Wilfrid Laurier	0	2	1
Windsor	0	0	5
York	1	5	4
Total References	**8**	**69**	**69**

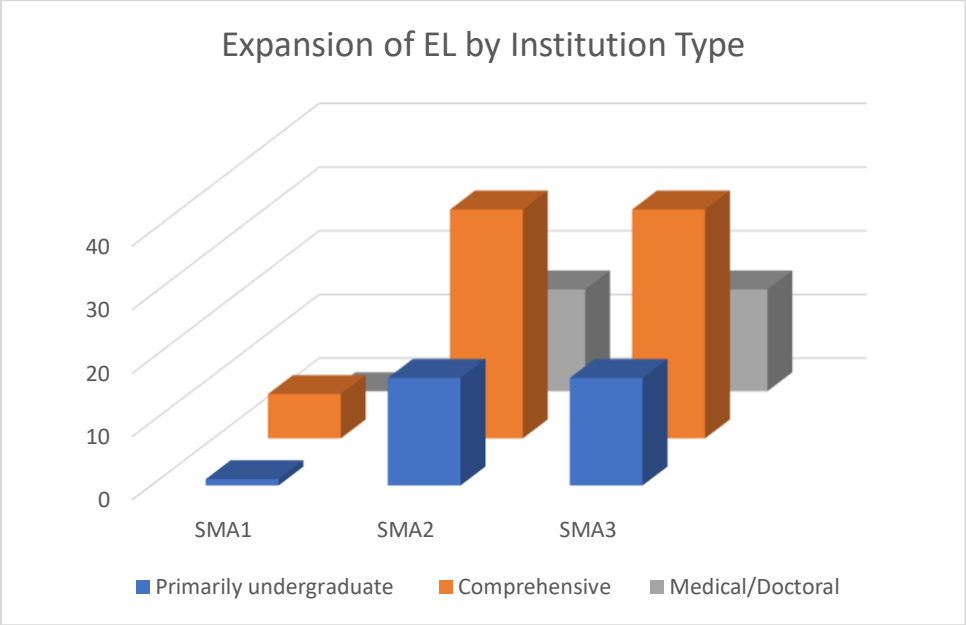
While the expansion of experiential learning opportunities increased in SMA2 and SMA3, there is no discernable pattern across the universities as they are shown individually. When the institutions are grouped by level of comprehensiveness, there is a clearer pattern about what *kind* of institutions are expanding experiential learning the most.

Figure 4: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Institution and Institution Type



When the universities are grouped based on the Maclean's organization of primarily undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical/doctoral, it is clear that the expansion of experiential learning has been most prevalent at the province's comprehensive universities. While Figure 4 includes the institutions comprising each institutional 'type' category, Figure 5 shows expansion of experiential learning as distinguished by institutional type category only.

Figure 5: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Institutional Type



Together, both Figure 4 and Figure 5 demonstrate that comprehensive universities have expanded experiential learning to a greater extent relative to their undergraduate and doctoral counterparts. This is not to say that primarily undergraduate and medical/doctoral universities have not seen their fair share of expansion efforts. The comprehensive institution category also has more universities within it than either other category. Table 6 outlines this expansion numerically by accounting for the average number of coding references for each institutional category.

Table 6: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Institutional Type

Strategic Mandate Agreements	SMA1	SMA2	SMA3	Average Reference Count
Primarily undergraduate	0.14	2.43	2.43	5.00
Comprehensive	0.88	4.50	4.50	9.88
Medical/Doctoral	0	3.20	3.20	6.40

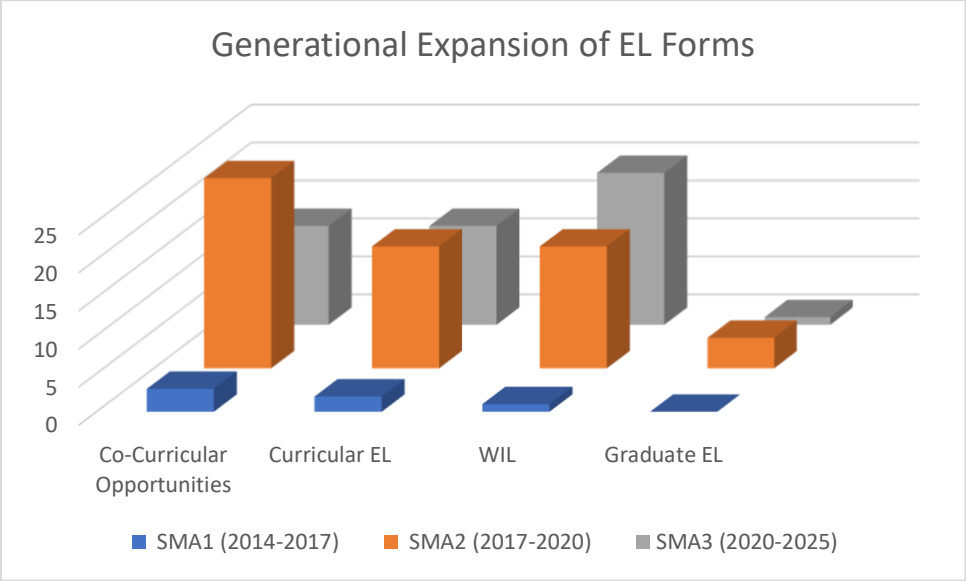
The noticeable rise in references to experiential learning could certainly be attributed to the structural changes to the SMA documents over time, where universities were asked about experiential learning specifically in SMA2 and SMA3, and not in SMA1. These expansion references can also suggest that there is something about comprehensive universities that has made the experiential learning frame resonate more than their undergraduate and doctoral counterparts. One interpretation is that these institutions are more numerous across the province, and occupy an organizational middle-ground between the advantages of primarily undergraduate institutions (e.g., small classroom sizes, closeness with community) and their medical/doctoral counterparts (e.g., sheer research capacity and prestige). Experiential learning may give these comprehensive universities a competitive edge between one another, and in contrast to their undergraduate and doctoral counterparts.

From a frame resonance standpoint, this is interesting given that all universities interact within the same organizational field, and are thus subject to the same kind of institutional pressure, and yet this expansion is not equally patterned across institutional type or across experiential learning form, as outlined below.

Expansion in the Particular Forms of Experiential Learning

The expansion of experiential learning forms has not been equally patterned across the SMA cohorts. As Figure 6 shows, the core forms of experiential learning have expanded at different rates across the province.

Figure 6: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Form and SMA



Co-curricular forms of experiential learning have expanded the most over the three cohorts of SMAs. In my analysis, co-curricular forms of experiential learning were defined as forms of experiential learning that take place adjacent to curricular forms, but which are not for eligible academic credit. These included international exchanges and experiences, mentorship, attending conferences and curating exhibits, exchanges, volunteering, and work opportunities on and/or off campus.[17] Work-integrated learning has expanded to the second highest degree across the SMAs, though expanded the most in SMA3. Work-integrated learning includes co-op, internships, or other work placements. These expansion patterns are further delineated in Table 7.

Table 7: Expansion of Experiential Learning by Form and SMA

Strategic Mandate Agreements	Co-Curricular Opportunities	Curricular EL	WIL	Graduate EL
SMA1 (2014-2017)	3	2	1	0
SMA2 (2017-2020)	25	16	16	4

[17] This form of work is distinct from WIL, as it is not connected to or embedded within curricular learning. Examples include work-study, research assistant positions, entrepreneurial ventures, and peer-helper programs.

SMA3 (2020-2025)	13	13	20	1
Total References	**41**	**31**	**37**	**5**

With respect to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), work-integrated learning can take many forms (see CEWIL, 2021). Co-op and internships were discussed the most in the SMAs, but some mentioned "work placements" generally in regard to experiential learning. For example, Nipissing mentions

> *Arts and Science programs, as well as professional programs such as Education, Nursing, and Social Work, all have significant work placements as part of the curriculum* (Nipissing SMA2, p. 4)

Ontario Tech University also mentions work placements,

> *Our commitment to the economic health of our local communities extends well beyond our on-campus employees. We are investing in our students through paid work-related placements in the Region of Durham and Northumberland County* (UOIT SMA3, p. 7)

Other times, some universities simply stated "placements" with respect to work-integrated learning. At Wilfrid Laurier, they state

> *Laurier's Workplace Partnerships offer students a flexible and effective form of work-integrated learning that includes job shadowing, case study projects and placements with employers* (Laurier SMA3, p. 6).

References to 'work placements' may suggest that the particular forms of experiential learning associated with work-integrated learning are referenced more casually given their expansion. At the same time, this 'third form' of work-integrated learning can inflict some analytic difficulty, given that pre-existing forms of work-integrated learning have specific criteria that distinguish one from another. Work placements seems to be used here as a catch-all for work-integrated learning.

While curricular forms of experiential learning have also expanded, they have done so to a lesser extent than co-curricular and work-integrated learning. For analysis and interpretation, I disaggregated the different forms of experiential learning. It should be noted that while this was necessary for the cross-tab process and subsequent presentation of results, it is rarely how institutions spoke about the expansion of experiential learning. Institutions acknowledge the distinctions between the different forms of experiential learning, but when communicating the expansion of experiential learning they often lumped these forms together. For example, OCAD university discussed experiential learning and work-integrated learning simultaneously,

> *Experiential and work-integrated learning takes a broad and multi-pronged approach to experiential learning that recognizes the myriad of student goals (e.g., employment, self-employment, entrepreneurship, social innovation) and the ways in which students can engage (e.g., work study, course-based placements, exhibitions, internships, research assistantships.)* (OCAD SMA2, p. 5).

Similarly, Brock couples these forms of experiential learning together when speaking of expansion,

> *Brock will continue to nurture its excellence in teaching and learning, including all aspects of experiential education and work-integrated learning, as well work with business and community partners to meet local education and labour market needs* (Brock SMA3, p. 1).

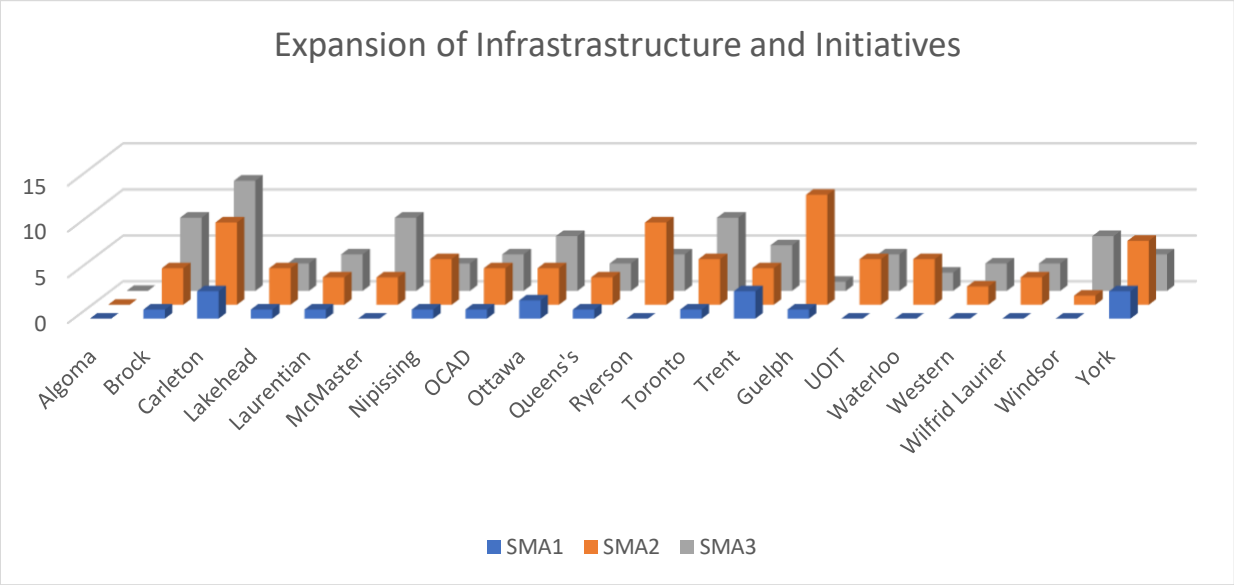
This is all to say that when speaking about the expansion of experiential education at their institutions, universities attempted to show the various ways in which expansion was taking place. This expansion was communicated in broad strokes through the terms ‘experiential learning’ and ‘work-integrated learning’, as well as through specific examples of these forms as exemplified in the OCAD statement.

Part of the dramatic rise in expansion between SMA1 and SMA2 could be attributed to experiential learning being included in the SMA questions which institutions needed to respond to. At the same time, it is unlikely that such a dramatic and patterned expansion would be a result of the SMA process itself. Given the widespread expansion, it is conceivable that expanding experiential learning has gradually become an institutional priority. With an understanding that experiential learning is expanding in scope, it is also useful to consider the extent to which experiential learning is being embedded in these institutions. Essentially, the concern would be whether the expansion that is communicated through the SMAs is merely 'lip service' without any meaningful supports or resources being developed at the same time. In an organizational sense, this would be evidence of ceremonial compliance, as the expansion would not be accompanied by administrative or technical level changes, and would also suggest that experiential learning has not moved past a stage of habitualization (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). As I outline below, the expansion of experiential learning has been accompanied by a considerable amount of infrastructure development.

Developing Institutional Initiatives and Infrastructure Related to Experiential Learning

The development of new initiatives and infrastructure related to experiential learning is inherently about the internal structural approaches to fostering experiential learning. Like the expansion of experiential learning, the development of institutional infrastructure and initiatives was more prevalent in the second the third round of SMAs in contrast to the first. Figure 7 shows this spread across the institutions and SMAs.

Figure 7: Development of Initiatives and Infrastructure by Institution and SMA



When presented as a table, the development of institutional initiatives and infrastructure becomes clear in SMA2 and SMA3, with 92 and 93 coding references respectively. This is in comparison to 19 coding references in SMA1.

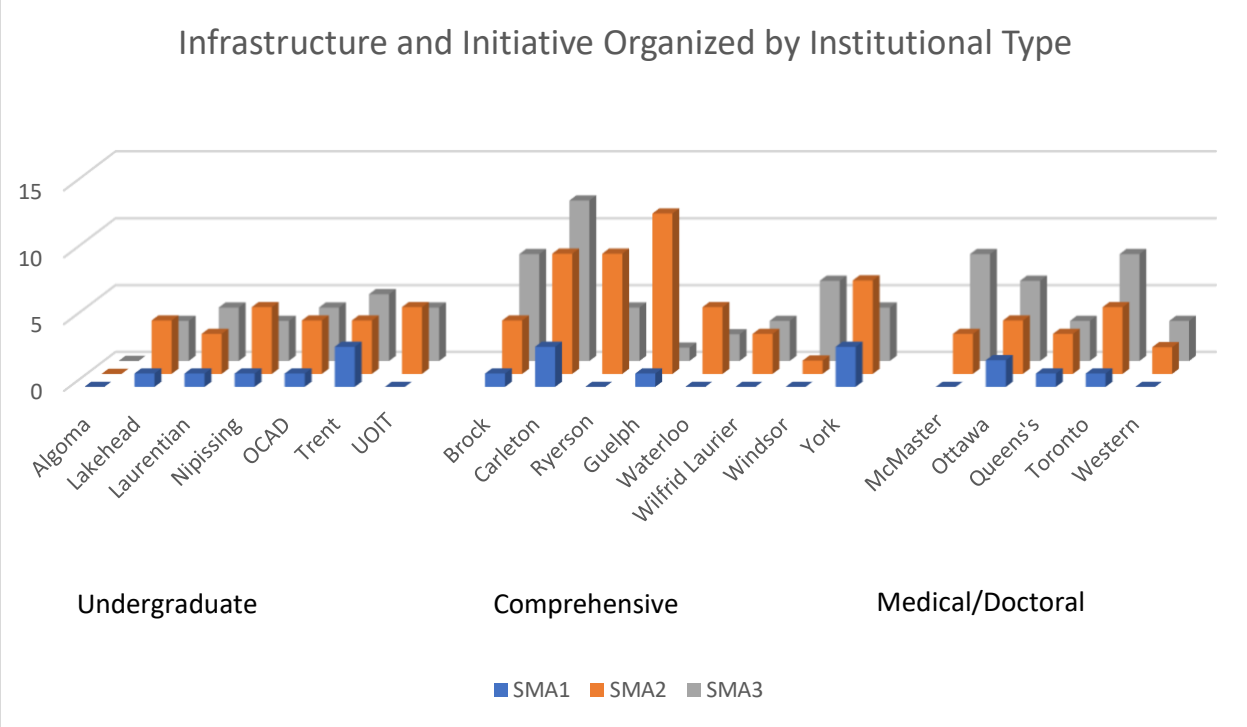
Table 8: Institutional Initiative and Infrastructure by Institution and SMA Cohort

Institution	SMA1	SMA2	SMA3
Algoma	0	0	0
Brock	1	4	8
Carleton	3	9	12
Guelph	1	12	1
Lakehead	1	4	3
Laurentian	1	3	4
McMaster	0	3	8
Nipissing	1	5	3
OCAD	1	4	4
Ottawa	2	4	6
Queens's	1	3	3
Ryerson	0	9	4
Toronto	1	5	8
Trent	3	4	5

UOIT	0	5	4
Waterloo	0	5	2
Western	0	2	3
Wilfrid Laurier	0	3	3
Windsor	0	1	6
York	3	7	4
Total References	**19**	**92**	**91**

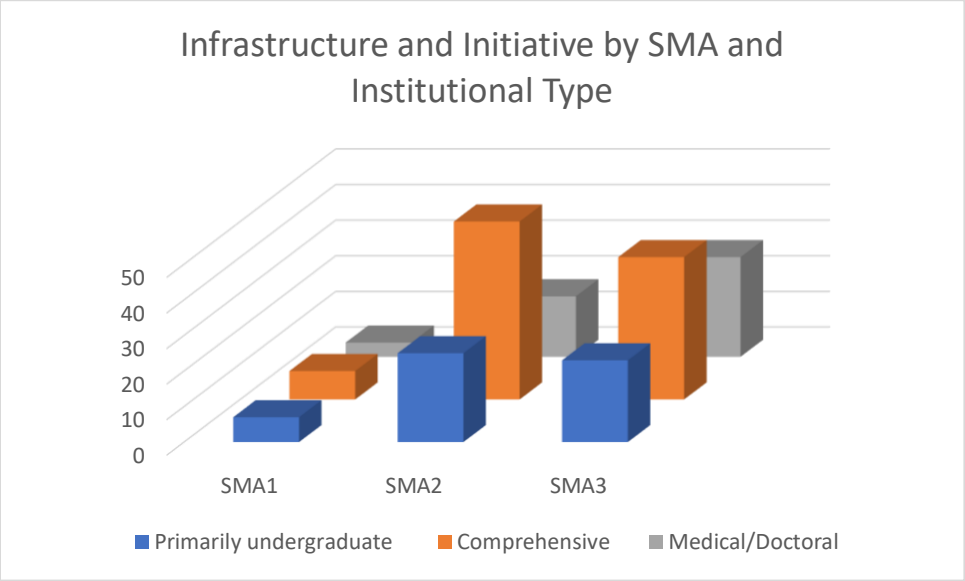
Similar to the expansion of the forms of experiential learning, the development of institutional initiatives and infrastructure happened most at the province's comprehensive universities, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Infrastructure and Initiatives by Institution and Institution Type



While Figure 8 shows the development of infrastructure and initiatives across the various institutions comprising the undergraduate, comprehensive and medical/doctoral categories, Figure 9 shows these developments in terms of the institutional categories.

Figure 9: Infrastructure and Initiative by SMA and Institution Type



Together, both Figure 8 and Figure 9 demonstrate that comprehensive universities have developed experiential learning infrastructure and initiatives to a greater extent relative to their undergraduate and doctoral counterparts. Table 9 outlines this expansion numerically by the average coding references in each institutional category.

Table 9: Infrastructure and Initiative by Institutional Type

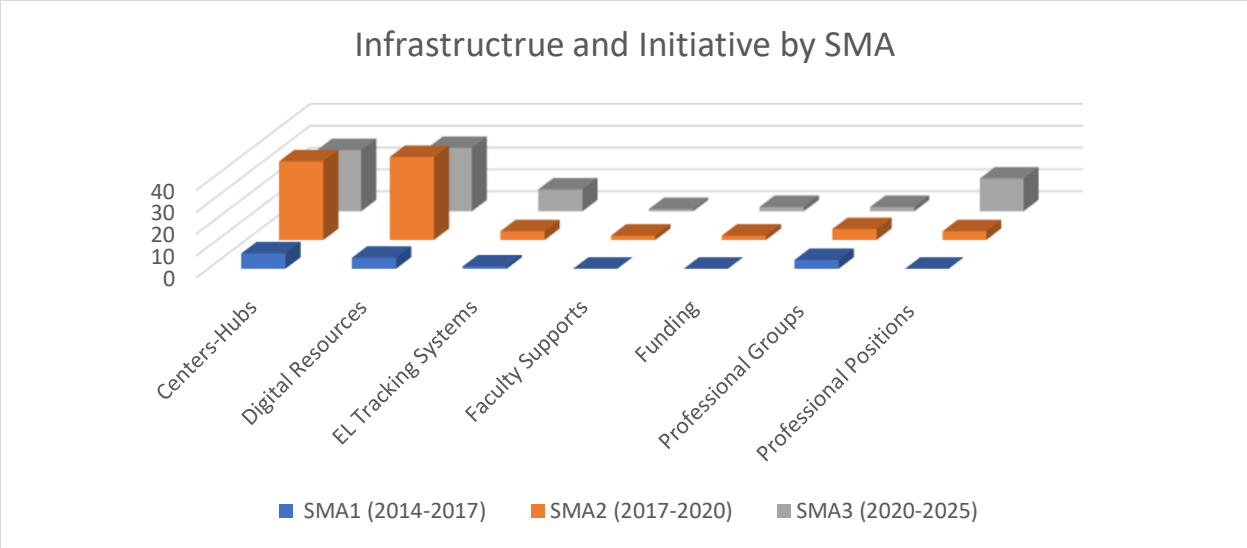
Strategic Mandate Agreements	SMA1	SMA2	SMA3	Average Reference Count
Primarily undergraduate	1.00	3.58	3.29	7.90
Comprehensive	1.00	6.25	5.00	12.25
Medical/Doctoral	0.80	3.40	5.60	9.80

The expansion of experiential learning in Ontario universities has been supported by a great deal of resourcing and infrastructure development. From a frame perspective, these institutional supports represent the kind of collection action that is necessary to instill and reify the values underlying collective action frames. It is clear that institutions have acted to support the diffusion

of experiential learning on their campuses. These supports are necessary for the long-term commitment to experiential learning, as they provide the functional capacity to deliver on institutional promises. As discussed in the Analysis section, there were seven common forms of infrastructure and supports: 1) centers/hubs for experiential learning, 2) development of digital resources, 2a) certificates, 2b) experiential learning records, 3) experiential learning tracking systems, 4) faculty supports, 5) institutional funding for experiential learning, 6) professional groups related to experiential learning, 7) professional positions related to experiential learning.

Figure 10 shows that the development of digital resources or records narrowly surpasses centers/hubs for experiential learning.

Figure 10: Development of Institutional Infrastructure and Initiatives by SMA



The expansion of experiential learning has not been merely institutional lip-service. Rather, the expansion of experiential learning has been accompanied by internal institutional resourcing and supports.

The substantive content of the SMA documents provide more nuanced detail than the graphics above and are useful for situating the expansion. For example, the University of Guelph developed an institutional task force to work on experiential learning, as well as created an institutional space for expressed purpose of fostering experiential learning.

> *In support of the Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility, the report of the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, the University of Guelph established an Experiential Learning Task Force. We reviewed our present programs, identified gaps, and suggested strategies for improvement, which will be implemented during the next three years through our newly created Experiential Learning Hub* (University of Guelph SMA2, p. 7).

Not only does this institution discuss the development of new infrastructure related to experiential learning, but it also scaffolds this development onto the policy direction provided by the province in *Building the Workforce of Tomorrow* (Government of Ontario, 2016a), and this suggests that this direction has been influential in the way the University approaches experiential learning development. This institution goes further, and communicates that this new "Experiential Learning Hub" is to support the campus-wide fostering of experiential learning, and is valuable for multiple constituent groups,

> *The Experiential Learning Hub will expand students' access to experiential learning that suits their learning needs and objectives and support faculty, staff and administrators in developing and offering experiential learning opportunities and programs* (University of Guelph SMA2, p. 7).

While some institutions developed institutes or hubs for experiential learning, others created professional roles tasked with building supports and resources on experiential learning. At Laurentian, this took the form of a special advisor role,

> *Laurentian created a new special advisor role, tasked with defining and baselining Experiential Learning (EL), coordinating funds from external partners, supporting*

> *faculty in the development and tracking of EL, and aligning EL and leadership-related work campus-wide* (Laurentian SMA3, p. 6)

This particular role has many professional components to it, as it is supposed to both facilitate connections within and outside the institution, but must also work to develop critical infrastructure by establishing a baseline of existing opportunities for experiential learning as well as creating new ones. This role, however, was not established in isolation. It operates within a broader professional network of experiential learning roles on campus,

> *This new role (in collaboration with a Teaching Fellow in Experiential Learning) includes consultation with faculty members to strategize on the integration of experiential learning opportunities into their courses by way of a working group and forthcoming Experiential Learning Advisory Network* (Laurentian SMA3, p. 6).

As with the expansion of experiential learning forms, the rise in references to infrastructure and initiatives may also be attributed to the structural changes to the SMA documents for SMA2 and SMA3.

Centers and hubs for experiential learning were most commonly referenced infrastructure developments across the SMAs. The vision or logic behind these hubs varied across the province's universities. In some respects, experiential learning hubs were mergers of pre-existing offices on campus. For example, at Trent University, the institution restructured its approach to experiential education by bringing multiple offices together under one banner. The institution restructured its career services,

> *creating a new department called, Co-op, Careers & Experiential Learning (CCEL) and branded Careerspace. The restructure has expanded our existing career services in a way that integrates community and workplace partnerships and centralizes all experiential learning (EL) processes and policies* (Trent SMA3, p.3).

Pairing experiential learning and work-related offices was a common institutional approach. Brock University brought together co-op, careers, and experiential education under the office of "Co-op, Career and Experiential Education (CCEE)" (SMA3), Wilfrid Laurier University has an Experiential Learning and Career Development Centre (SMA3), and the University of Windsor has a Co-op, Career and Employment Services (SMA2).

Another approach was the development of instructional structures related to specific forms of experiential learning such as community-engaged scholarship. The University of Guelph has a Community-Engaged Scholarship Institute, which "Trains undergraduate and graduate students and serves as a strategic hub for partnered and innovative research and projects" (SMA2, p. 8). Lakehead University also has a Centre for Community-Engaged Scholarship to "foster collaborative and mutually beneficial community-university research partnerships and community-service learning" (SMA1, p. 8). Other institutions, like McMaster University, highlight multiple hubs for experiential learning that are more targeted to specific specialized areas like their Automotive Resource Centre, the Research Shop, or their Manufacturing Research Institute (SMA2).

Digital resourcing was another way that institutions were supporting the expansion of experiential learning. The most common initiative was the creation of experiential learning records. Experiential learning records often took the form of co-curricular records, "allowing students to document learning experiences outside of the classroom" (Toronto SMA1, p. 3). Wilfrid Laurier University held itself out as the first institution in Canada to introduce a co-curricular record (Laurier SMA2), establishing the "Laurier Experience Record". This record is a "validated record of curricular and co-curricular activities", which could then be used to "present

employers with a complete record of the core competencies they have acquired through each of their experiences" (Laurier SMA3, p. 4).

This intention of presenting the records to employers was not isolated to Laurier. Carleton University also suggested that these records would be useful for employment purposes, as

> *Carleton's co-curricular record provides students with access to official documentation that they can present to employers to demonstrate their involvement in activities and experiences tied to building employability skills* (Carleton SMA3, p. 5).

The co-curricular record was pervasive in institutional initiatives on experiential learning. Of the 20 institutions, roughly half have some form of co-curricular record that students may use to demonstrate their learning. Some institutions such as the University of Ottawa and York University subsumed these records into a broader framework or digital portal which would allow students to keep track of their experiences and records. Often these portals or frameworks were given clever names and branding which should be interpreted as making the learning relevant to the institution (e.g., Laurier's "ExpLaur"), or to the students as individuals (e.g., York's "YUExperience" [you experience]). Branding aside, the intent of these portals and documents was most often articulated as being relevant for school to work transitions. This was succinctly rationalized in York's SMA3 document, where the "BecomingYU" program is indented to allow students to

> *provide examples of their skills and accomplishments in a variety of contexts and formats when applying for or considering future personal, academic and professional experiences* (York SMA3, p. 6).

These findings demonstrate that infrastructure related to experiential learning is widely conceptualized and applied across different institutions. Whether it be the development of

centralized hubs or more specific to particular research areas or modes of experiential learning, these institutions have grown in terms of their institutional infrastructure and ability to support experiential learning on and off campus. The development of co-curricular records and online portals gives some indications about how experiential learning and the expansion of resourcing is rationalized. Given that these resources are entwined with school to work transitions, it gives some hints that these institutions are thinking about experiential learning in terms of its employment benefits for students, and how they articulate the logic behind their organizational actions. To explore this further, I next discuss how these institutions rationalize experiential learning.

Institution's Rationalization of Experiential Learning

On their own, the first two findings establish a descriptive trend in the Ontario post-secondary sector. They have established that experiential learning is expanding in Ontario universities, and the expansion has been accompanied by institutional supports. In both accounts, it seems that experiential learning has resonated most with comprehensive institutions to a greater degree than undergraduate and medical/doctoral institutions. While these developments give an indication of the relative priorities of these institutions with respect to experiential learning (i.e., the priority of different forms), yet to be discussed is how these institutions rationalize the expansion and resourcing of experiential learning. Figure 2 is useful for highlighting that not only do these institutions talk about *what* they are doing with respect to experiential learning, but they also give rationalizations about why fostering experiential learning is important, and how they are doing it. Analytically, it is important to remember that these responses are based off the accountability demands of government. Because rationalization is with respect to experiential learning generally, I did not run cross-tab analysis on the "Rationalization of Experiential Learning" code. Rather, taking a splitting approach to this code

meant that I could create a multi-factor list of the various factors contributing to the overall rationale for fostering experiential learning. These factors encompassed benefits to employers, benefits to the economy, the personal and professional benefits to students, as well as facilitating town-gown relationships between institutions and civic communities.

The code "Rationalization of Experiential Learning" had 310 references from the SMAs, and was aggregated by 13 child codes, 6 grandchild codes, and 1 great-grandchild code. These different child nodes give indications about how experiential learning is being rationalized, and thus represent several analytic frames that rationalize organizational behaviour. These analytic frames ranged from experiential learning as an admissions pull factor, personal development, improving graduation rates, to student network building and improving town-gown relations. By far, the child code "Student Preparedness for the Job Market" was the most referenced child code in contrast to the other child codes, with 88 text references. This suggests that school to work transitions and employability is front of mind for universities when discussing experiential learning, and also suggests that experiential learning is being framed within the narrative fidelity of skill-readiness and graduate competencies. Experiential education, as discussed by the University of Waterloo (SMA2)

> *allows students to link their academic goals with their career goals. This is accomplished through hands-on learning experiences that link theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, enabling students to acquire and demonstrate personal transferrable skills* (p. 4).

Skill readiness was a pervasive theme in the SMAs when institutions would talk about the 'why' factor behind experiential education. The term 'skill' was discussed with reference to professional skills (Nipissing SMA3), or "professional competencies in their chosen field" (Queen's SMA3, p. 3). Skills, therefore, were not conceptualized in abstract. Rather, the point

these institutions continually made was that the skills being fostered through experiential learning were connected, or could be articulated, in relation to the workforce.

> *Co-op, work-integrated internships, practicums and placements give students practical work competencies, skills and meaningful experiences to prepare them to enter the job market* (Algoma SMA2, p.6).
>
> *Experiential learning opportunities are embedded into every program at Lakehead University and help facilitate transition into the workforce upon graduation through development of core competencies, the ability of students to articulate their skills to potential employers, and the development of professional networks at an early stage* (Lakehead SMA2, p. 7).
>
> *Fostering such connections promotes an understanding of the work environment and an awareness of the skills needed to succeed in the workplace, and ultimately enhances employability* (McMaster SMA3, p. 5).
>
> *Ryerson's professional and career-related academic programs include significant experiential learning opportunities to prepare students for the workforce* (Ryerson SMA2, p. 4).
>
> *Experiential learning is an effective way for students to gain transferrable skills for the workplace and beyond* (Western SMA2, p. 3).

These institutions communicate that experiential learning is advantageous for students because it enhances their employability by fostering the skills, they need to be successful in their later transitions to the workforce. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these benefits were often discussed in conjunction with the various forms of work-integrated learning (e.g., co-op and internships). Less discussed in the SMAs were other outcomes such as Personal Development (15 references), or Improved Learning Outcomes (17 references). Even in these fewer instances, there was still a heavy skew in these references to the 'real world' and applying knowledge outside the classroom.

> *EL offers students an opportunity to apply their classroom learning and skills development in real-world settings, thus enabling them to demonstrate and refine their skills and knowledge* (Guelph SMA3, p. 5).
>
> *Ryerson students' classroom learning is enhanced by real-world knowledge and experience* (Ryerson SMA3, p. 4).

> *students refine the knowledge acquired in a classroom or laboratory and apply it to the world of work* (York SMA3, p. 5).

While experiential learning is nonetheless rationalized in part by the personal and scholarly growth it helps to facilitate, the takeaway here is that is it most rationalized by the employment prospects and the connections that are made outside of the classroom. These claims are not inconsequential. The University of Waterloo (SMA2, p. 4) boasts some strong statements about how experiential learning puts students on top, and the kind of professional returns they can expect to see compared to peers from other institutions.

> *students graduate workplace-ready, with up to two years of real and relevant workplace experience, along with a solid understanding of how organizations work and what it takes to become a valued employee…*
>
> *Waterloo co-op graduates are more likely than other university graduates to be employed six months and two years after graduation*
>
> *They earn more than their university-educated peers and are much more likely to be hired in positions related to their field of study*

The core argument being made here is that by participating in experiential learning opportunities, students will come out ahead of their peers. Thus, while there are personal and scholarly rationalizations for why experiential learning is being fostered, employment prospects and return on investment are more strongly represented in the Strategic Mandate Agreements. This is significant when compared to the particular forms of experiential learning that have expanded the most. Even though co-curricular forms of experiential learning have expanded the most over the SMA cohorts, experiential learning rationalizations are framed within the current discourse about skill-shortages and the preparedness of graduates to enter the workforce.

Discussion

Conventional organizational reasoning suggests that organizational behaviour is influenced by external pressures emanating from the organizational field (Scott, 2008). Characterized by dual processes of resource dependence and institutional competition, organizations within a particular field compete for resources and legitimacy in fields that are hierarchically organized. This is also known as an 'open system' in organizational parlance (Scott & Davis, 2003). In these instances, previous logic has suggested that in order to reduce the impact of organizational pressure on the core technologies of the organization, administrative levels of organizations engage in a process of buffering (see Meyer & Rowan, 1977; for an empirical example, see Aurini, 2012). Through ceremonial compliance, the administrative level responds to the organizational pressure ceremonially, and this allows the day-to-day tasks and operations to continue without having to recouple roles and processes in response to the external pressure. From a change standpoint, this buffering process means that organizational change happens at a slow pace and is contingent upon the organizational relations and resource dependence within a particular field. While there have been some developments in institutional theorizing which 'open' institutions up to uncover their inhabited nature (see Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021), the analysis in this chapter remains at the meso-organizational level.

In this section I maintain the level of analysis between institutions and their environment, and revisit some of the classic assumptions outlined above. I draw on frame analysis to facilitate analytic connections between experiential learning, Ontario universities, and the provincial government. Not only does there appear to be a greater degree of resonance at comprehensive institutions- both with respect to the expansion of experiential learning in general, and the accompanying infrastructure- but institutions have also rationalized the expansion of experiential learning across several analytic frames. Analysis revealed that these institutions have framed

experiential learning largely along the lines of skill readiness, fitting with current concerns about graduate competencies.

I argue that experiential learning has gone beyond ceremonial compliance, given that institutions have matched their expansion efforts with institutional infrastructure. In doing so, experiential learning follows the process of institutionalization outlined by Tolbert and Zucker (1996), as it has become objectified within the institutions. Through the Strategic Mandate Agreements, the expansion of experiential learning and associated institutional resources has not been without concerted rationalization. These institutions have demonstrated thoughtful consideration about *why* they are institutionalizing experiential learning, beyond merely responding to new institutional funding metrics adopted by the province. Although this rationalization is not mutually exclusive from the funding metrics, institutions have rationalized the expansion and support for experiential learning within the current frame of skills shortages in the province's workforce. The benefits of experiential learning are framed as remedying the skills shortages by producing graduates that are more equipped for success in the labour market. To a lesser extent, experiential learning has been rationalized by its ability to develop 'the whole person' (i.e., personal, and civic development).

Expansion of Experiential Education as a Rationalized Process

Various studies discussing the implementation of experiential learning modes have touted its benefits for students' learning (for example, Coker & Porter, 2016; Eyler, 2009; Holtzman & Menning, 2015). Despite these claims, experiential learning has only just recently been subject to any kind of organizational theorizing, which considers it to be an organizational process and not just a pedagogical blessing (LaCroix, 2021). The Strategic Mandate Agreements provided a good source of data to track the development of experiential learning over time. The analysis revealed

that experiential learning has indeed expanded over the three agreement cohorts. This expansion has happened at comprehensive institutions at a greater rate than undergraduate and medical/doctoral institutions. This suggests that experiential learning may resonate more with comprehensive institutions, leading to the development of particular institutional supports (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Not only has experiential learning expanded as a whole, but co-curricular forms of experiential learning have expanded the most. This is surprising for a few reasons. The first reason is that co-curricular forms of experiential learning have not been subject to the same kind of policy discourse as curricular and especially work-integrated forms of experiential learning. Specifically in Ontario, co-curricular experiential learning is not even formally recognized or defined in the Ministry's guiding principles for what constitutes an experiential learning activity (MAESD, 2016). Not having co-curricular forms explicitly defined might suggest that these forms are being fostered from within the institutions themselves. Within the SMA documents it has been up to the institutions to provide working definitions of how they are thinking about experiential learning and identify where it is happening on campus. The potential for co-curricular forms of experiential learning to be fostered from within the institution is also, then, supported given that it is not being explicitly identified by the government or the funding metrics.

The second reason the expansion of co-curricular learning is interesting is that it is not necessarily aligned with the way experiential learning has been rationalized by the institutions. While co-curricular experiential learning has outpaced work-integrated learning, institutional framing of the expansion of experiential learning has been almost exclusively related to work-integrated learning. This suggests that, from an organizational standpoint, universities have

framed their collective actions to match their environment. These ideologies of rationalization (Edelman et al., 1999) determine how universities should respond to/frame experiential learning in the context of their organizational environment, as opposed to the true organizational realities being carried out within the university. Experiential learning was rationalized to a large degree by its capacity to prepare students for the world of work and instill the skills necessary for them to be productive workers and contributors to the provincial and national economy. There is some internal disagreement in these documents, then, between the forms of experiential learning that have expanded the most and how the benefits of experiential learning are framed. Recall that co-curricular forms of experiential learning were opportunities like international exchanges, volunteering, mentorship, and work-programs. These opportunities are distinct from work-integrated learning as they occur outside curricular context and are not eligible for academic credit. While there is some overlap with work-integrated learning, one might expect to see these forms of experiential learning rationalized more by social and emotional skill development (Macpherson & Rizk, 2022). This is not to say that the skill development between co-curricular and WIL forms of experiential learning are mutually exclusive. Rather, co-curricular forms lend themselves more toward the personal and civic development of the learner, which is less aligned with the professional skills and competencies that are used to rationalize experiential learning in the SMAs. One potential explanation for this that experiential learning is being framed within the narrative fidelity and current zeitgeist (Davies, 2002; Snow & Benford, 1988) of 21st century skill gaps.

Framing Institutional Rationalizations of Experiential Learning: Responding to Skills Shortages

The Strategic Mandate Agreements demonstrate the recursive nature of the university-government relations for steering institutional priorities in higher education. The rationalizations

for expanding experiential learning that were most present in the SMAs were about the potential of experiential learning to prepare students for the world of work, framed within the capacity for skill development. By participating in experiential learning, students would be well prepared for school to work transitions, and there was even some suggestion that some institutions were more premier than their institutional counterparts (e.g., the University of Waterloo). This was more articulated with respect to the transformative power of work-integrated learning modalities for developing career competencies.

With respect to the findings illustrated by the content analysis of the SMAs, it is clear that institutions have 'framed' their responses to the SMA process within the popular worry about student skill development, or what Mantione (2018, p. 1) refers to as a "skills shortage". Through their collective rationalizations, Ontario universities seem to acknowledge, though not overtly, that there is a concern over the job readiness of graduates. This recognition is not overt because the institutions discuss how they are contributing to 'skilling' their students, as opposed to acknowledging the presence of a skills shortage in the provincial or national economy. Thus, they frame their institutional initiatives within the popular concern over work readiness, and what might even be considered an existential threat to the economic security of the province (for a discussion on the economic impact of skill vacancies, see Gabler & Gormley, 2022).

The rationalization of experiential learning along work-integrated lines follows a trend in policy discussions about experiential learning in the province. At times, discussions on "experiential learning" quickly pivot to work-integrated learning specifically (see Council of Ontario Universities, 2014; Universities Canada, 2018). As well, the placement of the experiential learning metric in the SMA3 cohort is within the skills and job outcomes category (SMA3), and this may signal to institutions the mode of experiential learning that the province is

actually looking to hear about. Even though co-curricular forms of experiential learning seem to outpace work-integrated learning, institutions have framed their policy responses along work-integrated learning. The continued emphasis on work-integrated learning is an example of what Davies (2002) referred to as an "era-specific zeitgeist", or popular mentalities that "capture the collective imagination" (p. 272). The ongoing focus on skill readiness seems to have captured the collective imagination of various institutional constituents, as represented in the rationalizations of experiential learning. Institutions frequently identified their own role in skill-development, industry partners as interested parties, as well as the demand of students to have such opportunities before they enter the working world.

By framing their institutional responses within the frame of skills shortages, this helps universities to ensure that their initiatives are perceived as beneficial and legitimate by the province. Taking a frame theory approach highlights the relational interactions between organizations and their environment. Though the SMA process is an organizational process characterized by the resource dependence of universities (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), given that the public funding of each university is on the line, it is not unidirectional. By that I mean that the SMAs are not prescriptive policies imposed onto universities, but ones which highlight government priorities, and which allow the institutions to respond in ways that are most advantageous to themselves (i.e., discretion in weighting of the funding metrics). Nonetheless, the university responses in the SMAs must be aligned enough with the government priorities to be legitimized and not subject to further institutional scrutiny.

Taking a frame theory approach helps to unpack the nature of the organizational relations within the field, which is sometimes conceptualized more as a model where the institutional pressures are ceremonially responded to by default, as opposed to considering the advantageous

ways that organizations frame their responses. The SMA process is certainly one negotiated between the administrative level of the universities and the government, meaning that there is little involvement of the technical core, or the teaching and research functions of the university. At the same time, there is additional evidence that the expansion of experiential learning is more than just ceremonial lip service in the policy documents. By expanding their resourcing for experiential learning, universities have shown that in its different forms experiential learning has become an objectified organizational structure.

Beyond Ceremonial Compliance: Institutional Mechanisms Supporting Institutional Frames

Experiential learning has moved past a pedagogical fad, as demonstrated by the profuse development of initiatives and infrastructure on university campuses related to experiential learning. While the framing perspective is useful for considering the constructivist process resulting in the institutionalization of particular frames (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow & Benford, 1988), institutionalization requires mechanisms that sediment a particular idea or schema. In this sub-section I bring in some principles of institutional theory to unpack the ways in which experiential learning has become sedimented in Ontario universities, and thereby 'frames' it as a remedy to concerns over skills shortages. This theoretical blending helps nuance the way institutionalization has been incorporated into frame theory (i.e., beyond a discursive approach).

Universities have expanded resourcing through infrastructure and particular initiatives. With respect to infrastructure, universities have created new hubs and centers for experiential learning resources on campus. In an organizational sense, the expansion of experiential learning has followed Tolbert & Zucker's (1996) model of institutionalization. As the first component, habitualization, new organizational structures are developed in response to an organizational

problem. During the second round of SMAs there was enhanced discussion about creating new hubs for experiential learning and expanding the institutional resources. Across the board, this signaled the development of new structural elements on campus that would facilitate expansion. Since then, the expansion of infrastructure across the sector suggests that there is an element of durability, or mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) with respect to these organizational structures. Many institutions now have offices of experiential learning, specialized professionals working within these offices, as well as the expansion of various digital resources. The diffusion of these structures across the field suggests a level of organizational consensus that experiential learning requires institutional supports if it is going to be a permanent fixture of universities. The increasing penetration into the technical level organizational operations, evidenced by the diffusion of these structures, means that experiential learning is being embraced more than ceremonially. Rather, it is achieving a degree of permanence which over time could indicate sedimentation, the last step in the institutionalization process. This process moves experiential learning beyond a discursive frame (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018), to one that is embedded within the organizational structure of universities. By this, I mean that experiential learning isn't just being talked about within these institutions (i.e., discursive frame), but has been gradually supported by tangible structures on campus.

Assisting this process has been the various initiatives which help to legitimize these structures. For example, the wide adoption of co-curricular transcripts stands out as a particular organizational process which legitimizes the expansion of experiential learning and infrastructure, as students come away with official records of their engagements. In a way, these co-curricular transcripts help to credential experiential learning in a novel way. These documents take some of the guesswork out of the skills and aptitudes of students. Indeed, students do not

even need to remember what experiences they had. The development of official records keeps experiential learning within the logical realm of academia and certifies these experiences to signal skills and aptitudes to employers. The records help to build a logic of confidence (Meyer & Rowan, 1991) that students not only have their disciplinary knowledge, but also have developed the skills that are needed in the modern economy. In essence, these transcripts are organizational mechanisms which create more tightly coupled linkages within the institutions, as they create official records of engagement. While these are a relatively new credentialed approach, they should be subject to the kind of scrutiny that other modern education brainwaves are experiencing (e.g., micro-credentials). There is no evidence that a new official record will do anything to bolster skill articulation, or even that employers are looking for them. Quite simply, as very few employers ask for academic transcripts on work applications, I am skeptical that co-curricular records would be requested. They could, possibly, be more emblematic of a solution in search of a problem if they are not asked for or recognized by employers. In another sense, we should be critical of the extent to which the further credentialling of experiential learning motivates students to engage in experiences genuinely, or if they are motivated by the credential itself. As well, the expansion of co-curricular experiential learning might simply be 'moving the goal post' to institutionally recognize experiences that students were already engaging in to begin with (e.g., volunteering), and the potential for this to revert to ceremonial organizational action.

What the analysis in this chapter cannot offer is an indication of *how* this process is unfolding within the institutions themselves, and the implications for the sensemaking of organizational actors. While the analysis can capture the historic adoption and persistence of organizational structures, and the ways in which these developments are framed in relation to the

broader institutional environment, it says nothing about the internal and interpersonal dynamics of this process. Institutionalization is not an amorphous process; and, as I discuss, it is not merely a discursive one. It is driven by influential agentic actors who 'champion' particular structures within and across the organizational field, and requires the development of particular mechanisms within organizations to support the process (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).

Limitations and Future Research

No research study is without its limitations. Acknowledging limitations is important for various reasons, but perhaps most of all it enhances the transparency of what the researcher was able to accomplish, and where there may be future work to do. The goal is to produce trustworthy findings, and empirical shortcomings are part of that process.

Content analysis is a valuable unobtrusive method. Through the analysis of documents researchers are able to uncover patterns over time, and gain insight into particular rationalizations of social processes. Nonetheless, content analysis relies on the official accounts that are produced by individuals, groups, and organizations. This leaves the interpretation of these documents open to scrutiny, as well as the trustworthiness of the interpretations. I endeavored to be systematic in my methodological approach, and produce a reliable research design. One of the downsides of content analysis is the degree of familiarity of the researcher to the content, as more familiar researchers may come away with different interpretations than those who are less informed. For example, I was less familiar with some of the financial aspects of the mandate agreements, and a more familiar reader may come away with different interpretations of the funding implications and relative institutional weighting of the funding metrics. Although qualitative content analysis is characterized by its position within an

interpretive epistemology, the coding process is influenced by the researcher and their knowledge and familiarity of the content.

On a related note, these agreements are official accounts, and represent a not uncomplicated bureaucratic process. A limitation is the extent to which these mandate agreements fully flesh-out the internal dynamics and processes which underly the development of experiential learning. Broad policy documents such as these often rely on internal reviews and scoping exercises, in which different organizational units contribute to the broader policy document. This means that there are many hands in the pot, and these contributions are then re-interpreted and articulated by central authorities to be communicated out to the public and to government. Quite simply, there may be a different reality with respect to experiential learning depending on who one asks. The SMAs frame the institution's discourse, but institutions are inhabited (Hallett, 2010b), and the findings garnered by this study may be more or less relevant to different organizational actors. This research, and the findings it presents, may act as a catalyst to further interrogate the micro-foundations of experiential learning within these institutions.

Future studies should be critical of one the core aspects of experiential learning in these documents. The mandate agreements stipulate that all students should have access to at least one form of experiential learning by the time they graduate. While breadth of opportunity is not without its critiques in the experiential learning literature, the advantage here is that breadth opportunities help to ensure equal advantages and learning outcomes (see Coker, 2017). Although this has been established to ensure there is a minimum standard for experiential learning in the province, future studies should critically examine the implications of such a low number. Given that the expansion of experiential learning is rationalized in relation to the skills gap, and experiential learning is held out as a viable opportunity to remediate skills shortages, we

should be critical of how fruitful one experience can really be. Having this metric as the base guideline may have organizational implications for how institutions think about responding to such metrics. There was also some evidence that universities are beginning to think about experiential learning in graduate programs. Future studies may consider this as an empirical foundation to move past a conceptualization that until now has been exclusive to undergraduate populations.

While I have identified that the expansion of experiential learning and support infrastructure has occurred the most at comprehensive institutions, content analysis alone cannot flesh out why this is. From a frame resonance stance (Snow & Benford, 1988), it is possible to hypothesize that experiential learning and the capacity for skill development helps comprise a more comprehensive undergraduate education. However, early reviews of the SMA process revealed that universities have often had an eye towards establishing themselves as research-intensive (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2013). While the analytic categories developed by the Maclean's university ranking system are useful for disaggregating institutional type, experiential learning was not explicitly rationalized by these institutions in relation to their ranking category. Future research should take up this task to uncover whether there is something 'about' the comprehensive institutions that has made experiential learning resonate more. Potentially, there may even be a leveling out of expansion efforts at these institutions, and a catching up by the undergraduate and medical/doctoral institutions.

When considering the limitations of this chapter, it is important to re-situate that the Strategic Mandate Agreements communicate a lot of information. My purpose was to analyze the state of experiential education in the university sector, and so my analysis is limited to the experiential learning components of these documents. Future studies may well use a similar

approach to analyze other education developments such as equity and inclusion, town-gown relations, and decolonization, to name a few.

Conclusion

The conceptualization of the project began with the provincial government announcing a new set of institutional funding metrics that would now formally include experiential learning. Taking inspiration from the policy discourse, the Strategic Mandate Agreements were identified as a source of data that could be used to track its increasing emphasis in the university system. While experiential learning has certainly been analyzed through a pedagogical lens, it remains understudied from an organizational perspective. Embracing an organizational approach, I investigated how universities had responded to the institutional pressure to foster experiential learning, and its institutionalization within the university system. Through a rigorous content analysis, I concluded that not only have universities expanded their capacity for experiential learning, but that this expansion has been resourced through institutional infrastructure and other initiatives. As well, this process is framed within the current discourse of skill-readiness for undergraduates.

The development of these initiatives and infrastructure adds to our understanding of organizations, as it suggests that in open organizational systems ceremonial compliance is not necessarily the default organizational response to external pressures. Although, this interpretation should be cautious given that Ontario universities are dependent on the provincial government for their funding. Nonetheless, the findings demonstrated that there have been wide ranging internal changes to the structure of Ontario universities in order to support experiential learning. This adds to the understanding of frame institutionalization (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018), whereby particular institutional mechanisms are needed to support the institutionalization

process. There were countless examples of institutional structures, such as experiential learning hubs and offices of experiential learning. These offices were supported through the creation of new employment positions like experiential learning coordinators, and experiential learning working groups. These developments suggest that, in terms of institutionalization, experiential learning has reached the stage of objectification (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996), and in institutional terms it is more than merely a myth (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). What could not be interpreted from the SMAs was how sedimented these structures were, though this is something future studies could consider. Increased or decreased sedimentation would have implications for institutionalization, and whether all the emphasis on experiential learning was merely faddish.

By taking a frame theory approach, I showed that institutions framed and rationalized the expansion of experiential learning within the popular concern about the skill-readiness of graduates. Even though co-curricular forms of experiential learning have expanded the most, the expansion of experiential learning was rationalized with respect to work-integrated learning. While this does suggest some internal disagreements in the documents, it shows that universities were strategic about their rationalization, as framing their expansion within the skills-gap has helped to legitimize their efforts. This may be attributed to *where* experiential learning is situated in the third SMA cohort. As it was in the skills and job outcomes section, this may signal the kind of experiential learning the province was looking to hear about.

Ontario universities have expanded their approaches to experiential learning. Framed in conjunction with concerns over skill readiness, this expansion is often articulated as better equipping students for the world of work. The findings of this research underscore that experiential learning is more than a pedagogical approach; it is an organizational process.

PREFACE TO CHAPTER 4: FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education continues to grow in prominence across the Canadian university system. Evidence suggests that there are favourable rates of return for students involved in work-integrated learning, and positive learning outcomes associated with curricular and co-curricular learning (Burch et al., 2019; Eyler, 2009; Roberts, 2016), giving way to a process of institutionalization. Provinces are gradually incorporating experiential education as a specific funding metric for universities to report on, bringing the topic of experiential learning out of the classroom and into the institutional field. However, less is known about how faculty have responded to this process. This chapter reports the findings of a qualitative survey that was used to understand general faculty sentiments in Ontario about experiential education (n=132), and in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=47) from faculty members across eight disciplines from six universities. Drawing on inhabited institutionalism (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), I unpack the general process of recoupling that has taken place in the province with respect to experiential education. The findings of this study add to the inhabited institutionalism by demonstrating what happens when existing organizational practices are recoupled at the institutional level and reimposed on actors on the ground. I find that tensions occurred when the everyday practices and pedagogical understandings of faculty conflicted with organizational efforts to recouple experiential learning initiatives with a specific range of activities and outcomes.

CHAPTER 4: FACULTY EXPERIENCES WITH THE CHANGING TIDES OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION: AN INHABITED INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

Introduction

Experiential education has become a common feature of Canadian universities and falls into three broad categories: work-integrated learning (e.g., co-op), curricular forms of experiential learning (e.g., classroom simulations), and co-curricular forms of experiential learning (e.g., international exchanges) (for a broader review, see Association for Experiential Education, n.d.).[18] Experiential education is prominent in the institutional discourse on student work-readiness, and is associated with positive learning outcomes for students (Burch et al., 2019). Efforts to support experiential learning have been expanding across Canada (see Chapter 3). In some jurisdictions, experiential education has become featured as a provincial funding metric between Canadian provinces and their universities (Government of Ontario, 2021). These developments give form to a broad shift in the Canadian university system towards institutionalizing experiential education— an organizational process where patterns become entrenched, both within an organization's structure and across an organizational field (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996).[19]

Alongside the institutionalization of experiential education have been parallel efforts to impose accountability mechanisms on experiential learning (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2020; Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of Manitoba, 2022). In Ontario, the

[18] Here, I distinguish between these three forms of experiential education for the sake of clarity. In practice, and in various resource guides, the distinctions become less clear-cut and are sometimes used interchangeably.

[19] Despite these recent developments, it is important to remember that experiential education is not a new practice within university education. Early works comment on the place of experiential education in the university setting in contrast to more traditional methods of instruction (Chickering, 1977; see also Ewart, 1987). Faculty practitioners in these earlier days sometimes found themselves having to convince others about the legitimacy of learning through experience (Ewart, 1987).

site of this research, all universities are required to incorporate experiential learning into their degree programs as a way to "future proof" their undergraduate students (Edwards, 2022, n.p.). Though, experiential education is not a new or novel practice for university studies. Kolb (1984) remarks that the university system has long included "traditional" forms of experiential learning, such as field placements and work-study opportunities. While these forms endure, they have been coupled with an emphasis on competency-based education on the one hand, and more progressive 'high impact practices' on the other (see Kuh et al., 2008). In particular, competency-based learning, a current higher education climate of skill-fetishization (Wheelahan et al., 2022), and funding metrics, have worked to 'recouple' experiential education. Instead of blending experience and education for its progressive value for learning (Dewey, 2015), recoupling means that across the university landscape experiential learning is being subject to tighter organizational linkages (Espeland, 1998; Hallett, 2010b) that include bureaucratic processes which impose skills and competencies-based funding-based metrics.

This chapter addresses how faculty – organizational participants who are responsible for implementing experiential learning and subject to this process of recoupling – fit in to a reinvigorated institutional interest in experiential learning. As the key organizational actors tasked with implementing the university teaching, research, and service missions, faculty represent an important organizational group for fostering experiential education. Yet, their perspectives on experiential education are largely absent in the extant literature, outside of their roles publishing articles on the use of experiential learning in their courses. Put another way, existing contributions to the literature on experiential education have overlooked the people of organizations (see Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Drawing on inhabited institutionalism to address the 'people problem' of experiential education, I ask: How have faculty experienced the

institutional shift toward fostering experiential education and efforts to recouple experiential learning with tangible outcomes for students? To answer this question, I empirically document 1) pre-existing practices and rationalizations faculty use in relation to experiential education; 2) how faculty have experienced the recoupling of experiential education at their own institution, and across the province more broadly; and 3) the enduring effects this process has on their ability to reconfigure or reconceptualize their pre-existing perspectives with a new vision for experiential learning.

The findings of this study suggest that recoupling existing practices creates a pattern of confusion among organizational actors, which prompts them to question new organizational dictates. When recoupled practices fail to resonate, organizational actors turn to their institutional environment for sensemaking (see Chapter 5; see also Gonzales, 2013), or rely on tried and true instructional approaches that have worked for them in the past. Often, this means continuing with their existing pedagogical approaches to experiential learning without confirmation that their practices align with how their university conceives of experiential education.

Theoretical Context: Inhabited Institutionalism

Inhabited institutionalism intersects symbolic interactionism and institutional theory to solve the "people problem" of organizations (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 214). The need for such a perspective is derived from notable critiques of institutional theory for leaving the people of organizations behind, in favour of more structural approaches. Colomy (1998, p. 267), for example, critiques new institutionalism for overlooking the place of actors, as "powerless and inert in the face of inexorable social forces" (see also Hallett et al., 2009). While there has been a proliferation of work on institutional theory, others suggest that there remains a loose and scattered use of the term "institution" which muddies the theoretical clarity for explaining how

organizations function and relate to their environment (see Alvesson et al., 2019; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The varied conceptions of the term institution has created many 'institutionalisms', resulting in what Alvesson et al. (2019, p. 121) refer to as a "confederation of loosely coupled theories". At risk is the reliance on action perspectives that single actors lead the charge to organizational change (e.g., the institutional entrepreneur perspective) (DiMaggio, 1988), or that actors behave as uncritical "dopes" who perform acts unreflectively and at the mercy of broader logics (Binder, 2007; see also Powell & Colyvas, 2008). The challenge, as Hallett and Hawbaker (2021, p. 7) state, is "how to account for agency and change without reverting to the types of individual, interested actors that institutional theory was designed to critique?" The answer these authors suggest is that institutional researchers need to do away with the conception of actors as nested within organizations and think about institutions as being 'inhabited.' An inhabited institutional approach avoids the "macro-gaze" that is common to existing institutional theory, and takes into account the people of organizations (Hallett, 2010b, p. 53).

Inhabited institutionalism asserts that it is through interaction that institutions are interpreted and modified, and these interactions happen between organization members working to coordinate activities (Hallett et al., 2009; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a). Hallett and Ventresca (2006, p. 226) establish that inhabited institutionalism has three foundational principles, or "signposts":

1. Institutions are both locally and extra-locally embedded, meaning that interactions and institutions are recursively implicated in a broader social context. Not only do workers have their own locally negotiated orders[20] of interaction, but organizations are located

[20] The negotiated order is a symbolic interactionist foundation of inhabited institutionalism. The negotiated order sensitizes us to the subjective underpinnings of organizations, and that the stable functioning organization is supported by the social agreements of organizational actors (Fine, 1984). Order is negotiated between parties based on their subjective understanding of the organization's structure (e.g., formal rules), and these parties continually

within broader institutional environments that are extra-local to those micro-orders (Scott & Davis, 2003).

2. Meaning is also local and extra-local, where organizational actors are more than merely "carriers" of institutions (see also Binder, 2007). While broader patterns of meaning do exist and exert influence on individual actors (Thornton et al., 2012), these meanings are communicated, interpreted, and subject to reformation between actors.
3. The inhabited institutionalist approach takes a "skeptical and inquiring attitude" about the ways that organizations are assumed to run (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 228). This skeptical attitude requires methodological pluralism, though does not necessarily prioritize an either-or dyad between micro or macro levels of analysis. As will be discussed later, the inhabited institutionalist perspective has been deemed "Janus Faced" for its ability to look both outward and inward to make connections between local-level interactions and broader developments in an institutional field (Haedicke & Hallett, 2016).

Inhabited institutionalism achieves a more empirically honest coupling configuration between the institutional realm, organizations, and social actors, as opposed to the new institutionalist perspective which sees actors as nested within institutions (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a). By working towards a coupling perspective, inhabited institutionalism also avoids a classic critique of interactionism having an astructural bias (Fine & Tavory, 2019; for a counterperspective, see Low & Thompson, 2021), where action is interpreted in isolation from extra-interactional or social-structural influences (Blumer, 1969). Though, Cleckner and Hallett (2022) suggest that the degree to which institutional myths, social interactions, and organizations are coupled should be a value-free observation. It is incumbent on researchers to draw interpretations from these couplings.

Also at play is the fact organizational coupling should not be thought of as inherently loose or tight (Aurini, 2012; Hallett, 2010b; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a). Loose coupling is a structural arrangement where different elements of an organization are responsive to one another but preserve their own identity, as well as "some evidence of physical or logical separateness"

adjust their understanding of this structure and relations with one another. Order is continually 'worked out' between parties as organizational change unfolds (i.e., order is not a stagnant or unchallenged).

(Weick, 1976, p. 3). For example, Weick (1976) gives the example of a common school wherein the guidance counselling office is adjacent to the principal, but nonetheless covers a separate educational function. While logically separate, organizational elements that are loosely coupled are still bound by shared goals and organizational imperatives that serve as the 'glue' which couples them together. Orton and Weick (1990) suggest that the image that commonly emerges in discussions of loose coupling is one where loose coupling is situated at one end of a coupling continuum, with tight coupling at the other end. In this case tight coupling is an organizational configuration with little structural distinctiveness between elements (Firestone, 2015). A tightly coupled organization is one where there is little 'slack' between elements, and changes onto or within one element are directly felt by others. Firestone (2015) discusses the evolution of educational accountability policies as one such example, where schools became more tightly aligned with centralized state authority over education, and the spread of policies with stronger sanctions for teachers with poorly performing classrooms. Coupling configurations can be further complicated by different degrees of coupling, such as where institutional myths and organizational practices are tightly coupled, but loosely coupled from social interactions (Cleckner & Hallett, 2022).

In less abstract terms, inhabited institutionalism has been effectively used to link changes in the institutional environment with organizational practices at the technical core of organizations. Binder's (2007) research on transitional housing programs found that organizations with multiple subunits are likely to have multiple negotiated local meaning systems (see also Bechky, 2011). Binder (2007) found that while all three departments within a transitional housing organization (Community Parents) were subject to similar environmental pressures, their responses depended on each department member's local meanings and

professional logics. In the case of teachers, this multi-dimensional nature of organizational actors is further nuanced by Everitt (2012) who found that the degree to which local practices and institutional mandates are coupled is contingent upon how actors negotiate that relationship through practical work activity with, and among, each other in specific social contexts (p. 204).

In this case, high school teachers filtered their pursuit of institutional goals through "arsenals of practice" (p. 203) which they accumulate through work experience. Specifically, career stage emerges as a key consideration for the ability of teachers to mediate between institutional pressures and classroom practices. Those termed 'veterans' were able to more easily mediate between pressures and practice with the arsenal they had built over their career, with the secondary benefit of warding off the kind of epistemic distress that Hallett (2010) found in teachers struggling to adapt to new institutional demands. Others, (e.g., Coburn, 2004) have found that the degree of coupling between organizational actors and their institutional environment is further mediated by the degree of congruence, intensity, pervasiveness, and voluntariness of institutional messages with their existing practices.

Thus, various scholars have continued to address the 'people problem' of organizations by taking an inhabited approach. While an inhabited approach has been useful for "thinking about the constitutive role of people in organizations" (Hallett et al., 2009, p. 488), and the general process by which "myths are given tangible flesh in organizations" (Hallett, 2010b, p. 53), less has been done to consider what happens when pre-existing practices are taken out of the hands of practitioners and reimposed after a process of recoupling. The institutional transformation of experiential education across the province of Ontario represents one such process.

Methods

This study followed a sequential qualitative design (Morse, 2010) to triangulate multiple sources of data (Denzin, 1979). Consistent with existing efforts in inhabited institutional research (Binder, 2007; Haedicke & Hallett, 2016; Hallett, 2010b), a qualitative approach was used for the capacity to get close to the data (Aspers & Corte, 2019) and the perspectives of those who inhabit institutions. Knowing that the interpretations of individuals within organizations are shaped by the work they are doing and their occupational membership (Bechky, 2011), a survey method was first used to gain a general understanding about faculty views on experiential education, and also served as a recruitment tool for the interview method. At the end of the survey, faculty could opt-in to participate in a semi-structured interview. Faculty were sent a recruitment email containing a letter of information outlining the project and consent options, as well as a link to the qualitative survey. Findings from the survey were used to frame the more in-depth analysis accomplished by the interviews.

Sample

Faculty members were recruited via information on their institutional profile. Essentially, I reviewed department websites for each of the disciplines included in this study and made a master list of faculty contacts from each department. Included in these lists were all faculty members the department listed on their website, including full-time and sessional[21] or part-time instructors.[22] Emerita/us faculty members were not included in the sample, given the focus of this dissertation project is about exploring the experiences of current faculty members.

[21] Sessional instructors are teaching staff who are non-tenured and non-permanent employees of the university.
[22] Undoubtedly, this required a broad interpretation. While institutions tended to be similar in their faculty titles (e.g., associate professor and assistant professor), some also had titles such as continuing lecturer, lecturer, and definite-term lecturer. To be as inclusive as possible, all listed faculty were included in the sampling framework.

To understand how faculty members across the province have experienced the broad institutional shift toward fostering experiential education, participants were recruited from six Ontario universities given the established funding metric and provincial expectation of experiential education. These institutions represented two undergraduate, two comprehensive, and two medical/doctoral institutions, as defined by the Maclean's (2023) *University Rankings*. Institutions were purposefully selected to ensure geographic diversity in the province was captured (e.g., northern and southern institutions). As part of the sampling strategy, institutions were selected on the basis of geographic variance and program offering. The goal of this strategy was to ensure the perspective of faculty from *across* the province were captured, rather than focusing on university-dense areas of the province (e.g., the Greater Toronto Area). This study was approved by the research ethics board at the University of Waterloo, as well as from all institutions I recruited from.

To further enhance the internal validity of the research findings, faculty members were recruited across the same six disciplines at each selected institution. As shown in Table 10, this was possible for all institutions except for Undergraduate Institution 2 (UG2) that did not offer chemistry or physics.[23] Table 10 shows the number of faculty members within each academic department at each university (e.g., the English Department at UG1 has 27 faculty members). To protect the confidentiality of faculty participants all institutions have been assigned a pseudonym.

Table 10: Faculty Sampling Frame

	Undergraduate		**Comprehensive**		**Doctoral**	
	UG1	**UG2**	**COMP1**	**COMP2**	**DOC1**	**DOC2**

[23] This was a methodological decision. Not all universities in Ontario offer the same program. To ensure adequate representation of the three institutional categories, some concessions needed to be made. The trade-off here was that UG1 did have these programs, ensuring science-based disciplines were represented in the undergraduate category.

English	27	17	18	47	54	60
History	24	10	11	20	46	40
Political Science	9	4	18	20	40	29
Sociology	11	14	15	21	28	45
Biology	22	10	17	41	62	85
Chemistry	18	NA	23	42	39	46
Math/Stats	15	9	24	60	55	27
Physics	10	NA	9	43	40	59
Total: 1,384	**136**	**64**	**135**	**294**	**364**	**391**

Together, these departments gave a total sampling frame of 1,384 individuals. Faculty members were recruited over four rounds of outreach between January and November 2022, broken down into recruitment rounds of 25% segments of the total sampling frame. After one week, a follow up email was sent to those who had not completed the survey. Given the size of the sample, recruiting in rounds created manageable chunks of data collection.

Survey

They survey component of this study was used to gain a descriptive account of faculty attitudes toward experiential education. It also was a pragmatic methodological decision to capture responses from faculty who might have been interested in contributing to the project but did not have time to arrange a full interview. The survey consisted of three sections, with a mix of fixed-response and open-ended questions. Section one asked participants about their current professional role at their institution. Section two asked participants about their use or non-use of experiential education, and their rationale. Section three provided an open-response section to share additional thoughts or details about their responses, as well as indicate whether they would

like to participate in an interview. After screening for incomplete responses, the survey yielded 132 responses.[24]

Qualitative Interviews

In total, 47 faculty members agreed to an interview.[25] Interviews took place between January 2022 and December 2022, averaging one hour in length. As outlined in Table 11, most of the faculty interviews were derived from comprehensive institutions (n=21), followed by doctoral (n=16) and undergraduate (n=10) institutions. Most interviews came from the humanities and social science disciplines (n=35) rather than from STEM-based disciplines (n=12).

Table 11: Faculty Interview Sample

	Undergraduate		Comprehensive		Doctoral	
	UG1	UG2	COMP1	COMP2	DOC1	DOC2
English	1	1	0	3	2	2
History	1	1	0	1	3	1
Political Science	1	0	4	4	0	0
Sociology	0	2	0	6	1	1
Biology	0	1	0	1	1	2
Chemistry	1	0	0	0	2	1
Math/Stats	0	1	0	1	0	0
Physics	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total: 47	**4**	**6**	**5**	**16**	**9**	**7**

The faculty sample is also differentiated by professional standing (i.e., tenured and non-tenured). Of the 47 participants 33 were tenured or tenure-track and 14 were non-tenured. Of the 14 non-

[24] See Appendix A for the complete survey instrument.
[25] See Appendix B for the complete interview guide.

tenured participants, their professional locations varied from full-time continuing lecturers to more clear-cut members of the precariat sessional or part-time lecturers. In terms of users and non-users or experiential learning, 36 participants identified as users and approximately 11 participants identified as non-users.[26] Interviews covered three main themes relevant to both the existing literature on experiential education, as well as the broader theoretical contributions being made in this project. Faculty members were first asked about their views on the institutional shift toward experiential education underway in Ontario. Faculty were also asked about how they conceptualized and implemented (or not) experiential learning in their teaching practices, as well as any disciplinary nuances that might be relevant. The interview concluded by asking faculty about the professional implications of experiential education, both for how they see their own roles, as well as any impacts they viewed on the professoriate writ large. It is this final thematic component that the data in this chapter reports on.

Data Analysis

The survey data was analyzed thematically to gain a better understanding of the general attitudes' faculty have toward experiential education, given the lack of existing literature on the topic. Faculty survey responses were used to develop a descriptive account of general sentiments toward experiential education (e.g., positive or negative), their use and non-use of experiential learning modes, and the extent to which faculty perceived experiential education influencing their profession. As outlined above, these descriptive accounts were used to help develop the interview guide and the specific questions I asked interviewees about the profession.

[26] For methodological clarity, these participants are being classified as non-users if they *themselves* did not think they were using 'tried and true' forms of experiential learning, or did not self-identify as users. This distinction is important to their overall sensemaking of experiential learning, because while some non-users strongly dissociated their teaching practices from experiential learning, others noted that they didn't think of themselves as using experiential learning but had been told by others that they were using experiential learning practices (e.g., bringing in guest speakers or getting students to work with statistical software).

Interviews took place over Zoom and were transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. Completed transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and de-identified before being uploaded to NVivo software for analysis. From there, analysis began with a two-stage coding strategy. In the first stage, pre-established codes derived from the interview guide were deductively applied to the interview transcripts as a general process of winnowing the data (Creswell, 2013). The code *Rationalization of Experiential Learning*, for example, focused on questions relating to how and why faculty participants use experiential learning in their courses, or not. The code *Institutional Channels Communicating Experiential Learning* explored how messages about experiential learning flowed through the institutions, and the extent to which faculty members were aware of these messages. This code was further saturated with child codes that capture specific channels that faculty discussed, such as *Departmental Channels,* for discussions happening around the faculty table, and *Institutional Channels* for more bureaucratic processes in which messages about experiential learning 'trickled down from the top' (e.g., Deans). Grandchild codes *Formal Statements* and *Informal Nudges* captured how "official" these messages were and whether there were any 'teeth' to these messages.

In the second phase, theoretically driven coding was used to inductively reorganize and redefine pre-existing codes through the lens of inhabited institutionalism. Through this coding process, the organizational process of recoupling took shape, and I identified the stages in which this recoupling took place. Three stages were created based on how faculty experienced the institutional shift toward experiential learning. The first identified stage was *Pre-Existing Practices,* which became a master code for how faculty discussed their tried-and-true teaching practices, why they use experiential learning, and for how long they have used experiential learning. In this case, *Rationalization of Experiential Learning* became a child-code to the master

code. The second stage was *Recoupling Experiential Education* in which faculty discussed broader institutional processes 'above them', in which experiential education was being remade and reformulated. *Institutional Channels Communicating Experiential Learning* became a child code, along with other efforts by the university to define and respond to broader institutional developments like the strategic funding metrics. This continues to be an ongoing organizational process, and so the final stage was *Actor-Level Effects of Recoupling* in which participants not only discussed specific effects they observed resulting from the institutionalization of experiential education, but also some of the intra-institutional tension points currently playing out at their universities.

Together with existing perspectives on inhabited institutions (Cleckner & Hallett, 2022; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), the analysis revealed an institutional situation wherein existing organizational practices were taken from the hands of technical-level actors, recoupled at the institutional level, and then reimposed on those actors. The redefinition and reformulation were often met with tension and confusion, in many cases fanning the flames of existing professional tensions (e.g., erosion of disciplines and the academic logic, bureaucratic frustrations). This process is discussed in greater detail below.

Findings

Recoupling is a central feature of the inhabited approach and recognizes that external myths can pressure organizations in ways that disrupt the "epistemic security" of organizational members carrying out individualized routines (Hallett, 2010b, p. 59). Experiential education has been subject to recoupling, where tighter organizational mandates have been developed to direct public universities. As a result of this process, all Ontario universities are required to demonstrate where and how experiential education is happening in their institutions. In their

interviews, faculty discussed the scoping exercises underway at their institutions to identify where experiential learning was occurring in their programs, but tensions arose when there were discrepant understandings of experiential learning between faculty and the university.

Although the faculty members noted having their routines disrupted when experiential education became recoupled at the institutional level, early adopters continued to incorporate their version of experiential learning without fear or favour of how it was institutionally defined. Faculty were able to buffer themselves from these redefinitions to a certain degree, owing to their relative professional autonomy. In some cases, however, what they would have once called 'experiential learning' was no longer recognized by their university.

Pre-Existing Practices: "Before Experiential Learning Became Such a Buzzword…"

Several faculty (n=14) participants considered themselves "early adopters"[27] of experiential education. These vanguards had amassed a long professional tenure in the university system, and many of them spoke about how experiential education was something they had always done based on what they viewed as the pedagogical value of experience. These participants were using experiential learning in their courses before there was a formal term for such practices, and before there was a big institutional push to formally recognize the teaching philosophy. At this time, experiential or 'applied' learning was used for the benefits it had with respect to curricular learning outcomes. Experiential learning was not yet part of the professional lexicon, and there was certainly little to no institutional support for experiential learning. When reflecting on their decision to use experiential learning in their courses, one English professor stated that,

[27] In this context, "early adopter" is being used in the historic sense. These faculty are more 'seasoned', and some have been working in the academy for decades.

> *before experiential learning became such a buzzword, I did do work in the classroom with my students that now I understand was experiential learning. And really, I think it was generated for me by my desire to show them how present and active and, in a sense, future oriented are the kinds of aptitudes that we can learn when we're working with 16th and 17th century English literature.* (COMP2. English)

Another participant stated that the motivation to pursue and utilize experiential learning in a course must be intrinsic to the instructor, "as long as faculty members think of education as being student-centred. We need to provide experiences that are good for the student, and helpful to the student when they graduate" (COMP1. Physics). These motivations were often discussed retrospectively, especially in relation to what professors felt they wanted more of—or enjoyed—in their own education. As one sociologist stated, "it sounded right because I already believed in it" from learning through experience as an undergraduate themselves (DOC. Sociology). Similarly, another sociologist discussed that when they first started teaching, experiential education "was kind of a quest to try to engage in a different way and get students on board with their own learning" (COMP2. Sociology).

These motivations were not unchallenged, though. One early adopter from Biology shared that over thirty years ago they were using experiential learning in their classroom, and had a negative encounter with one of their colleagues regarding the distinction between experiential learning and problem-based learning,

> *I remember one of the profs coming up to me early on saying there was no need for experiential learning, which I thought was kind of weird because I thought problem-based is experience...* (DOC1. Biology)

While continuing with their experiential learning design to have labs in their courses, they recalled a recent development in which their chair was looking to build more experiential learning into the program.

> *I remember doing a double take because it was not even more than 10 years before that when they said 'you know, everything should be no labs because then you can have more people [in the course]'. Still to this day, my course is the only course in the third and fourth year in my program that has a lab. Everyone has gotten rid of theirs.* (DOC1. Biology)

While this participant was an early adopter and has been witness to the sea-change of experiential learning (i.e., that universities are now focusing on it more), others have more recently opted for experiential learning in their courses; though, these participants still echo the intrinsic rationale of the early adopters. One sociologist discussed feeling "embarrassed" by the lack of experiential learning in their research methods courses. In the revised iterations of their other courses, they drew on experiential learning to bring in real-world elements to the class such as "real data that [students] would actually use if they were doing any sort of real analysis", and noted that this change had been gradual over their career.

> *Over the course of my career, I've switched from this largely lecture style to at least integrating a bit more of a practical element that people can say 'hey, look, I've got these experiences based on what I've done in these courses'.* (COMP2. Sociology)

The intrinsic motivation for using experiential learning was regarding school-to-work transitions, and the kind of skills or abilities students should come away from courses with. While some talked about "wanting to give students a sense of what they're doing is important" (DOC2. Sociology), others spoke more referentially to giving students "the opportunity to do, in some ways, what they would be doing in the field, in a job" (DOC1. English).

While the motivations for using experiential learning ranged, these were all intrinsic to the pedagogical practices of instructors and what they thought was best for student learning. Many observed that the language around experiential learning has been changing in recent years, and what they used to do for pedagogical reasons is becoming more "in vogue" (UG2. English)

across the university sector. Faculty members were aware of a broader institutional shift toward discussing experiential learning more in the university system and across programs, with one participant sharing "we didn't feel pressured, you know, to do this kind of thing. But right now, we do a little bit" (UG2. Math). There has been a broad process of recoupling experiential learning, in which experiential education has been taken from a 'nice to do' pedagogy, to one that is institutionally defined and measured across Ontario universities.

Recoupling Experiential Education in Ontario Universities: "What's being flagged is very narrow."

The "early adopters" use of experiential learning was exceptional for a time where there was little *formal* recognition of the pedagogy (Ewart, 1987). In more recent years, experiential learning has become much more 'in vogue'. Coupled with formal funding metrics and institutional planning, experiential education has become a formalized pilar of Canadian universities. Over time, the province of Ontario has seen a gradual shift towards metric-based funding in the university system (see Chapter 3). When asked about where the desire for more experiential education was coming from, many participants connected their university's practices to the broader provincial landscape. As discussed in Chapter 3, experiential education has become a formalized funding metric that universities must respond to. Specifically, the most recent iteration of the Strategic Mandate Agreements (SMA3) asks about the "number and proportion of graduates in programs, who participated in at least one course with required Experiential Learning (EL) component(s)" (Government of Ontario, 2021).[28] Reflecting on this

[28] This Ministry-provided wording can be found in any of the university SMA3 documents. For example, see University of Waterloo (2020).

shift, a faculty participant from English stated, “that was the first time that our Faculty of Humanities had to really think about experiential learning as a thing” (DOC1. English), because experiential education was now being tied to institutional funding.

Though the experiential learning requirement was rather broad, participants—as organizational actors within a broader institutional system—were aware of the flows of resources from the province and the need for universities to respond. As one biologist stated,

> *I honestly think it’s just the institution responding to downward pressure. I think that if [the university] really cared about it they would have been resourcing it all along. Because, the importance of experiential learning, or active learning, or however you want to frame it is not new.* (DOC2. Biology)

The institutional dynamic between government and universities was discussed as the government providing “downward pressure” on to universities. Funding models are the mechanism through which these government interests were expressed to universities. As one participant said, “funding models that are given to the universities are a big motivator to change things or to shape things” (DOC2. History); another stated that when funding was tied to experiential education “[the province] expected to see it from universities” (COMP1. Political Science). What participants experienced, though, from the institutional messaging around experiential education was a much narrower view than their existing practices.

Rather than seeing experiential education being discussed for its pedagogical value (which shaped many practices for early adopters), faculty noticed that experiential education was being discussed in much more narrow terms. As one historian stated,

> *The general consensus is that what is being flagged as experiential is a very narrow scope that is very much informed by SMA3, which pretty much means if it’s not work-integrated, like co-op or an internship, it’s not getting counted.* (DOC1. History)

The narrowing of scope meant that for some, what was familiar about experiential education changed to being unrecognizable. One faculty participant from math noted that "I think it was maybe three years ago, it was better. But when the government started incorporating [experiential learning] into its funding metrics I've seen less of it" (UG2. Math). Another participant figured this narrowing of scope was due to the way experiential education was understood at the political level.

> *I don't think that most people are at the level of political decision makers—politicians, but also the Public Service who are involved in making rules around this and who are involved in post-secondary education policy at the provincial level—I suspect they have a fairly narrow vision for what experiential learning actually is.* (COMP2. Political Science)

In the context of these field-level dynamics, experiential education became recoupled. Experiential education has a long history of use in university education, and has traditionally been implemented based on its pedagogical value. The recoupling process playing out in Ontario has impacted this: rather than being a pedagogical tool, experiential education has been absorbed into the ongoing transition to performance-based funding in the province. In effect, experiential education was taken out of the hands of faculty members and recoupled at the institutional level. At this level, the prevailing interest of school to work transitions, and value of work-integrated learning became paramount. As was voiced by these participants, experiential education was redefined, favouring a narrower definition that reflected particular forms of experiential learning over others (e.g., co-op). When reimposed and more narrowly defined, experiential education became unrecognizable to some, and this was seen as a detriment. While participants felt this recoupling started at the institutional level, the effects were most felt when the narrower conception of experiential learning trickled through the internal workings of their universities. Here, the 'teeth' of recoupling was much more impactful.

Internal Processes of Recoupling: Institutional Recognition of Experiential Learning

The recoupling of experiential education played out in various ways across the institutions that were sampled for this research. The common narrative voiced by faculty participants was about institutional scoping searches to identify where experiential education was happening in their programs. These scoping searches tended to flow through hierarchal bureaucratic channels, often coming down from upper administration. Typically, these searches began with some guiding direction about how the institution was thinking about experiential education, and were accompanied by various 'cataloging exercises' to capture where experiential learning was happening.

Faculty discussed a vertical 'trickle down' process through which discussions about experiential education made their way from upper administration to the department level. As one participant described,

> *the VPs bring it to the Deans. The Dean's bring it to our Chairs, then our Chairs bring it to us, you know. It's bound to trickle down. And it all comes down to the resilience and stubbornness of chairs and whether- how far it gets down to us.* (UG1. Chemistry)

These vertical processes were not without their difficulties. Universities are diverse organizations with a plethora of degree programming. Imposing a single idea of what experiential learning means and how it should be done was discussed as an acrimonious process. With respect to organizational diversity, one historian stated,

> *The province has a set of definitions, which map well into some parts of the university and map pretty awkwardly onto parts of the university that I'm in.* (DOC1. History)

Trying to create organizational consensus across disciplinary lines was a noted challenge, as "it's harder for some faculties to do than other in a meaningful way" (COMP2. Sociology), and trying to weave a common thread was likened to a game of telephone, where

> *the determination of what experiential learning is, is reshaped at each step of each stage and probably in ways that are not originally intended or much narrower, or perhaps in the wrong direction entirely than what the initial impetus was.* (COMP2. Sociology)

This is not to say that institutional discussions about experiential education were an organizational 'free for all', where faculties could respond as they choose. The process of recoupling meant that there were tighter coupling configurations for how experiential education was supposed to be defined and counted across programs. Some participants likened these cataloguing exercises as "bean counting", because they were more about identifying existing practices than resourcing and supporting new ones.

> *It's just a different type of bean counting. It's like "give us a list of the number of experiential learning blah blah blahs. And that's a completely meaningless metric, in my opinion. So, everyone's loving to count the beans with it. And the thing is that I don't see it having come with any more resources.* (DOC2. Biology)
>
> *We've been asked to also provide documentation to the department chair with information on courses that provide experiential learning. And they would give us examples- does it have a field component? Does have a lab component? Do you have contact with community organization? Is there a field trip? There are a lot of examples. And in our response, we're invited to say yes or no, there was experiential learning or not, and also give a short blurb on what the experiential learning was.* (DOC2. Biology)

Another participant described these 'bean counting' exercises as a tick-box metric, in which they were asked to respond about whether any of their courses aligned with the institutional definition of experiential learning,

> *At one point, we were asked "are you doing any of these things in your courses?" And we had to say which courses fit into this very tight little definition of what the university considers experiential learning. So, it becomes a very kind of ticking the box exercise of how many courses can we stick under this umbrella so that then we can use that quantitative measure as some sort of indication of how progressive we are as an institution.* (COMP2. Sociology)

Sometimes these bean counting exercises took the form of large tracking mechanisms across university faculties to gain a broader view of experiential learning, instead of reporting directly back up disciplinary channels,

> *We have all been asked by our faculties to fill out a gigantic spreadsheet that asks us to indicate which courses have experiential components, what those experiential components are, and how much of the course is devoted to those experiential components. So, there's very much there's a cataloging exercise that's ongoing at [my university] that measures so that we can say "x number of courses are experiential"* (DOC2. English)

Further, faculty participants shared other mechanisms through which experiential learning was becoming more tightly coupled at their institutions, such as course-tagging initiatives where courses with recognized experiential learning would become 'tagged' as such. Others discussed experiential learning being integrated into the standardized course-syllabus template used by their institution, where instructors would have to check off whether the course would include experiential learning components.

> *We have a standard templated course syllabi… there's a checkbox you know, "does this course have an element of experiential learning?" … it might just be a way for [the Centre for Teaching] to collect data so they could put it in the next Strategic Mandate Agreement saying "yes, we have 'x number' of courses that have this component in it.* (COMP1. Political Science)

The cataloguing exercises were therefore used to build tighter coupling configurations regarding experiential learning. Universities bracketed particular interpretations or definitions of experiential learning, and faculties were expected to respond in-kind about where those experiences were happening in their programs. While the goal here was to be able to reflect these collections back to the provincial government, they did not always result in enhanced consensus about what experiential learning was and why it was happening. As will be discussed next, when these intra-organizational processes occurred, there was disconnect between actor-level

conceptions and institutional-level conceptions of experiential education. As this is an ongoing provincial process, faculty discuss the impacts it is having on them and their pedagogical decisions.

Actor-Level Effects of Recoupling: "there's a gap between the institution as a whole and the everyday people who give the courses"

The recoupling of experiential education is an ongoing organizational process in Ontario. Accordingly, the discord between organizational re-definition of experiential learning and local-level understandings demonstrates recoupling 'in action'. At the institutional level, faculty opined that they saw experiential education as another indicator of the neoliberalization of higher education. Experiential education had gone from being an individual pedagogical tool, to one that was being mandated and attached to institutional funding. This gave the impression that experiential education was now another way in which the 'free thinking' university education was being restricted in favour of employment-specific outcomes.

When thinking about the ways that experiential education was transforming the institution and the way university education should be done, faculty took a cynical view of this process. For some, the way experiential learning was being used reflected a corporate model of education, in which there is "a closing of the autonomy of the university and a university education as a free place to explore ideas, and instead as a way to move people into the workforce" (COMP2. Political Science), or a process which is "trying to make degrees look like something that are going to translate onto the job market" (COMP2. Sociology). To put it more generally, "experiential learning has become kind of a commodity that universities are now selling" (COMP2. Sociology). In the university-dense province of Ontario, one sociologist also noted that experiential learning can play into a university's strategy to stand out: "I think it's a

way for [my university] to distinguish itself from other nearby institutions because there's like eight universities within a two-hour radius of us" (COMP2. Sociology).

Despite the cataloguing and scoping missions previously discussed, many faculty were also left with a lack of clarity about experiential learning, which had implications for how seriously they thought their institutions were committing to it. One participant who is a sessional lecturer and experiential learning coordinator discussed the intra-organizational disconnect at their institution with respect to experiential learning. Despite extensive steering documents and cataloguing exercises, they noted:

> *I've met with tons of faculty over the last few months and just asked them what they're up to. No one seems to understand what counts. I've even talked to some instructors who said, "oh, no, we don't do experiential learning". And then I talked to them and they're describing experiential learning. They're just not seeing the connection there.* (DOC1. History).

This sense of confusion was articulated by one of this participant's institutional colleagues with a long tenure at the university.

> *At the moment, in my understanding of [my university]- and I'm not the world's expert on this- but if somebody who's been here 37 years has no idea what the university wants, that's telling.* (DOC1. Chemistry)

The source for some of this confusion was over what the university was counting, and how the inclusion criteria resonated with existing practices. As another participant stated,

> *There's kind of a gap between the discourse of the institution as a whole, which I think is very keen on experiential learning, and the actual everyday people who give the courses and how much they integrate that into their courses.* (COMP2. Sociology)

Part of this disconnect occurred when actor-level conceptions of experiential education were not connected with the university's ideas. In the case of STEM disciplines, an example of this was

with respect to lab-based courses, where certain kind of labs were not considered experiential by the university. For some, there was agreement that first-year style lab courses that relied on replication, or where experimental data was pre-cleaned by the instructor did not count as experiential. This nuance was discussed by one chemistry participant.

> *You can't just jump to something experiential from nowhere. So, we have argued to-and-fro about whether [a first-year lab course] in chemistry should count as experiential. But for the moment, we've sort of admitted that perhaps the difference is where you go from something that is primarily potted, in that the student follows instructions and gets a gets a result and every student gets the same result essentially.* (DOC1. Chemistry)

These internal disagreements are emblematic of broader tensions when trying to define what 'counts' as experiential learning. For some, nothing could be more experiential than lab work, regardless of the degree of 'pottedness,' as this required students to take their learning into an applied setting and make connections between what they learned in class and implement that learning in a laboratory setting. For others, the fact that the results are known, and all students come to the same result meant that there was insufficient engagement by students to warrant an experiential learning distinction.

As a perspective from the social sciences, one sociologist shared a similar experience where their conception of experiential learning was not aligned with the institutional perspective; though, they felt their use of experiential learning was much more beneficial to student learning and development.

> *In my opinion, a lot of what I do with my students- like I'll co-author with them…or I'll co-present with them, provide them with funding for them to go to a conference. But that doesn't often come up in the metrics or [the university's] definitions of experiential learning… And now it's kind of this push to either repackage that in a way that fits under this experiential learning umbrella or find another way that may be less beneficial.* (UG2. Sociology)

The recoupling of experiential education has aggravated classic tensions about the scope of the role of universities, and a broader friction between academic and corporate logics (see Canhilal et al., 2016; Lepori, 2016). While the universities continued to excavate where experiential learning was happening, the narrow scope of these efforts risk alienating broader interpretations of experiential learning at the faculty level. There were many instances in which forms of experiential learning that leant themselves to the disciplines represented in this study (e.g., labs, publishing), were not recognized by the university. For some, this brought about a broader question about why experiential learning was being done, and whether it was merely a further commodification of university education, and something for universities to sell. To be sure, no faculty participant discussed stopping what they considered to be experiential education simply because it was not institutionally recognized. The concern was more about where the slow build of experiential education was heading, and how they or their department may have to further respond to institutional pressures (for a broader discussion of this sensemaking, see Chapter 5).

Discussion

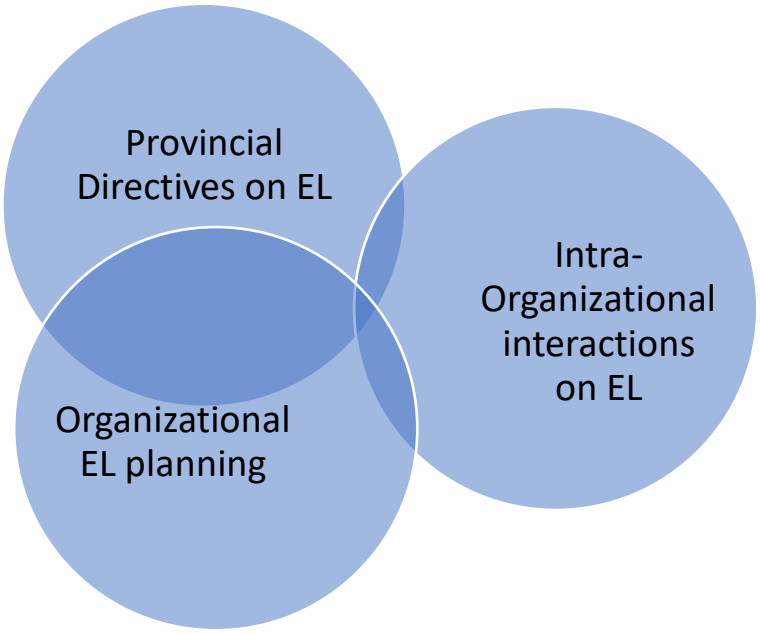
The institutional transformation of experiential education in Ontario has implications for various organizational constituencies in the university system. In this case, faculty members experienced the recoupling of existing practices that were originally done for pedagogical reasons. The use of experiential learning modalities by these instructors was based on pedagogical calculations for how students could learn best. For early adopters, these pedagogical decisions gave them what Everitt (2012) termed "arsenals of practice" to rationalize teaching practices that require a significant amount of work, but which nonetheless were framed by their internal motivations to help students learn and develop skills. Put another way, these internal motivations were to adopt a pedagogical strategy that was antithetical to the 'sage on the stage',

or classic banking model of education (see Freire, 1970) that sees students as passive receptacles of knowledge.

Faculty, though, are not lone actors championing particular pedagogical approaches. Unlike the entrepreneurial view of organizations (DiMaggio, 1988), faculty actions are recursively implicated with their institutional environment. The perspectives offered in this chapter highlight that what was once done for pedagogical reasons has been recoupled at the institutional level. The inherent motivations that faculty once found 'good enough' to use experiential education were now subject to institutional metrics to foster *recognized* forms of experiential learning. Ironically, some early adopters who once had to argue the value of experiential education were now arguing that what they do should count as experiential. Absorbing experiential learning into the institutional funding umbrella of the province meant recoupling and redefining it according to broader institutional priorities, and imbued it with value beyond its pedagogical utility. In effect, experiential education became redefined as primarily concerned with work-integrated learning, a conceptualization which largely fell outside the instructional purview of faculty participants.

From an inhabited institutionalist perspective, the findings of this study reveal tighter coupling configurations between the institutional and organizational level, and looser coupling with social interactions (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a). Borrowing the coupling configuration visual from Hallett and Hawbaker (2021), the coupling configuration reflected by the findings of this study shows more closeness (i.e., tighter coupling) between the provincial level and university, and subsequent distance (i.e., looser coupling) to the internal operations (i.e., faculty interpretations) as outlined in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Experiential Education Coupling Configuration in Ontario Universities



Faculty perspectives indicated that experiential education had become more narrowly defined at their universities, often in response to experiential learning directives from the province. This led to organization-wide scoping searches, which faculty likened to 'bean counting', to identify where experiential learning was taking place. Many faculty members shared a feeling of general confusion about this process. The way in which the institution was conceptualizing experiential education was not aligned with how they conceived of it; that is, the interactive and meaning-making foundation of the inhabited actors was misaligned with their broader institutional dynamics. This meant that there was a tighter coupling configuration between the administrative levels of the universities and provincial government, and looser coupling with the inhabited actors (i.e., faculty).

A common heuristic approach that early inhabited institutionalists used to communicate the micro-level processes that connect individuals to their institutional environments was to lean on Blumer's (1969, p. 12) interactionist premise. In this case I replace "object" with "experiential learning" to emphasize the interactionist foundation of meaning-making, through which experiential learning is given value.

> The meaning of [experiential learning] has to be formed, learned, and transmitted through a process of indication- a process that is necessarily a social process. Human group life on the level of symbolic interaction is a vast process in which people are forming, sustaining, and transforming [experiential learning] as they come to give meaning to [experiential learning]. [Experiential learning] has no fixed status except as its meaning is sustained through interactions and definitions that people make of (it).

Faculty from across different disciplines had their own ideas about what constitutes experiential learning. Approaching experiential learning from different disciplinary standpoints supports the idea that organizations with multiple subunits have their own negotiated order (Bechky, 2011; Binder, 2007), and construct an understanding of experiential learning based on the requisite disciplinary interactions of that discipline. Quite simply, experiential education was widely conceptualized across disciplines. Where conflict occurred was when these 'micro-foundations' of experiential learning, which had sustained the pedagogical reasoning of these participants, became misaligned with broader 'meso-foundations' that were formed through the recoupling process. No faculty participant discussed changing their view of experiential education in response to this tension. Rather, instead of the clarity the institutions were hoping to provide, the result was a general sense of confusion about what experiential learning was exactly, and how participants should act on that direction. This was succinctly discussed by one participant as a

gap in the discourse between the institution and the "everyday people" who act on that discourse.[29]

It is important to highlight that the institutional dynamics surrounding experiential education are ongoing in the Ontario university system. Quite simply, the tensions expressed by faculty participants has not led to institutional loggerheads. However, inhabited institutionalism reminds that from a distance organizations may seem like they are built on stable and unchanging relationships, but "these relations are ultimately dependent upon the agreement of their parties" (Fine, 1984, p. 243; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). What has been demonstrated here is the ongoing negotiation of order within Ontario universities regarding experiential education. Given previous evidence that experiential education is becoming institutionalized in this institutional system (see Chapter 3), the negotiated order for making sense of experiential learning is imperative for continued success and organizational alignment.

Conclusion

Existing approaches to understanding the ways institutions are inhabited have leant on scenarios where external demands are placed on organizational actors; or, put another way, "myths are given tangible flesh in organizations" (Hallett, 2010b, p. 53). This study has added a new dimension to the inhabited institutionalist perspective, in which existing organizational practices are recoupled and reimposed from the institutional level. While experiential education has an established use in university education, the pre-existing practices of faculty in this study were recoupled with broader institutional concerns over work-readiness and economic transitions to the labour market. The findings nuance our understanding of coupling configurations, where

[29] The perspectives of these everyday people have been represented in more collegial discourse, such as *The 10 Commandments of Experiential Learning* (Roberts & Welton, 2022).

organizations can be patterned by both tight and loose coupling configurations (Aurini, 2012; Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021a). In this case, the tighter coupling between universities and the provincial government meant that narrower conceptions of experiential education did not resonate with the kind of micro-foundations faculty had developed through their arsenals of practice.

Exactly how these intra-organizational tensions around defining and measuring experiential learning will be resolved remains elusive. Though, the findings of this study suggest that these institutional dynamics may have implications for how successfully new practices can be institutionalized. It has been suggested that experiential education is becoming increasingly institutionalized in Ontario universities. The inhabited institutionalist perspective was useful for its "Janus-faced" perspective to consider the interplay between the "folk" of the universities and the extra-local institutional environment (Haedicke & Hallett, 2016). The misalignment between how universities and professors conceptualize experiential education has implications for the ways that universities can demonstrate that experiential learning is being fostered. In the resource dependent relationship between universities and the province, this misalignment could have negative repercussions for the financial resource flows, and how successfully universities can demonstrate their responses to the experiential learning funding metric.

PREFACE TO CHAPTER 5: FACULTY SENSEMAKING AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education is a growing institutional phenomenon in university education. Experiential learning opportunities are increasingly embedded within institutional mission statements, administrative priorities, and pedagogical frameworks. Despite its spread, little attention has been paid to the perspective of faculty members in terms of how they make sense of experiential education and how it shapes their professional roles or disciplinary priorities. To shore up these gaps, I report the findings of a qualitative survey that was used to understand general faculty sentiments in Ontario about experiential education (n=132), and in-depth semi-structured interviews (n=47) from faculty members across eight disciplines from six universities. Drawing on international literature on experiential education (e.g., Björck, 2021; Bradbury et al., 2021) and organizational sensemaking (e.g., Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995), the findings of this study reveal four sensemaking lenses that faculty use to make sense of experiential learning: the disciplinary lens, the institutional lens, the pedagogical lens, and the professional lens. Both collectively, and individually, these lenses have implications for the successful institutionalization of experiential education, as they are the lenses through which faculty form meaning and enact their responses. By distinguishing these lenses, this chapter reinforces sensemaking as a process of bricolage, and that faculty draw on multiple lenses to understand organizational changes. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research on faculty sensemaking.

CHAPTER 5: FACULTY SENSEMAKING AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Introduction

Experiential education is a growing institutional phenomenon in university education. Broadly defined as a pedagogical philosophy that blends classroom learning with external experiences and purposeful reflection (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.), experiential education is particularly valued for equipping post-secondary students with the skills they need to be successful in the workforce. In Canada, the higher education system is broadly categorized into public universities, public colleges, private religious universities, and private career colleges (Pizarro Milian et al., 2016). The higher education system is under the purview of provincial jurisdiction, where each province holds the purse strings of funding for public institutions. Turning attention to the university sector, the province of Ontario has gradually moved towards a performance-based funding model where up to 60% of university funding is being tied to particular funding metrics, including experiential education (Ontario, 2021; for a broader review on the mandate process and experiential education see Chapter 3). Given the resource-dependency of universities on government funding, discussions about experiential education are becoming pervasive across the province, especially as universities continue to figure out how to frame existing efforts and foster new ones. Ontario, however, is not unique. Other Canadian provinces have moved towards metric-based funding, inclusive of experiential education (Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of Manitoba, 2022). In the United States, similar experiences have been discussed at the institutional level of universities (e.g., Isaak et al., 2018), and there has been further international discourse on the pervasiveness of various forms of experiential learning (Björck, 2021; Bradbury et al., 2021).

To date, scholars have considered the rapid administrative growth surrounding experiential education at universities (e.g., Buzzelli & Songsore, 2022), and how this adoption shapes university-community connections, or 'town-gown' relationships (see Buzzelli & Asafo-Adjei, 2023). Emerging perspectives, such as LaCroix (2021), suggest that the adoption and institutionalization of experiential education represents an organizationally complex process within universities given that they are sites of overlapping institutional logics (see Besharov & Smith, 2014). Universities have needed to liaise institutional pressures emanating from their organizational environment, while simultaneously respecting the professional autonomy and disciplinary logics of faculty (see LaCroix, 2021; see also Besharov & Smith, 2014). In many ways, the strategic responses to environmental pressure and internal liaising work encompasses the full gauntlet of intra-organizational systems, involving the administrative structure and technical core, as well as the organizational periphery.[30]

Despite faculty being frontline organizational actors tasked with accomplishing the teaching, research, and service efforts of universities, their professional experiences remain surprisingly absent in research on experiential education. With experiential education being framed more officially within universities (e.g., mission statements, strategic institutional priorities, institutional infrastructure, see Chapter 3), the implications of this absence are especially acute given evidence that institutional changes have implications for "what it means to be an academic" (Henkel, 2005, p. 165). While faculty are certainly represented as researchers on experiential education (e.g., through implementation studies), there is relatively little

[30] In organizational terms, the organizational periphery is otherwise referred to as the organization's "technostructure". Mintzberg (1979) utilizes this term to capture the structural elements of the organization that support the core technical mission. In relation to universities, the technostructure of experiential education would be those organizational elements that support expansion and resourcing, such as experiential learning hubs, online resources, and professional staff (e.g., co-op advisors, community-engaged practitioners, etc.).

coverage of them as organizational actors encountering organizational change. These perspectives are critical to understanding individual and collective sensemaking, as Qualters (2010b, p. 57) notes that different parties to experiential education across universities will all have "burning questions" about how experiential education impacts the realms they inhabit. Some effort has been made to explore how faculty across different disciplines think about experiential education, though findings have remained overly general (i.e., not nuanced by discipline) (e.g., Rosenstein et al., 2012). Subsequent interpretations suggest that faculty see the value in experiential education, but still rely predominantly on the traditional lecture (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). Thus, the sensemaking perspectives of faculty with respect to experiential education remains a conceptual 'black box'.

With this in mind, the current study pulls back the curtain on faculty perspectives and asks how faculty have/continue to make sense of experiential education as it impacts them as professional actors within universities. Drawing on organizational sensemaking literature, findings from this project suggest that faculty make sense of experiential education through four lenses: disciplinary, institutional, pedagogical, and professional. Through a disciplinary lens, faculty make sense of experiential education in relation to the idioculture of their respective disciplines. Faculty members use an institutional lens to make sense of how experiential education takes shape within their own universities. A pedagogical lens is used to conceptualize experiential education in terms of its value for enhancing curricular learning outcomes. Faculty also make sense of experiential education in relation to their professional locations, using a professional lens. Importantly, while multiple lenses exist, they are not mutually exclusive, but act as complementary and contrasting frames of meaning. The findings in this study bring the topic of experiential education out of the institutional structure and down to the 'shop floor' of

universities. They add to our understanding of organizational sensemaking, in that organizational actors do not make sense of emergent phenomenon in static roles (see Ashforth et al., 2008; Brown, 2017). Rather, organizational roles are multi-faceted and provide a prism through which organizational change can be made sense of from various angles. By teasing out the distinct lenses of sensemaking, this study contributes some theoretical refinement by delineating particular frames of meaning, and the process of bricolage where faculty liaise between these frames.

Theoretical Context

Sensemaking in Organizational Studies

Sensemaking is an organizational process involving the construction of realities and understanding within organizations and their environment, and how actors 'make sense' of these constructions (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). The early work of Weick (1995) is often treated as the conceptual foundation of sensemaking, as a micro-level process to understand how actors understand their place, roles, and changes within broader institutional fields. Essentially, these micro-processes address critiques of institutional theory for paying too much attention to macro-levels of analysis (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Jepperson, 1991) and failing to fully consider the position of organizational actors. Sensemaking highlights the importance of the micro in organizations, such that small interactions and interpersonal relations between individuals and structures can have consequences for how action unfolds within organizations (Weick, et al., 2005). While definitions and applications of sensemaking vary (see Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), many share core features. Sutcliffe (2018, p. 1) carves out many of these features, and succinctly defines sensemaking as

> a process that occurs when surprising or discrepant cues interrupt individuals' ongoing activities and they retrospectively develop plausible meanings of those cues that rationalize what they have been doing.

Critical to sensemaking is that the process is brought on by these "discrepant cues" which can take the form of crises (e.g., Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010), or less dramatic instances where exiting stocks of knowledge cannot solve a problem. Actors need to make sense of these cues, and often rationalize their responses retrospectively to justify their actions (Sutcliffe, 2018; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).

Organizational sociologists have reengaged with the recursive relationship between micro-macro levels of analysis, and in this undertaking sensemaking emerges as more than a top-down process. Sensemaking has been applied to a variety of empirical projects to tease out how organizational actors make sense of developments within their organizations and broader environments. Binder (2007), and later Hallet (2010; see also Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021) forward the notion of inhabited institutions to reemphasize the agency of actors within organizations. In these empirical examples, transitional housing programs (Binder, 2007), and schools (Hallet, 2010) serve as sites where human agency is used to "combine and generate practices that are intended to satisfy multiple demands" (Binder, 2007, p. 549). For example, Binder (2004) found that members of a transitional housing organization strategically couple their actions with rules from their institutional environment, and leverage these rules as resources in their interactions with staff and clients. Sensemaking in these inhabited examples occurs in response to stimuli from the organizational environment, but also via the action routines of organizational actors. Put another way, sensemaking involves the recursive and mutually constitutive relationship between organizational actors and their organization and/or

environment. Reintroducing the place of the local actor helps to recenter human agency in sensemaking perspectives.

Since its inception, sensemaking as an organizational perspective has blossomed in popularity. Recent reviews (e.g., Cristofaro, 2022; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) have gone to great lengths to index existing contributions and work toward theoretical refinement. Given the substantive breadth of literature, I distill four core propositions of sensemaking that are outlined in the literature and connect those propositions to the current empirical study. Importantly, this is not a systematic review, but instead provides readers with an understanding of the core theses of sensemaking as they apply to the research at hand.

Proposition 1: organizing is achieved to the extent that sensemaking is accomplished. Accordingly, faculty will make sense of experiential education in relation to relevant 'raw materials' offered by their institutions.

Weick (1995; et al., 2005) conceived of organization *as* sensemaking, and argued that it is an epistemic error to think of organizations as preceding sensemaking. Organizational sensemaking is fundamentally about answering questions regarding how a development or phenomenon comes to be, and how organizational members should react in response (Weick, 1995). The mutually constitutive process of realizing there is a particular societal need, and the development of the knowledge and tools needed to meet that need is the process of organizing. Organization is thus enmeshed in sensemaking, where organization emerges from an ongoing process in which people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs, and then enact that sense back into the world to make it more orderly (Brown et al., 2015). As particular roles and action scripts become carved out to connect different elements of organizations to their environment, these become the 'raw materials' of sensemaking supplied back by institutions (i.e., roles are imbued with subjective meaning that arise from actors enacting institutional structures in a local

environment; Weber & Glynn, 2006). Also accomplished in this dialectic process is the construction of whole organizational environments which, as outlined in proposition three, interact with individuals and collective groups via environmental cues (for a perspective on the role of groups in sensemaking, see Fine & Hallett, 2014).

Proposition 2: sensemaking is triggered by cues where meaning is ambiguous and/or expected outcomes are uncertain. Accordingly, faculty members will make sense of experiential education in relation to their disciplinary background.

Sensemaking is fundamentally about the interplay between thinking and acting. Organizational actors go about their roles in largely semi-autonomous fashion, often acting in relation to an idioculture where "systems of knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs are shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (Fine, 1979, p. 734; see also Fine & Hallet, 2014). While these performance scripts provide taken-for-granted capacities for action, sensemaking is triggered by cues—events from the organizational environment—where meaning is ambiguous and/or outcomes are uncertain. Weick et al. (2005) suggested that actors engage in an interpretive process to combine cues with an existing frame of knowledge via a process of interpretation. Contemporary revisions (e.g., Maitlis & Christianson, 2014) suggest that this is an error, given that this assumes there is a pre-existing frame of knowledge in place to draw on (in which case sensemaking would not be required). Rather, Maitlis and Soneshein (2010) suggest that interpretation is one component of sensemaking, but so is social construction in which actors construct new meanings in the face of these environmental cues. The impediment to natural organizational routines requires actors to ask 'what's going on here?', and either learn how to act in response, or engage in further deliberation (Weick et al., 2005).

Proposition 3: sensemaking is an ongoing and retroactive process where actors rationalize past behaviour. In this regard, faculty will make sense of experiential education use and non-use retrospectively as a way to rationalize pedagogical decision-making.

Sensemaking takes place in the longue durée of organizational action. Given that sense is 'made' following the development of external cues, sensemaking is always a retrospective process. For example, Maitlis and Sonshein (2010) note the reactive nature of sensemaking when organizations and their members encounter crises. In these instances, crises spur a sensemaking process often resulting in teams trying to generate shared understanding and attempting to 'get back to normal' or re-establish the pre-crisis state of the organization. However, the ongoing nature of sensemaking acknowledges that organizational actors are not able to 'step out' to make sense of cues and then 'merge' back into their routines (see Taylor & van Every, 2000). Sensemaking is therefore nested within a larger social context (Weber & Glynn, 2006). An important distinction that should be drawn from the ongoing and retroactive nature of sensemaking is that sensemaking is distinct (though sometimes synonymously referred to) from decision-making. Whereas decision-making hinges on the evaluation between choices, sensemaking emphasizes action as we enact our environments, and the interplay between action and interpretation (Smerek, 2013; Sutcliffe, 2018; Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Proposition 4: organizational members are less likely to engage in sensemaking when there is a strong sense of individual or collective identity. Following this, for tenured and tenure track faculty, logics of academic freedom provide a professional buffer from institutional sense-giving. Precariously employed faculty may be more subject to institutional sensegiving.

Sensemaking is often conceptualized as a top-down process within organizations, where "institutions function to contextualize sensemaking by imposing cognitive constraints on the actors who do the sensemaking" (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1642; for a recent exception, see Rheinhardt & Gioia, 2021). Otherwise known as the 'cognitive constraint' model of

sensemaking, organizations impress sensemaking downward through informational channels, influencing how actors both interpret and enact their roles. This allows organizations to steer the actions of their members in a relatively semi-autonomous and taken-for-granted fashion. Tension occurs, however, in instances of planned organizational change. Individual and collective identities are strong anchors to which "collectives construct meaning and understand their experiences" (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 563). Intra-organizational dynamics of power and control over change often take the form of sense*giving*, where actors attempt to influence the sensemaking and meaning-construction abilities of others toward their "preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Where individuals or collectives have a strong association with their identity, they can respond to these sensegiving attempts via their own sensemaking processes and "adopt, alter, resist, or reject the sense they have been given" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 78). Collective sensemaking is therefore a critical buffer against top-down attempts at change. Unless organizational actors agree with change efforts, these efforts risk becoming failed attempts.

Together, these four propositions outline core aspects of sensemaking, distilled here from a broader pool of the sensemaking perspective (see Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). These theoretical discussions have largely taken place within the confines of literature on organizations, though sensemaking is not without its extension and application in the realm of higher education.

Sensemaking in Higher Education Literature

Sensemaking is often used as a theoretical tool in higher education literature for analyzing and understanding organizational transformations. Sensemaking has been applied to studies at all organizational levels to understand how individuals make sense of the position they are in relative to ongoing changes. For example, Degn (2018) relied on sensemaking in the

context of institutional shifts taking place in European higher education, investigating how academics experience "identity threats" brought on by Danish higher education reforms. At conflict in these reforms were the sense-making frames that actors drew on to situate themselves within the organization's identity. In this case, reform changes created organizational fractures within the case universities, resulting in tighter coupling- or, stronger organizational linkages- between the formal organizational structure (i.e., the administrative component of the university) and the political level, and a simultaneous looser coupling- or, weaker organizational linkages- of the formal organizational structure from the academic core.[31]

Similar tensions to administrative reform efforts were noted by Gonzales (2013) in the case of one American university's mission to become a 'Tier One' research status institution. While the outcome of the 'mission creep' is not noted, Gonzales (2013) highlights some important connections between sensemaking and institutional perspectives (e.g., Powell & Colyvas, 2008), where faculty turned to their institutional environments to make sense of 'triggers' within their own organization. Specifically, faculty drew on logics from already established and legitimized research universities, the evaluative criteria of the entities who rank and evaluate universities, and peers at competitor institutions to compare and contrast their own perspectives on the institutional creep with the messages provided by the administration. In doing so faculty actively resisted a top-driven effort to recouple the institutional mission of the university.

Unlike the above stalemates, Kezar and Eckel (2002) and Kezar (2013) find that there are important internal processes associated with sensemaking that can lead to successful organizational changes. Kezar and Eckel (2002) studied six institutions as they attempted to

[31] For a classic review of tight and loose coupling, see Weick (1976).

enact their own transformation goals in accordance with the Ace Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation (e.g., becoming more student-centred, changing faculty roles and rewards; see also Eckel, 2002). Critical to the transformation initiatives was administration "creating an environment where sensemaking activities could occur" (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 314). Examples of such activities were roundtables, and interest groups which helped faculty to "personalize the change" in relation to their "jobs, responsibilities, and identities" (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 314). Similarly, Kezar (2013), heeding calls to study sensemaking from the bottom up (e.g,. Maitlis & Soneshein, 2010), looked at efforts for institutions to develop a more interdisciplinary core technology. Success hinged on establishing a deeper understanding of what constituted 'interdisciplinary', a broad approach to transformation throughout the institution, and change agents making strategic connections between sensemaking/sensegiving and specific barriers they were looking to overcome. Those institutions that failed to keep momentum and fully engage across these three elements sometimes experienced stalled or unsuccessful attempts at transformation (Kezar, 2013).

Other perspectives have continued to focus on the top level of institutions. Smerek (2013) investigated the sensemaking of new college presidents and how they make sense of their transition into the head administrative role of universities. Interestingly, Smerek's (2013) findings did not fully align with some of the classic propositions of sensemaking literature, especially where cognition is positioned to follow action. This does make sense to a degree, given the steering role that administrative heads have to their organizations (Mintzberg, 1979). What this perspective adds is an understanding of 'sensemaking at the top' as presidents come into their new roles, rather than instances of them acting as change-agents. Though, given the relatively small number of university presidents in contrast to other organizational members, and

their unique position within the organization, findings about cognition and action may not translate to these more populous bodies.

Sensemaking in higher education has been broadly applied. These studies have highlighted the internal dynamics of sensemaking and sensegiving across multiple topics relevant to higher education. Indeed, the interplay within universities is one of constant churning and continued work towards mutual understanding in relation to environmental cues. Experiential education represents one such cue, where messages from the Ontario provincial government have spurred some transformational changes within Ontario universities. In many ways, experiential education may act as a 'trigger' of sensemaking for faculty given the potential threat to professional identity (Maitlis & Christinason, 2014).

Sensemaking is therefore a useful theoretical perspective to understand how organizational actors make sense of changes within their own organizations and across their organizational field, and how this process unfolds within the power dynamics of organizations (i.e., sensemaking vs sensegiving). In its application to higher education, sensemaking is a suitable perspective to apply to the current project on faculty responses to experiential education in Canada. Essentially, how do faculty make sense of experiential education? And, to what extent has experiential education impacted faculty perceptions of their professional roles? To answer these questions, faculty members across six Ontario universities were recruited to take part in a survey on experiential education, as well as semi-structured interviews. Faculty were recruited across the STEM fields, as well as humanities, arts, and social sciences to add disciplinary nuance considering that disciplinary considerations have been largely absent from existing research on experiential education.

Methods

This study followed a sequential qualitative design (Morse, 2010), involving a qualitative survey and semi-structured interviews to triangulate multiple sources of data (Denzin, 1979). The survey was used to gain a general understanding of faculty views about experiential education, as well as a recruitment tool for semi-structured interviews. Faculty members were identified and recruited via information on their institutional profile. Faculty were sent a recruitment email containing a letter of information outlining the project and consent/participation options, as well as a link to a qualitative survey that also allowed them to 'opt-in' for a follow up interview. Findings from the survey are used to frame the more in-depth analysis offered by the interviews. This study was approved by the research ethics board at the University of Waterloo. Ethics approval was also obtained from all institutions I recruited from.

Sample

Faculty members were recruited via information on their institutional profile. Essentially, I reviewed department websites for each of the disciplines included in this study and made a master list of faculty contacts from each department. Included in these lists were all faculty members the department listed on their website, including full-time and sessional[32] or part-time instructors.[33] Emerita/us faculty members were not included in the sample, given the focus of this dissertation project is about exploring the experiences of current faculty members.

Existing efforts to research experiential education have not recruited along disciplinary lines. To enhance the internal validity of the sampling design, institutions were selected that offered the same academic programs to be able to establish comparisons within and across

[32] Sessional instructors are teaching staff who are non-tenured and non-permanent employees of the university.
[33] Undoubtedly, this required a broad interpretation. While institutions tended to be similar in their faculty titles (e.g., associate professor and assistant professor), some also had titles such as continuing lecturer, lecturer, and definite-term lecturer. To be as inclusive as possible, all listed faculty were included in the sampling framework.

disciplines, as well as within and across institutions. These institutions represented two undergraduate, two comprehensive, and two medical/doctoral institutions, as defined by the Maclean's (2023) *University Rankings*. Institutions were purposefully selected to ensure geographic diversity in the province was captured (e.g., northern and southern institutions). As part of the sampling strategy, institutions were selected on the basis of geographic variance and program offering. The goal of this strategy was to ensure the perspective of faculty from *across* the province were captured, rather than focusing on university-dense areas of the province (e.g., the Greater Toronto Area). As shown in Table 12, this program strategy was possible for all institutions except for Undergraduate Institution 2 that did not offer chemistry or physics.[34] Table 12 shows the number of faculty members within each academic department at each university (e.g., the English Department at UG1 has 27 faculty members). To protect the confidentiality of faculty participants all institutions have been assigned a pseudonym.

Table 12: Faculty Sampling Frame

	Undergraduate		**Comprehensive**		**Doctoral**	
Department	**UG1**	**UG2**	**COMP1**	**COMP2**	**DOC1**	**DOC2**
English	27	17	18	47	54	60
History	24	10	11	20	46	40
Political Science	9	4	18	20	40	29
Sociology	11	14	15	21	28	45
Biology	22	10	17	41	62	85
Chemistry	18	NA	23	42	39	46
Math/Stats	15	9	24	60	55	27
Physics	10	NA	9	43	40	59

[34] This was a methodological decision. Not all universities in Ontario offer the same program. In order to ensure adequate representation of the three institutional categories, some concessions needed to be made. The trade-off here was that UG1 did have these programs, ensuring science-based disciplines were represented in the undergraduate category.

Total: 1,384	**136**	**64**	**135**	**294**	**364**	**391**

Together, these departments gave a total sampling frame of 1,384 individuals. Faculty members were recruited over four rounds of outreach between January and November 2022, broken down into recruitment rounds of 25% segments of the total sampling frame. After one week, a follow up email was sent to those who had not completed the survey. Given the size of the sample, recruiting in rounds created manageable chunks of data collection.

Survey

They survey component of this study was used to gain a general sense of faculty attitudes toward experiential education. It also was a pragmatic methodological decision to capture responses from faculty who might have been interested in contributing to the project but did not have time to arrange a full interview. The survey consisted of three sections, with a mix of fixed-response and open-ended questions. Section one asked participants about their current professional role at their institution. Section two asked participants about their use or non-use of experiential education, and their rationale. Section three provided an open-response section to share additional thoughts or details about their responses, as well as indicate whether they would like to participate in an interview. After screening for incomplete responses, the survey yielded 132 responses.

Qualitative Interviews

In total, 47 faculty members agreed to an interview. Interviews took place between January 2022 and December 2022, averaging one hour in length. As outlined in Table 13, most of the faculty interviews were derived from comprehensive institutions (n=21), followed by doctoral (n=16) and undergraduate (n=10) institutions. Most interviews came from the

humanities and social science disciplines (n=35) rather than from STEM-based disciplines (n=12).

Table 13: Faculty Interview Sample

	Undergraduate		Comprehensive		Doctoral	
Department	**UG1**	**UG2**	**COMP1**	**COMP2**	**DOC1**	**DOC2**
English	1	1	0	3	2	2
History	1	1	0	1	3	1
Political Science	1	0	4	4	0	0
Sociology	0	2	0	6	1	1
Biology	0	1	0	1	1	2
Chemistry	1	0	0	0	2	1
Math/Stats	0	1	0	1	0	0
Physics	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total: 47	**4**	**6**	**5**	**16**	**9**	**7**

The faculty sample is also differentiated by professional standing (i.e., tenured and non-tenured). Of the 47 participants 33 were tenured or tenure-track and 14 were non-tenured. Of the 14 non-tenured participants, their professional locations varied from full-time continuing lecturers to more clear-cut members of the precariat sessional or part-time lecturers. In terms of users and non-users, 36 participants identified as users and approximately 11 participants identified as non-users of experiential learning.[35] Interviews covered three main themes relevant to both the existing literature on experiential education, as well as the broader theoretical contributions

[35] For methodological clarity, these participants are being classified as non-users if they *themselves* did not think they were using 'tried and true' forms of experiential learning, or did not self-identify as users. This distinction is important to their overall sensemaking of experiential learning, because while some non-users strongly dissociated their teaching practices from experiential learning, others noted that they didn't think of themselves as using experiential learning but had been told by others that they were using experiential learning practices (e.g., bringing in guest speakers or getting students to work with statistical software).

being made in this project. Faculty members were first asked about their views on the institutional shift toward experiential education underway in Ontario. Faculty were also asked about how they conceptualized and implemented (or not) experiential learning in their teaching practices, as well as any disciplinary nuances that might be relevant. The interview concluded by asking faculty about the professional implications of experiential education, both for how they see their own roles, as well as any impacts they viewed on the professoriate writ large. It is this final thematic component that the data in this chapter reports on.

Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed thematically to gain a better understanding of the general attitudes' faculty have toward experiential education, given the lack of existing literature on the topic (see Appendix B). Faculty survey responses were useful for me to develop a descriptive account for general sentiments toward experiential education (e.g., positive or negative), their use and non-use of experiential learning modes, and the extent to which faculty perceived experiential education influencing their profession. As outlined above, these descriptive accounts were used to help develop the interview guide and the specific questions I asked interviewees about the profession.

Interviews took place over Zoom and were transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. Completed transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and de-identified before being uploaded to NVivo software for analysis. From there, analysis began with a two-stage coding strategy. In the first stage, pre-established codes derived from the interview guide were deductively applied to the interview transcripts as a general process of winnowing the data (Creswell, 2013). The code *Faculty Attitudes Toward Experiential Education,* for example, focused on questions relating to how faculty have responded to the provincial and institutional

shifts toward fostering and encouraging experiential learning in undergraduate programs. This code was then further saturated by the child codes *Positive Attitudes, Negative Attitudes, and Ambivalence* to capture the range of faculty thoughts and responses to these institutional dynamics.

In the second phase, theoretically informed codes were developed inductively from this winnowed data. Central to this stage of coding was capturing the range of professional responses faculty had toward experiential education; that is, how they felt experiential learning was impacting themselves as professional actors, as well as the profession more broadly. This chapter reports on the Master Code *Experiential Education and Professional Identity,* and its associated Child Nodes. This code was created based on faculty responses to questions about the impact of experiential learning on the professoriate broadly, and on their own professional practices as organizational actors. As an example of this analytic process, the code *Professional Identity* was originally created to code instances where faculty voiced profession-related implications of experiential education. During the first cycle of coding it was found that there was a real variance in whether faculty were speaking egoistically—that is, in relation to their own selves—or whether they were taking a broader perspective on their peers, discipline, and profession. Consequently, during the second cycle of coding *Professional Identity* was split into two separate codes to more accurately capture this distinction: *Implications of Experiential Education for Professional Identity* and *Professional Considerations of Experiential Education*.

Organizational research on identity suggests that rather than single identities, there are multiple means "by which individuals construe their selves in relation to their organizations" (Brown, 2017, p. 296). The analytic coding revealed that there were distinct lenses that faculty members were using simultaneously to 'make sense' of experiential learning and its

professional-level implications. In a further step within the analytic coding, I developed theoretically-driven codes to identify the various lenses that faculty drew on in their sensemaking endeavors. Specifically, faculty regularly interchanged between 1) a disciplinary lens, 2) an institutional lens, 3) a pedagogical lens, and 4) a professional lens. Thus, this study adds to our understanding of organizational sensemaking, as it further delineates specific analytic lenses that faculty draw on in their sensemaking process. Each of these lenses work together via a process of bricolage for interpreting institutional triggers and engaging appropriate action responses. These lenses are discussed in greater detail below.

Findings

Faculty do not make sense of experiential learning along monolithic lines. Conventional sensemaking logic discusses sensemaking as an individual and collective process, where environmental cues are made sense of in relation to pre-existing stocks of knowledge which are a core part of their identity (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 2005; for a counter point, see Brown, 2017). At the micro-level, though, the process of how this is accomplished has less empirical evidence. Faculty overall had positive feelings toward experiential education, and their capacity to incorporate it into their teaching practices. As well, this positive association seemed to hold across disciplines. The findings also show that faculty in this study made sense of experiential education through distinct frames of reference. These frames are discussed in greater detail below, and include a disciplinary lens, an institutional lens, a pedagogical lens, and a professional lens. It is important to note that these sensemaking frames are interwoven and not mutually exclusive. In their interviews, faculty members often drew on multiple frames simultaneously and thereby drew on different facets of their professional identity as 'sources of sense'.

The Disciplinary Lens

One way faculty made sense of experiential education was in reference to their existing stock of knowledge and professional orientations by their academic discipline. When approaching experiential education from a disciplinary perspective, many faculty indicated that their disciplines were still trying to 'figure out' experiential education. Sensemaking along the disciplinary lens meant drawing on existing discussions that faculty were aware of occurring within the discipline itself, and how the discipline was responding. For non-users, this meant some leant on the idea that experiential education was not a prominent feature in the discipline, such as one History participant who noted that experiential learning is "not something my department takes terribly seriously" (COMP2. History).

Disciplinary discussions were particularly acute for some of the humanities disciplines represented in the sample, and often in reference to needing to justify the ongoing relevance of the discipline. For some, this meant that experiential education was "just an increasing expectation in this field" (UG1. History). An English professor explained further that experiential education was an added layer to existential disciplinary discussions:

> *I think in the humanities, there has been so much pressure for so long to justify our existence. It that's become a really fraught discussion. I think there is a lot of discussion in the humanities more generally, about, you know, getting us back to remembering what it is that's important about humanities. Right, which is about building better people building better humans, right. That that can be talked about, outside of experiential learning, if that makes any sense.* (COMP2. English)

These considerations were shared by faculty from the social sciences, wherein the rising emphasis on experiential education fit within broader disciplinary transitions to make students more work ready, and the connections between degrees and jobs. One sociologist likened these transitions to an "in between situation", where the foundational values of studying, learning, and

critical thinking were important, but acknowledged “we also want our students to have jobs” (COMP2. Sociology).

These discussions on the state of the discipline, in relation to experiential education, were also mentioned by participants from the sciences. Some STEM faculty spoke referentially about experiential education in relation to their humanities colleagues, noting for example that “[experiential learning] may affect people who traditionally taught in humanities” (UG2. Math). One chemist mused “I suspect [humanities and social sciences] getting more pressure to work on, put in, or try to justify what they consider experiential learning” (UG1. Chemistry). This suggests that between disciplines, faculty are aware of instances where one discipline may organically lend themselves to the kind of experiential education the universities were looking to ‘count’. Within the sciences themselves, one chemist noted that while they thought the discipline was moving in the direction of more fully embracing experiential learning there are ongoing considerations:

> *That doesn't mean everybody loves it… But I would argue that the discipline is moving in that direction. And people will, within the discipline, support that. But there's no clear definition. Like I said before, what does that really look like? I think there's going to be a menu of things- "Yeah, that's experiential, that it's experiential". How experiential? I mean, I don't know. That's tricky.* (DOC1. Chemistry)

These disciplinary considerations showcase that conceptualizing experiential education is ongoing work across many academic disciplines, though it is in no way settled terrain. The disciplinary lens was used by faculty to recombine messages and meanings of experiential learning with their existing stocks of knowledge as disciplinary actors. These stocks of knowledge were used to make sense of an emerging institutional discussion on experiential education through the knowledge and ‘ways of being’ they had accumulated or habitualized over time as professionals working within a particular discipline. For some, this meant considering

where experiential education 'fit' within the discipline as it was. Others made sense of experiential education in relation to ongoing discussions on the state of the discipline.

The Institutional Lens

Faculty members perform their professional roles in the context of a broader institutional field of higher education. The institutional lens of sensemaking is where faculty interpret experiential education in relation to their institutional environment, and the institutional norms about how higher education should be done. Faculty members often discussed how they made sense of experiential education within their own universities, and the enabling and constraining factors which influenced the degree of intensity towards experiential education. There were two critical aspects to the institutional sensemaking lens. The first was about how experiential education was being mechanized within the universities themselves. The institutional messaging that participants were aware of often took the form of intra-organizational messaging via emails, newsletters, or strategic planning documents. While these helped to officially frame experiential education within their institution, faculty were less confident about the degree to which these discussions would lead to substantive change or impact on their roles:

> *I was initially hopeful when I saw the President's plan. I was like, "Oh, my God, this is, this is so good", right? "We do this already, this will help, this will help us do better". But as I see the structure that's been created, I get less and less hopeful that actually anything will trickle down to the departmental level other than the policy. You know, we'll get the policy, but I don't think we'll get the assistance.* (DOC2. History)

In one case, the trickle-down effect also meant that selected faculty were held out as beacons of experiential education. A biologist noted that this happened "every time they want to make the department look good" (DOC1. Biology). These institutional discussions aided sensemaking of faculty, as they could make sense of experiential education within the context of their respective institution.

The second critical aspect was about the perceived authenticity of these institutional discussions. Faculty sensemaking was influenced by how sincere or authentically their institutions were fostering experiential education. Many had a shared sentiment that much of the talk was largely ceremonial, or recognized 'institutional gab' as being incommensurate with the technical foundations of the university (i.e., the teaching and learning functions). Experiential education was commonly discussed in relation to the administrative structure of the university, where some faculty viewed it more as a "branding tool" than an authentic effort to change pedagogical philosophy. As one faculty stated,

> *I do think that at an institutional level it's a branding tool… We're in a situation where we're competing for students. We are competing for students in an institutional level, we are competing with students between departments whether you want to or not. And you need to fill classrooms. And so from that perspective, coming up with things that differentiate your school in your classroom is important.* (COMP2. Political Science)

Another participant voiced this institutional gab as mere "lip service" to experiential education, but also was concerned about the way in which this phenomenon was being commodified in the institutional realm:

> *I'm so torn, because I do really feel like there's this two-face nature of experiential learning. This is so hard to talk about, because on the one side I feel like it's just incorporated into how I think about pedagogy. But then the flip side, the way it's been institutionalized, the way it's been commodified, the way that universities have taken it up is so revolting to me.* (COMP2. Sociology)

This participant further stated that experiential education, with all the accompanying discourse, was not really "rocking our understanding of what higher education could or should be". Thus, the institutional lens allowed faculty to make sense of experiential education in relation to how it was being framed and discussed within their own institutions. These framing exercises acted as the 'triggers' from which sensemaking unfolded, and were often interpreted as relatively

insincere. This largely seemed to be evidence of a ceremonial effort[36] to imbue experiential education with legitimacy without meaningful translation to core-level changes, such as resourcing. This sparked concern over the ways in which experiential education was being commodified as a branding tool rather than one with meaningful pedagogical resourcing or change.

The Pedagogical Lens

The teaching and learning responsibilities of faculty members generated a pedagogical lens to make sense of experiential education. The pedagogical lens reflects the extent to which experiential education was seen as commensurate with the pedagogical philosophy of the faculty participants. The majority of the faculty participants were active users of experiential learning in various forms. Active users of experiential education often made sense of it to the extent to which it offered some benefit to their students. The "usefulness" of experiential education came down to creating an environment where students would emerge with some concrete skills or knowledge that they would not otherwise gain through traditional lecturing:

> *thinking about experiential learning more has made me think about students having a better understanding of the field as a whole, and how this is going to prepare them for future courses, future employment, which is something that I didn't think about at all, when I first started as a professor.* (COMP2. Math)

Thinking in this way re-orients the roles and responsibilities of both instructors and students. Experiential education is emblematic of the student-centred shift in pedagogy in higher education, which prioritizes "meeting students where they are… and then go somewhere

[36] Ceremonial change is where institutions imbue a particular change or development with legitimacy at the administrative level to show compliance with pressures from their organizational environment ((Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This allows them to strategically couple administrative change to environmental developments, while buffering the technical core from a constant ebb-and-flow of changes in response to every environmental jolt or change-making stimulus.

together" (COMP2. English). As one participant stated, "I thought of it in terms of the students. What's best for the students?" (UG1. Chemistry). Broadly, active users of experiential education found alignment between the teaching method, or particular experiential learning modes, and their own pedagogical philosophy. One political scientist noted that,

> *I guess insofar as it's part of my overall teaching philosophy that, you know, I want them to leave with a skill, something that they could apply to their other courses. So, for me, it's important, I think that it makes it just a much more enjoyable experience for everyone.* (COMP1. Political Science)

The pedagogical lens also allowed faculty to consider the way their thinking on experiential education had changed over time. For some, experiential education was nothing new, as one participant voiced "I've always believed in the value of doing" (DOC2. Chemistry). Others acknowledged that their orientation toward experiential education represented a change in thinking over time and an evolution of their teaching philosophy. In particular, those who were currently at the endpoint of their careers were able to reflect on the evolution of experiential education, and how it fit with their own pedagogical training.

> *I'm from a generation where we got no pedagogical training, right? Like, you know, you, you did your PhD, TA a few courses, and, you know, then it was assumed you could do whatever needed to happen.* (COMP2. English)

As mentioned, not all faculty participants in this study were active users. Through the pedagogical lens, some non-users reflected on their pedagogical decision-making, and why they chose to not use experiential learning in their courses. The pedagogical decisions not to use this teaching approach typically revolved around the year level of the course (e.g., large first year courses), but also the inherent nature of the class that may not lend itself to experiential education. For example, one physics professor noted,

> *I cannot use experiential learning in every one of my classes. It's just not possible to do that. Because the point of a course may be to communicate disciplinary knowledge… Sometimes you have to be conveying disciplinary knowledge and the students have to learn that. Otherwise, why are they coming to university for that particular discipline?* (DOC1. Physics)

The pedagogical lens allowed faculty participants to make sense of experiential education in relation to their own instructional philosophies and what they wanted students to take away from their courses. Active users made sense of experiential education in relation to the tangible skills and learning they want their students to come away from their courses with. For faculty in later career stages, the pedagogical lens facilitated retrospective analysis to reflect on how their approaches were reinforced or changed over time. At times, this meant that not all courses could be experiential, and there were rationalized reasons for rebutting experiential education.

The Professional Lens

As professional actors, faculty members also draw on their position within the professoriate to make sense of experiential education. The professional lens was one through which faculty coupled together their position within the profession with the larger institutional shift toward experiential education. Faculty drew on their sense of the profession and the stock of knowledge they had developed to help them understand their roles as professors, and the expectations inherent to those understandings. Most faculty participants in this study were either tenured or on the tenure track. Through the professional lens faculty discussed the relative privilege of academic freedom as insulating them from organizational pressures, while also acknowledging that this privilege is not equally distributed for all members of the profession.

The professoriate is unique among broader professions, as the logic of academic freedom provides a relatively strong degree of 'professional insulation' from any pressures about how to perform their role in relation to experiential education. One participant noted that what counts in

terms of administrative oversight is adhering to the academic calendar. As long as faculty adhered to the general course subject matter, "how you go about covering it is up to you" (UG1. Chemistry), meaning that there cannot be administrative influences on *how* a course is taught. Along these lines one political science professor elaborated,

> *I'm generally critical of being told by provinces in particular, but administration as well, about how to teach and engage, unless it's coming from my colleagues and conversation with them, which the experiential learning hasn't really.* (COMP2. Political Science)

This is not to say that Ontario universities are adopting a 'carrot and stick' approach to encouraging experiential education. Indeed, faculty participants did not discuss overt actions requiring them to use experiential education. They were, however, aware of the slow creep of institutionalization, and were cognizant of potential intrusion into their professional space. As one sociologist opined, any intrusion into the academic freedom logic of the professoriate with respect to experiential education would be met with resistance.

> *There will be people who say "this isn't, this isn't what I signed up for", right? Assuming if experiential learning is pushed and becomes a required component, and becomes less of a suggestion and more of a requirement for the courses, then there's going to be people who are like, "Well, I didn't get hired to do this, you hired me, based on what I was presenting at the time".* (COMP2. Sociology)

At the same time, faculty noted the impact that experiential education *may* have on the profession in the future by way of the increasing reliance on precarious labour in Canadian universities.[37] Several touched on the potential for experiential education to become a component of the hiring process, and worried about the impact this would have for contingent faculty members:

[37] An enduring trend in the Canadian higher education labour market is the over-reliance on sessional instructors to teach a bulk of undergraduate courses (Rose, 2020). Some estimates suggest that one-in-three academic staff in Canada work on a contract-to-contract basis (Canadian Association of University Teachers, n.d.)

> *I worry that this is one more cudgel to beat the precarious academic staff with. So for myself, I'm not particularly worried one way or the other, or I don't- it's not something I spend time thinking a lot about to be perfectly honest. But I do worry about the increasing academic precariat.* (COMP2. English)

> *it's going to be on the backs of people who desperately want to prove their worth, and who are going to do far more work than they're compensated for. And it's going to continue to be an issue in faculty negotiation going forward, I don't see universities suddenly turning the tide and being like, "wow, we need to hire these people permanently. And we need to give them benefits" and so on. And I don't see sessional instructors suddenly being like, "Well, I'm just going to work to rule because I want to get hired back". So it's just workload creep expectation creep.* (DOC2. English)

Some faculty participants were precariously employed by universities, or had recent experiences on the job market. These participants were in the unique position of confirming how changes to the academic profession were unfolding in job requirements, and were able to further nuance the professional lens compared to their tenured and tenure-track colleagues. In one instance, a participant noted "at my job interview, [experiential learning] was a question" (COMP2. Sociology). Another said that they were encouraged to be prepared to answer questions about "buzzwords" at their interview, including experiential learning (DOC2. Biology). In relation to the above concerns on the slow institutional creep of experiential education, one participant shared the following experience,

> *I've been applying for tenure track positions. I've seen a shift in those four years toward an emphasis on experiential learning. A lot of hiring boards now want to talk about it in your interviews, they want to hear about it in your application letters and your application materials.* (COMP1. Political Science)

The professional lens tells a mixed story about how sensemaking occurs for faculty members. Those with tenure felt a sense of security for warding off any expectations that experiential education be imposed on how they understand and perform their roles. At the same time, many were also conscious that within the institutional field of higher education, institutional expectations to develop and implement experiential education could have adverse repercussions

to those without academic freedom and autonomy. To an extent, this was experienced by a smaller number of faculty participants who were sessional instructors or had recently been on the job market, or were preparing for the job market.

Discussion

The rise of experiential education in Ontario and across Canadian provinces has implications for the roles of faculty members- both individually, and collectively. Recall that at its basic foundations, sensemaking is where organizational members try to figure out 'what's going on here?' (Weick, 1995; 2005). While experiential education is not new to higher education, recent institutionalization efforts act as environmental cues that have triggered the sensemaking response by faculty members.

Faculty made sense of experiential education through four distinct lenses. The 'prismed' nature of sensemaking allows a constellation of sense to be drawn by actors to the degree to which experiential education was commensurate with the stocks of knowledge contained in those lenses. The disciplinary lens reflects the ways in which faculty acknowledged the permeation of experiential education into their disciplines, and how this particular pedagogical philosophy was commensurate with the idioculture of those disciplines. Following the logic of Weick (1995; 2005) and Fine and Hallet (2014) *Proposition 2* of sensemaking suggests that organizational actors perform their roles in relation to a professional idioculture, and sensemaking is triggered by environmental cues that require actors to learn how to act or engage in further deliberation in response to these cues (see also Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In this case, faculty members both interpreted experiential education in relation to ongoing disciplinary discussions, as well as acknowledged various ways in which experiential education was constructed within their disciplinary fields. Sensemaking from the disciplinary lens therefore involved connecting cues

(i.e., ongoing institutional discussions of experiential education) with frames (i.e., disciplinary knowledge) (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). For some, though, lurking in this process was the prospect of mis-interpreting experiential education, as there was a lack of awareness and/or understanding with how experiential education was defined. This follows the concerns voiced by Kezer and Eckel (2002) and Kezar (2013), where lack of intra-organizational clarity can impact collective sensemaking and organizational transitions. Heeding these concerns, universities will need to go to greater lengths to facilitate "sensemaking activities" and ensure faculty sensemaking is aligned with broader organizational goals around experiential education.

The institutional lens allowed faculty to make sense of experiential education in relation to broader discussions in their institutional environment. This follows from Degn (2018) who found that faculty make sense of organizational change by drawing on norms from the institutional field. *Proposition 1* of sensemaking is that individual actions are recursively implicated with/by broader institutional environments (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Accomplished in this dialectic process is the establishment and reinforcement of organizational environments, which then provide the 'raw materials' for sensemaking. Actors in turn enact those meanings through role performances (Brown et al., 2015; Weick et al., 2005). Faculty members in this study drew on particular intra-institutional developments to make sense of how experiential education was playing out within their own universities, and the implications it had for their pedagogical decisions. Faculty members were more apprehensive about the authenticity of these raw materials (e.g., the President's Plan discussed by DOC2. History), and saw their institutional initiatives as branding tools rather than anything of substance. For some, this presented a conflict of interest in using experiential education, as they saw it contributing to ongoing commodification.

Through a pedagogical lens faculty conceptualized experiential education in relation to its value for teaching and learning. Given that most of the participants were users of experiential learning modalities, discussions on the pedagogical value were largely retrospective, and therefore provided an opportunity for faculty to make sense of the decisions they made about adopting and implementing experiential education. Interestingly, many participants had to pause to think about 'why' they had chosen to use experiential learning in their courses. This highlights *Proposition 3* of sensemaking, that the sensemaking process is retroactive in nature (Sutcliffe, 2018), and that this process unfolds in the durée of organizational action. That is, faculty make sense of experiential education in the context of their broader pedagogical philosophies and practice. In sensemaking, organizational actors have to come up with "plausible explanations" for past actions (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sutcliffe, 2018). In contrast to users of experiential learning, some participants had sound pedagogical reasons for *not* using experiential learning in their courses. In some ways, their sensemaking of these actions blurred the lines between the disciplinary and pedagogical lenses. This 'fractal' between the two lenses demonstrates pedagogical decision-making based on disciplinary knowledge. This is distinct from some of the enabling qualities of pedagogical sensemaking, where many of the participants talked about the value experiential learning had for skill development, or practical skillsets that students could mobilize in future academic and workplace settings.

Faculty in this study had strong senses of their professional roles, and the expectations about how those roles should be enacted. For many, making sense of experiential education came from the professional locations of being tenured or on the tenure track. When making sense of experiential education, several drew on the academic freedom that serves as a professional insulation from administrative dictates. In this way, the collective sensemaking by the majority

of participants buffered them from any perceived or actual sensegiving endeavours by their institutions to foster experiential education. In the sensemaking perspective, it is acknowledged that power plays a critical role in defining organizational realities (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensegiving is where the sensemaking process is subject to influence by others toward a "preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). Following the top-down logic that is pervasive in sensemaking literature (e.g., Weber & Glynn, 2006), the professional insulation afforded by academic freedom allows faculty members to disregard attempts at cognitive constraint within their universities. This is especially acute in relation to the 'slow creep' of experiential education that was noted by multiple participants. Unfortunately, not all faculty participants have the luxury of this insulation. The professional lens highlighted the varying degrees of intensity to which experiential education was interpreted. Those working within the academic precariat are more subject to these organizational constraints. Some participants in this study work within the academic precariat, either as sessional instructors or fulfilling limited term appointments. While these were a minority of the participants (n=14), the limited data that could be gathered on this group suggested that experiential education may become more prominently featured in pedagogical expectations of universities, often to the worry of more seasoned and later career stage colleagues.

Conclusion

Experiential education continues to rise in prominence both in Canada and internationally (Björck, 2021; Bradbury et al., 2021; Isaak et al., 2018). From an organizational standpoint, this has considerable implications for how faculty combine institutional discussions on the value of experiential learning with their existing comprehension of their roles. The findings of this study add to our understanding of organizational sensemaking as a process of bricolage, in that organizational actors do not make sense of emergent phenomenon in static roles (see Ashforth et

al., 2008; Brown, 2017). Faculty members in this study relied on four lenses of sensemaking to interpret the rise of experiential education in the Ontario higher education landscape: a disciplinary lens, an institutional lens, a pedagogical lens, and a professional lens. The institutionalization of experiential education across the province's universities served as a cue for sensemaking. While the existing micro-foundations of sensemaking (e.g., Fine & Hallet, 2014; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010) acknowledge that organizational actors make sense of situations in relation to their roles and role expectations, organizational roles are often multi-faceted. While organizations indeed contain a constellation of identities (Weber & Glynn, 2006), roles themselves have constellations. In this study, the various facets of sensemaking add to this understanding by distinguishing various prisms through which faculty make sense of experiential education.

Faculty, though, are also not a monolithic group. This study contained faculty from different career stages, as well as those who have served in various administrative positions (e.g., department chair, deans), and different stages of academic careers. The findings suggest that experiential education has considerable organizational implications for change, and follows recent comments that it is a complex intra-organizational process (LaCroix, 2021). Future studies should continue to disentangle the various dimensions of academic sensemaking across this mosaic of professional variance, as findings here suggest that experiential education may be moving from an informal to formal institutional constraint (North, 2007) with adverse implications for already professionally precarious group, or those moving in the job market.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The focus of this dissertation has been on exploring the institutionalization of experiential education in the province of Ontario, and how institutional changes work their way through the structures of organizations. While experiential education is expanding its horizons throughout the field of higher education in Canada (Council of Ontario Universities, 2014; Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of Manitoba, 2022; Government of Ontario, 2016a), as well as internationally (Björck, 2021; Bradbury et al., 2021; Isaak et al., 2018), substantive research on this topic was limited in a number of ways. For example, although there have been a plethora of implementation-style publications that tout the pedagogical benefits of experiential education (e.g., Cornell et al., 2013; Windsor & Carroll, 2015), less has been done to consider the extent to which these benefits are patterned (or not) across disciplines. Moreover, existing thinking on experiential education has primarily been along pedagogical lines, following classic models such as the Kolb experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). To be sure, these accounts, in combination with recent data from Statistics Canada (Martin & Rouleau, 2020) all point to the benefit of experiential education for students during and after their post-secondary studies.

At the same time, existing research has not considered the impact experiential education has on those teaching within the walls of universities. Prior to my research, we knew little about how faculty perceive experiential education, and how they have been reacting to the increasing prominence of experiential education on their campuses. Despite some efforts to analyze experiential education from an organizational standpoint (Buzzelli & Allison, 2017; LaCroix, 2021), unpacking the organizational complexities and considerations of experiential education has remained a conceptual ‘black box’ in higher education. In consideration of this fact, my research pulled back the curtain on 1) how experiential education has become institutionalized in Ontario universities, 2) how faculty have experienced this process within their own institutions,

and 3) how faculty have made sense of experiential education. In doing so, I considered both disciplinary and institutional nuances to this process. My analysis accounted for institutional 'type' (i.e., primarily undergraduate, comprehensive, and medical/doctoral institutions) that symbolically differentiates Ontario's university system. Faculty perspectives were also nuanced by discipline, as existing research has not considered the extent to which disciplinary foundations impact efforts to foster and make sense of experiential education (see Rosenstein et al., 2012; Wurdinger & Allison, 2017).

The research for Chapter 3 was conducted to explore the process of institutionalization (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Institutionalization is an organizational process where new patterns or ideas become sedimented in the core structure of institutions. With respect to experiential education, the question was about where this particular pedagogical philosophy stood in this process. Tolbert and Zucker (1996) outline three stages of institutionalization: habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation. Through this process ideas become formalized, become supported by new or existing structures, and endure over time. It was not only important to understand where experiential education stood in this process, but how universities were framing this process. Organizational logic would suggest that as experiential education becomes more institutionalized, it would be subject to the kind of 'frame institutionalization' (Björnehed & Erikson, 2018) to help keep it in place as an enduring fixture of universities. Interestingly, using the Strategic Mandate Agreements revealed somewhat of a mixed picture. While there was indeed evidence of experiential education becoming more institutionalized, this transpired in some seemingly ceremonial ways, such as universities merging two pre-existing units on campus. Of course, ceremonial compliance is a mainstay of organizational theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). There were supports for experiential education that never existed before, though

inconsistencies came to light when the framing of experiential education did not match the forms that appear to be expanding the most. Whereas co-curricular forms were found to be expanding the most, universities framed experiential education primarily in relation to concerns over student skill-readiness and labour-market preparation. Thus, the institutionalization of experiential education fit within the current "era-specific zeitgeist" (Davies, 2002, p. 272) of university education: the ability for universities to prepare students for the world of work.

Chapter 3 took a macro-view of experiential education across the university sector in Ontario. Although valuable for unpacking how universities have framed their responses to new funding metrics and the changes they are making, the findings tell us little about how individuals within these institutions think about experiential education. Not only is this a limitation of content analysis, but it would also be an empirical error to suggest that all parties agreed with this framing process. More contemporary thinking about actors and organizations tells us that institutions are 'inhabited', rather than nested within a broader system (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021b; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). Actors come to their own conclusions about their place within their institutional environment, their roles, and can sort out conflict between these two positions. Rather than 'dopes' within an organization, organizational actors are capable of complex sensemaking to understand and react to organizational change (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This meant that to critically understand how institutional changes regarding experiential education were felt within universities, it was imperative to 'go within' and speak to front-line actors.

The research for Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 accomplished this goal by using qualitative survey and interview methods. By 'going where the data is', I was able to make informed claims about the internal organizational dynamics happening within universities regarding experiential

education. In the Chapter 4, faculty perspectives were put in conversation with the broader level institutional changes. Here, I began with the knowledge and understanding that experiential education practices have been an educational phenomenon well-before the development of any provincial policy (see Dewey, 2015). The question here was about how faculty were responding to more formalized policies encouraging the use of experiential education. There was a good number of faculty participants (n=14) who were early adopters of experiential education, and a more sizeable group who were currently wading through the current policy environment. These vanguards of experiential education provided useful insight on the changes they have observed over time. With the 'early' and 'contemporary' perspectives, I was able to tease out the general process of recoupling currently underway at the sampled institutions. Across the board, existing practices were being taken from the hands of faculty, remolded at the administrative level of their universities, and then reimposed on them in the form of institutional policy. Teasing out this process adds to the inhabited institutionalism approach, as it documented some of the key developments and tensions inherent to recoupling. Specifically, the ongoing discussion about experiential education and how it is being defined and measured. The recoupling process illuminated this tension when institutional conceptions of experiential education did not jive with how faculty understood it, nor how they had been using it in their teaching practices.

Owing to existing research that acknowledges that organizational actors look to their institutional environment as a source of sensemaking (Binder, 2007; Degn, 2018), Chapter 5 further explored faculty sensemaking. Revealed in this chapter is that faculty do not make sense of experiential education along monolithic lines. While sensemaking propositions suggest that actors draw on existing stocks of knowledge to make sense of organizational problems (Sutcliffe, 2018; Weber & Glynn, 2006), faculty do not have single roles or single stocks of knowledge. As

actors that work within and inhabit many fields, they are subject to many sensemaking influences. Although participants spoke generally about experiential education, analysis revealed that they drew on many 'sources of sense' simultaneously. Through a process of bricolage, faculty drew on four distinct lenses of sensemaking, often interchangeably, and which were not mutually exclusive. These lenses were the disciplinary lens, the professional lens, the pedagogical lens, and the institutional lens. Each provided unique frames of reference to understand experiential education, its expansion and institutionalization within the university system, and how faculty could (or should) react in response.

In summary, my research on experiential education yields significant contributions to the substantive literature, as well as to organizational theory itself. By leveraging organizational theory, I was able to ask unique research questions that worked outside of the pedagogical focus that has steered existing research. My research traces data and contributes findings to the field level of education research by exploring field level developments, and asking both meso- and micro-level questions about the state of experiential education in the university sector. This is significant, given that existing literature seems to take experiential education for granted, as an established and 'given' feature of higher education. The research design ensured that empirical weaknesses in the meso-element of the project were addressed by asking questions about organizational change and sensemaking. A qualitative and inhabited approach ensured that the voices of those working on the frontlines of universities were accounted for. By recruiting across institution type, provincial geography, and academic disciplines, the findings of this study are generalizable to the field of Ontario university education. I make no claims about how the findings contained in this dissertation translate to other provinces or international audiences,

though I have repeatedly acknowledged that the formalization of experiential education is not a 'made in Ontario' phenomenon.

Policy Implications

There are several important policy implications of my research. From a field-level perspective, the dynamics unfolding in Ontario are driven by the strategic funding metrics (Government of Ontario, 2021). These resource flows have influenced the rise of experiential education across the sector, though the directives are extremely loose. In the Strategic Mandate Agreement template, institutions are required to report on the "number and proportion of graduates in programs, who participated in at least one course with required Experiential Learning (EL) component(s)."[38] This funding metric leaves the door open for institutions to strategically develop their own interpretations of experiential learning, and report this back to the ministry. This metric also follows from existing promises in the higher education sector to have all students complete at least one experiential learning opportunity by the time they graduate (Canada's Business Higher Education Roundtable, 2018). At the same time, faculty interviews revealed that institutions were still trying to 'figure out' how to define, measure, and report on experiential education. This was also a persistent source of tension, where faculty conceptions of experiential education did not align with their institutions. Given that these reporting metrics are coming from government, one prudent suggestion is to have an accompanying provincial definition of experiential education to ensure institutions and their faculty members are on the same page. While there is no disagreement about the value of experiential education, there are serious disagreements about defining it and measuring it both inter- and intra-institutionally.

[38] As a bibliographic reminder, these instructions can be found in any university's third Strategic Mandate Agreement.

Leadership and consultations at the provincial level could work toward a more concerted and nuanced definition of experiential education to help universities frame their initiatives. Such an approach could take inspiration from previous provincial efforts to conceptualize experiential education along curricular and co-curricular lines (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2016). Such an approach would indeed allow universities to still have the agency to develop programs broadly, but it would also help to ensure that the full gauntlet of possibilities with experiential education is utilized, as opposed to institutions focusing on particular forms like work-integrated learning.[39]

The findings of my research may also help to inform various intra-institutional policies regarding experiential education. Building on the above recommendation, institutions will need to think hard about the ways they are defining and rewarding experiential education. In terms of conceptualization, faculty consistently voiced confusion and concern with the way experiential education was being defined on their campuses. Just as the above recommendation suggests government broadens its view of experiential education, universities should follow suit. Essentially, there are many forms of experiential learning, and each carry their own benefits to student learning. By focusing on specific metrics (e.g., hours spent outside of class), and particular forms (e.g.., co-op), universities do a disservice to the valuable pedagogical strategies of various disciplines. Institutions, of course, need to walk a fine line between soft and heavy-handed approaches to defining experiential education. Though, the findings of this study emphasize that there are significant disciplinary nuances to developing and implementing experiential learning, and this is coupled with ongoing trends that make using experiential

[39] This concern is grounded in ongoing developments by professional associations such as CEWIL Canada which seem to be incorporating more and more forms of experiential learning under the banner of WIL (e.g., service learning, and applied research projects) (see CEWIL Canada, n.d.).

learning more difficult (e.g., large course enrollments, reliance on sessional instructors). Working towards a broader conception of experiential education will involve much more 'logic work' to ensure that the logic of experiential education service workers (i.e., those working with the expanded institutional infrastructure) is aligned with the professional and disciplinary thinking of the professoriate.

One strategy to help incentivize faculty to use experiential education would be to acknowledge this pedagogical approach in the tenure and promotion structure of universities. This would align with findings from Chapter 3, which noted that universities have been on a 'tagging quest' to identify which courses have experiential learning embedded in them. Recognizing these courses as an additional credit offering for faculty teaching might help offset some of the workload associated with these courses by garnering a reduced teaching load, and might also make trying experiential learning more attractive to non-users. Moreover, acknowledging the enhanced workload in the tenure and promotion structure would ensure that faculty are also able to reap professional rewards for teaching in this way. Thus, while there have been noted benefits to student learning, it is also incumbent on universities to ensure these benefits translate to instructor benefits as well.

These recommendations are in addition to the important work that is already underway across universities to make experiential learning more accessible. As highlighted in the research chapters, there seems to be a disconnect between the institutionalization of experiential education, and the perception of faculty members as feeling supported in their endeavours. While more resources are always an important recommendation, *how* these resources are made available and accessible by faculty seems to be the greater challenge for universities.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of my dissertation add to a collective understanding of how experiential education is playing out in universities. Although the insights developed in the pages of this research are valuable, I also note limitations throughout. Each chapter notes respective limitations—either methodological or substantive—as well as a potential research agenda to address those limitations. More broadly, a notable research agenda stands out as a necessary continuation of this study: students. While this may seem like the ultimate cliffhanger to a dissertation project seemingly based on a pedagogy that enhances student learning outcomes, the voices of students are noticeably absent from research on experiential education. Most of the empirical research on experiential education is written from the perspective of faculty members who are reporting on the ways they implemented experiential learning methods in their courses. The same sensemaking framework that has guided much of this dissertation can be useful for understanding the student perspective, and how students make sense of experiential education. For example, does experiential education factor into the kinds of schools and programs students choose coming from high school? How do students perceive and understand 'experiential education'? How does this understanding align (or not) with the findings laid out in this study from the faculty and institutional standpoint? Moreover, if experiential education has benefits in the classroom and on the job market, how do students leverage this advantage in their school to work transitions? These questions frame an ambitious research agenda that may challenge the existing knowledge structure on experiential education, since these voices have been absent as central features of existing research. Future studies would do well to think beyond implementation studies, and employ systematic sampling and research methods to shore up these gaps.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument

I. Academic Profession. In this section you will be asked about your current role at your academic institution.

1. What is your current academic position?
    a. Sessional (course instructor)
    b. Assistant professor
    c. Associate professor
    d. Full professor
    e. Other, please specify
2. What is the status of your current academic position?
    a. Part-time
    b. Full-time
    c. Other, please specify
3. How many years have you been teaching at the university level?
4. What is your tenure status at your current institution?
    a. Tenured
    b. On tenure track, but not yet tenured
    c. Not on tenure track
    d. Other, please specify
5. Which discipline best represents your professional position? (Participant fills in blank)

II. Using experiential education. In this section you will be asked about whether or not you use experiential education modes and practices in your courses, and why/why not.

6. Is experiential education something you implement in your own pedagogical practice?
    a. Yes
    b. No (survey skips to question 6c)

6a. If Yes, what modes of experiential learning do you use in your courses (select all that apply)

a. Capstone project
b. Co-curricular activities
c. Course-based research
d. Community-engaged learning
e. Interactive simulations
f. On-campus work
g. Performance-based learning
h. Apprenticeships
i. Clinical placements
j. Co-operative education
k. Field placement
l. Internship
m. Practicums
n. Service learning
o. Other, please explain _____

6b. If yes, briefly outline reasons why you have chosen to use experiential education practices in your course(s),

6c. If No, briefly outline reasons you do not use experiential learning modes in your courses.

7. Experiential education produces better curricular learning outcomes for students than traditional forms of rote learning (e.g., the traditional lecture)
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
8. Experiential education better prepares students for school to work transitions than traditional forms of rote learning (e.g., the traditional lecture)
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
9. Experiential education results in 'deeper' (e.g., more emotional, and affective) learning than traditional forms of rote learning (e.g., the traditional lecture)
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
10. I feel pressured by my institution to use experiential education practices in my courses
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
11. I am willing to implement experiential education practices in my courses
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
12. I feel experiential education practices are amenable to my discipline
    a. Strongly agree
    b. Somewhat degree
    c. Neither agree nor disagree
    d. Somewhat disagree
    e. Strongly disagree
13. As an instructor, I feel equipped to implement experiential education practices in my courses

a. Strongly agree
b. Somewhat degree
c. Neither agree nor disagree
d. Somewhat disagree
e. Strongly disagree

III. Concluding Inquiry. In this last section, you will be asked about any closing thoughts you have on experiential education, and whether you would like to participate in a follow up interview.

14. Do you have any comments you would like to share about experiential education?
15. I would like to be contacted for an interview
    a. Please provide an email address you can be contacted through

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

Body

Theme 1: The Institutionalization of Experiential Education

- Policy discussions regarding experiential education are certainly prominent in Canadian universities. How do you feel about this broader discussion about experiential education?
- Could you talk about any factors you believe influence this process?
- Can you tell me about experiential education in your institution? (e.g., INST specific discussions, programs, resources, etc. they may be aware of)
    - If yes: could you elaborate on that? What does this look like at your own institution? In your own discipline?
    - If no: would you say there is resistance or other factors which go against the general trend toward experiential education?

Theme 2: Conceptualizing & Implementing Experiential Education

- How do you conceptualize experiential learning?
- Is experiential education something you implement in your own pedagogical practice? Why/why not?
    - If yes: can you tell me about what that looks like?
        - When did you make the decision to include EE in your course?
        - What factors influenced this decision?
        - How does the course differ from "traditional" course delivery?
        - Have you encountered any barriers to fostering EL in your own practice?
    - If no: can you tell me about why you have not included this pedagogical approach?
        - Do you think you ever would include it?
        - Do you see yourself as actively resisting the broader shift in developing this pedagogical approach?
- Could you tell me about any disciplinary considerations, for your own discipline, with respect to fostering experiential education?

Theme 3: Experiential Education and Professional Identity (entrepreneurialism)

- Does experiential education influence how you view your role as a professor? (e.g., balance research & teaching)
- What implications does this have for your professional identity? (e.g., is it changing the profession and how they relate to the profession?)
    - Do you feel pressure to adopt it? Where does this pressure come from?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion?