

The Influence of Collegiate Experiential Learning on New Professionals' Construction of Meaning of Work

DR. ABBY RAZINK • UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

ABSTRACT

The pursuit of meaningful work in today's rapidly evolving professional landscape is a paramount concern for college students, higher education leaders, and employers alike, particularly within the United States. This study explores the influence of collegiate experiential learning on new professionals' construction of meaningful work. While numerous studies have showcased the skill development and economic gains associated with collegiate experiential learning, questions remain about how experiential education prepares students to construct meaning in their work after graduation. Grounded in psychological constructivism and career construction theory, this study sheds light on the potential for experiential learning to enhance holistic career development. The findings reveal that experiential learning can foster a meaningful awareness of self and work, inspire meaningful work aspirations through connections, facilitate access to meaningful employment, and empower meaningful work enactment. These findings have implications for higher education policymakers, higher education administrators, experiential learning educators, and future researchers.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Amidst recent shifts in social expectations of post-secondary education, colleges must prepare students for fulfilling careers alongside technical skill development. Experiential learning, with its focus on active engagement, critical reflection, and practical application of learned insights, presents a promising pathway to enhance holistic career development. This study examines the question: How does collegiate experiential learning influence new professionals' construction of meaningful work? In answering this question, it explores the ways experiential learning activities during college might shape, inform, or contribute to the development of a sense of meaningfulness in the work lives of new professionals who have recently graduated from college.

Demonstrating the innate connection between experiential learning and meaningful work, Kolb's (1974) earliest publication on experiential learning contained "a normative model of human fulfillment [and] personal variables that can be used to understand and influence the career

development process" (p.1). Since then, however, the prevailing focus of experiential learning studies has remained on the formation of hedonic career development outcomes, including knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, employment rates, and income levels (Bonesso et al., 2015; Bowering et al., 2020; Burga et al., 2020; Dik et al., 2020; Ensher & Ehrhardt, 2022; Esters & Retallick, 2013; Gilbert et al., 2014; Knight et al., 2014; Lee & Sabharwal, 2016; Nevison et al., 2017; Ranta et al., 2020; Spanjaard et al., 2018; Upadaya & Salmela-Aro, 2015). Only recently has the field begun to assess intrinsic and eudaimonic career development outcomes, such as meaningful work (Bates-Gallup, 2019; Dik et al., 2020; Steger et al., 2012). The scholars behind these growing bodies of literature unanimously stress the need for further research.

SALES ROLE-PLAY AS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

While there are many different approaches to experiential learning, the practice of role-play was selected for this qualitative investigation given its growing importance across

academic disciplines. To reduce variability and yield a focused investigation that allows for comparison across individual experiences, this study narrowed its scope to role plays in one discipline, sales. Sales role-play was selected as the focal form of collegiate experiential learning for the study due to its presence in sales education, its versatility of application, and its adherence to the essential components of experiential learning. For this study, sales role-play was defined as interactive training exercises where students enact sales scenarios (Cummins et al., 2020). Sales role-plays can serve as a for-credit pedagogical technique within sales and marketing classes. They can also be made available through sales programs as a campus extracurricular (Johnson et al., 2022). In both settings, sales role-plays aim to simulate real-world sales environments, offering college students a practical and immersive learning experience.

Sales role-plays incorporate essential components of experiential learning—active engagement, critical reflection, and practical application of learned insights (Billups & Poddar, 2018; Canhoto & Murphy, 2016). Students' engagement is visible in their reciprocal interaction with the buyer and "active experimentation with various selling processes and techniques" (Magnotta et al., 2020, p. 247). The individual role-playing the buyer normally gives students feedback immediately after their role-play performances, facilitating critical reflection (Pelletier & Hopkins, 2018). Sales role-plays are conventionally conducted face-to-face; however, with the rise of online learning, they are being offered through online platforms more regularly (Pelletier & Hopkins, 2018). Often, the performances are digitally recorded to allow students to review them for additional reflective learning (Mani et al., 2016). In classroom settings, students are normally given writing assignments in which they reflect on their sales role-play performances. Application of the theoretical sales cycle to a realistic, professional situation achieves the final component of experiential learning. As Magnotta et al. (2020) note, sales-role plays "bring selling scenarios to life and provide context for the theories and techniques being taught" (p. 243).

During sales role-plays, students typically follow a pre-defined, five-stage sales cycle: building rapport, needs identification, presentation and communication, addressing buyer concerns and objections, and close (Dugan & Lee, 2023; Loe & Chonko, 2000). They begin by introducing themselves, securing the buyer's attention and trust, and providing a meeting agenda (building rapport). Students go on to obtain a clear understanding of the customer's

situation (needs identification) by uncovering the buyer's challenges or needs, the effect of those problems, the purchase criteria, and the key decision-makers for the purchase. With varying formality, students persuasively match the benefits of their product or service with the buyer's needs (presentation and communication). Presentation slides, props, and other visual aids are often utilized during this stage. The buyer is then given the opportunity to ask probing questions about the solutions presented. In response, students practice forming complete and concise answers to resolve the buyer's concerns (addressing buyer concerns and objections). Finally, to conclude the sales role-play, students provide the buyer with information about next steps, either requesting a follow-up appointment or obtaining confirmation of the sale (close).

STUDY DESIGN

Method

The selection of a predominantly qualitative methodology for this study was driven by a desire to understand the research constructs from the perspective of the participants (Gall et al., 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Narrative inquiry was chosen for its paradigmatic alignment with psychological constructivism and career construction theory, the ontology and epistemology underlying this study. Narrative inquiry is explicitly connected to the key constructs of experiential learning and meaningful work. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), influential scholars in educational research and narrative inquiry, base their assumptions about narrative inquiry on Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, which is also the underpinning for Kolb's (1984) work on experiential learning (1984). Clandinin and Connelly draw heavily on Dewey's two criteria of experience: continuity and interaction. Continuity, in narrative research, means that experiences are not isolated events; rather, present experiences grow out of past experiences and lead to future experiences. Interaction captures the interconnectedness of the personal and social dimensions of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To enhance the research design, this qualitative study incorporated a minor quantitative component that served as a supplement to augment the qualitative findings.

Participant Eligibility and Recruitment

Valuable insights can be gained from the perspectives of new professionals on their prior engagement in collegiate experiential learning and the construction of

meaningfulness in their professional work. As such, the sample for this study was drawn from a population of U.S. new professionals who had participated in sales role-plays during college. This survey classified new professionals as individuals “who received their [undergraduate] degree in the prior 2 or 3 academic years” (National Science Foundation, n.d., para. 1), and in turn, focused on those who completed their degrees in the previous three complete academic years (i.e., 2021, 2022, 2023). Participants were recruited through participant rosters for past sales role-play events hosted at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Students from a variety of colleges and universities across the United States participated in these events.

Using network sampling, these professionals were contacted directly through LinkedIn, a professional networking site, to inquire about their interest in participating in the study. Once potential participants were identified, they were invited to complete a Google form with screening questions based on a set of predefined criteria.

Participants were then selected using purposive, non-probabilistic sampling (Lohr, 2022). While purposive sampling does not have a threshold for sample size, the sampling for this study aimed to capture a sufficiently large and diverse group of participants (Lohr, 2022). Given the specificity of the participant credentials and use of narrative inquiry techniques, the proposed sample size for this study was between six and 15 participants (National University Library, 2023; Sarfo et al., 2021). Those who met the criteria and expressed interest were sent a formal invitation to participate in the study, including information about the study’s purpose, the nature of their involvement, and assurances of confidentiality and data protection.

Qualifying individuals were required to have participated in at least one sales role-play during their undergraduate tenure in either a curricular or extracurricular format. Finally, in order to obtain the most relevant perspectives on meaningful work, the participants were required to be engaged in full-time professional work at the time of the study (at least 35 hours per week).

Participants

The sample in this qualitative study included 13 participants, all of whom had graduated from college between 2021 and 2023. The majority (53.84%) completed their degrees in 2022, followed by 30.77% in 2023, and 15.38% in 2021. Four participants (30.77%) identified as first-generation college graduates, meaning their primary caregivers did not

complete a bachelor’s degree. Only one participant (7.69%) was an international student, meaning they completed their undergraduate degree in the United States but were not a domestic student.

The sample consisted of seven women (54.85%) and six men (46.15%). In terms of racial and ethnic representation, eight participants (61.54%) identified as White, three participants (23.08%) identified as Asian American, and two participants (15.38%) identified as Black. At the time of data collection, participants ranged in age from 22 to 26, with 24 being the most common age (38.48%).

The majority of participants studied business-related fields, particularly marketing or business and marketing education. Some participants pursued multiple majors in different areas of study, such as psychology and economics, marketing and Spanish, and journalism and recreational tourism. Most participants (10 out of 13) pursued careers in professional sales. The remaining worked in campus ministry, data analytics, strategy consulting, and merchandising. The most common industries of work for participants were software technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. Less commonly occurring industries included ministry, travel, logistics and shipping, and retail fashion.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was designed to gather work narratives and other relevant information from new professionals who participated in collegiate sales role-plays. The researcher took an emic perspective during data collection, meaning she prioritized understanding the topics from the subjective viewpoint of the participants (Gall et al., 2015). The data collection included a set of pre-interview activities and a semi-structured interview with each participant.

Pre-Interview

In advance of the interview, study participants were invited to complete a written pre-interview containing a sequence of brief questions focused on familiarizing participants with relevant concepts and prompting their memories related to these concepts prior to the face-to-face interview. The pre-interview asked participants to reflect on key terms such as professional work, experiential learning, meaningful work, and sales role-play. These were presented again at the start of the face-to-face interview to ensure a shared understanding of terminology.

Following the definitions, participants responded to the Experiential Learning and Meaningful Work Questionnaire, which contained open-ended prompts about memorable sales role-play experiences, perspectives on meaningful work, and beliefs about the origins of these perspectives. Informed by narrative inquiry pre-interview techniques (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2007), the Experiential Learning and Meaningful Work Questionnaire was designed to: 1) prime participants for the in-depth interview by eliciting memory recall and reflection on the key constructs (e.g., sales role-plays, meaningful work); and 2) identify points of alignment or divergence between the participants' definitions of these constructs and those used in this study. This section of the pre-interview encouraged participants to actively engage with their lived experiences before the formal interview process.

Participants then completed the Experiential Learning Engagement Questionnaire. This instrument was adapted from Coker et al. (2017), who examined the impact of Depth and Breadth in multiple forms of experiential learning (e.g., study abroad, internships, service-learning, undergraduate research). For this study, the questionnaire was modified to focus exclusively on sales role-plays rather than multiple forms of experiential learning.

Next, participants completed the Work and Meaning Inventory, consisting of 10 close-ended questions rated on a scale from "Absolutely Untrue" to "Absolutely True." This instrument, developed and validated by Steger et al. (2012), assessed three subscales of meaningful work: Positive Meaning (how one's work is seen as a source of personal purpose or significance), Meaning-Making through Work (how one's work is seen as a way to make sense of broader life experiences), and Greater Good Motivations (how one's work is seen as a positive contribution to others or society). The subscores for each subscale, along with the Overall Meaningful Work score (a composite of the subscores), were calculated based on the guidelines provided by Steger et al. (2012). This section of the pre-interview assessed the meaningfulness participants perceived in their current professional work.

In the final section of the pre-interview, participants were asked demographic questions about their age, gender identity, race or ethnicity, employment status, and primary field and industry of professional work.

Semi-Structured Interview

After completion of the pre-interview, the researcher scheduled semi-structured interviews with each participant, which ranged in duration from 50 minutes to nearly 3 hours, though the majority of the interviews (10 of 13) spanned between 60 and 90 minutes. Six of the interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining seven were conducted virtually. All of the interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. The researcher listened to each recording for transcription accuracy and noted verbal and non-verbal elements (e.g., pauses, filler words, intonations). These interviews served as the primary data source for this study. The interview captured the narrative accounts of the participants' sales role-play experiences and reflections on their meaning-making processes during the early years of their professional work.

The interview began with the participants' completion of a storyboard, which is a handmade arts-based research method in which participants create a series of visual panels to explore the research concepts and their personal narratives (Ball, 2020). The researcher emphasized to participants that the goal of this activity was "not to create an 'artistic,' aesthetically pleasing, linear, or complete piece of art per se. Instead, [participants were] encouraged to be as creative, messy, gestural or orderly as needed to communicate their experiences" (Ball, 2020, p. 86). Participants were given up to 10 minutes to visually represent their perspectives on work on a horizontally oriented piece of paper divided into three sections, each representing a distinct phase of their life: before, during, and after college. Collectively, these phases were deemed the participant's "work story." Once complete, participants were asked to give a verbal overview of their sketch with minimal interruption from the researcher. This exercise spurred the participants' memories, offered the researcher a holistic view of participants' work stories, served as a springboard for the following discussion, and became a visual artifact for data analysis.

After the storyboard exercise, the researcher then "zoomed in" on discrete parts of the participants' work stories with open-ended questions following the same chronological fashion: before, during, and after college. The researcher supplied the participants with printed reference materials to support the conversation, including a list of relevant definitions (e.g., experiential learning, professional work, meaningful work, sales role-plays) and an emotions wheel featuring a series of common emotion words (e.g., sad, joyful, scared, peaceful). The open-ended interview questions

covered various facets of participants' experiences and perceptions, such as their pre-college attitudes towards work, memorable learning experiences during college, and reflections on their current professional roles. Specific questions were consistently asked to all participants; however, the

researcher typically asked tailored questions based on participants' pre-interview responses. The interview concluded with a verbal summary of the researcher's field notes, allowing participants to review and correct any inaccuracies, as is customary in narrative inquiry.

TABLE 1

Narrative analysis process

STEP	DESCRIPTION
1. Chronological Coding	Deductively organized the transcripts into three distinct phases: before, during (including sales role-plays), and after college using NVIVO.
2. Narrative Coding	Performed fine-grained coding of transcripts to identify psychological states, influential figures, and obstacles.
3. Labov's Narrative Structure	Produced narrative profiles for each participant with the sections: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda.
4. Storyboard Interpretations	Incorporated participants' verbal explanations of storyboards into profiles. Images of the storyboards were included at the end of each profile.
5. Quantitative Measures	Calculated and contextualized the Experiential Learning Engagement and Work and Meaning Inventory scores for individual participants and the sample collectively.

Data Analysis

The first stage of analysis—narrative profiles—conveys participants' individual work stories. The interview transcripts were coded and reported according to Labov's (1972) narrative structure of Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda. As recommended by Riessman (1993), select portions of the transcripts were "re-transcribed" or coded with identifiers corresponding to the respective components of Labov's narrative structure (i.e., A, O, CA, E, R, C). The "core narrative" for each participant was then reported in a cohesive, chronological manner (Riessman, 1993).

Each narrative profile began with an Abstract containing the given participant's name or pseudonym, demographic information, a concise summary of their overall narrative, a statement about the perceived influences of sales role-plays on their life and work, and a statement about their conceptualization of meaningful work. This was followed by an Orientation to the participant's pre-college work experiences and perspectives. The Complicating Action then detailed a sequence of events from the beginning of college

through graduation. The participant's Experiential Learning Engagement Questionnaire results (Overall score and sub-scores) were also stated in the Complicating Action. The Evaluation discussed the participant's reflections on the perceived influence of sales role-plays on their life and work overall. The Resolution described the participant's transition into the workforce and current professional role, including their job responsibilities, field, industry, and perception of meaningfulness in work. The participant's Work and Meaning Inventory results (Overall score and sub-scores) were also stated in the Resolution. Finally, the Coda returned to the present, representing the participant's current perspectives on work and desires for work moving forward.

Quantitative metrics gathered during the pre-interview enriched the narrative profiles. By weaving the Experiential Learning Engagement and Work and Meaning Inventory results into the narrative profiles, the study conveyed a richer, more contextualized depiction of each participant's experiences. Participants' verbal explanations of their storyboards were also incorporated into the profiles.

TABLE 2**Thematic analysis process**

STEP	DESCRIPTION
1. Bracketing Transcripts	Summarized related transcript segments and digitized the summaries.
2. Inductive Coding (Open Coding)	Reread transcripts and inductively coded segments corresponding specifically to sales role-plays.
3. Grouping Codes (Axial Coding)	Compiled codes into a list and grouped them by commonalities to form themes through iterative arrangement.
4. Deductive Coding via NVIVO	Revisited the transcripts in NVIVO to deductively validate the themes across participants.
5. Integration of Themes and Narratives	Established logic between participant stories, themes, and the research question.
6. Cluster Analysis	Analyzed participants as clusters by theme, noting the presence and absence of patterns in the collected data.

Given the subjective nature of experiential learning and meaningful work, as well as the study's basis in career construction theory and psychological constructivism, it was essential to portray the data from the participants' perspectives. To achieve this, the researcher employed member checking by allowing participants to review and revise drafts of their narrative profiles. Following preparation of the data, narrative analysis entailed five steps (See Table 1).

This approach to narrative analysis ensured that the narrative profiles reflected a complete view of the participants' reflections on sales role-plays and meaningful work throughout distinct phases of their lives. With the integration of numerous qualitative and quantitative data sources, this narrative analysis laid the foundation for a valuable thematic analysis that revealed how sales role-plays influenced the construction of meaningful work for these new professionals.

The second stage of analysis—thematic analysis—centered on conducting a macroscopic view of the narratives collected. The analysis loosely followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-step analysis process and employed NVIVO coding software to facilitate the process. Through axial coding, the researcher identified relationships (themes) between the initial codes as they related to the overarching research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To validate the inductively derived themes, the researcher returned to NVIVO to

deductively code the transcripts. Logic was then established between participant stories, the identified themes, and the study's research question. The final step of thematic analysis involved grouping participants by theme and identifying notable commonalities and inconsistencies within each cluster's data.

The results of the Work and Meaning Inventory communicated participants' perceptions about the meaningfulness of their current professional work. The mean Overall Meaningful Work score (out of 50 possible points) was 40.85 (SD = 5.86), with scores ranging from 27 to 49. Among the three dimensions, Positive Meaning (out of 20 possible points) had the highest average rating (M = 16.08, SD = 3.15). Greater Good Motivations (out of 15 possible points) had the lowest average score (M = 11.62, SD = 2.18). Meaning-Making through Work (out of 15 possible points) fell between these subscales with a mean of 13.15 and standard deviation of 1.82. These findings were incorporated when interpreting the interview data.

As with narrative analysis, thematic analysis for this study followed a systematic process. However, where the narrative analysis organized and contextualized the collected data, the thematic analysis sought to uncover, interpret, and synthesize recurring themes relevant to the study's research question. Thematic analysis entailed six steps (See Table 2).

KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal that the experiential learning practice of sales role-plays influenced participants' construction of meaningful work in four ways:

Fostering Meaningful Awareness of Self and Work

The sales role-plays served as a mirror to reveal participants' work values, preferences, strengths, and areas for growth. Their heightened awareness of self and work resulted in transformative realizations that supported their construction of meaningful work. The role plays often validated a natural alignment between participants' personal characteristics and sales, the focal profession of the experiential learning activity. The experience also exposed misalignments, prompting thoughtful pivots toward more suitable roles or industries. Whether by unveiling new pathways or reinforcing existing interests, the sales role-plays informed participants' understandings of what makes work meaningful to them.

Inspiring Meaningful Work Aspirations through Connections

Through mentorship, encouragement, validation, role models, or other forms of guidance, the relationships formed through sales role-plays can inspire current and future meaningful work aspirations not previously considered. For the participants, these role play-related relationships typically occurred with coaches and peers. Several participants formed new conceptualizations of meaningful work in response to certain influential figures. As a result, they began to prioritize newfound values, such as contributing to the societal good, promoting representation in underrepresented spaces, mentoring others, and embracing personal and professional growth. This theme illustrates the potential for sales role-plays to indirectly inspire deeply meaningful work aspirations for new professionals.

Facilitating Access to Meaningful Employment

Sales role-plays bridged the gap between education and employment, supporting participants' access to work they deem meaningful. Some leveraged role play-affiliated networking opportunities to secure internships or full-time positions, while, for others, these professional relationships continue to serve as career resources *en route* to meaningful employment. Additionally, the pre-professional work experience and interviewing skills acquired through sales role-plays enhanced certain participants' career readiness

in the eyes of employers. Across all cases, sales role-plays contributed to participants' attainment of employment that is meaningful, as defined by financial security, professional growth, personal values, or a combination of these factors.

Empowering Meaningful Work Enactment

The sales role-plays cultivated a range of competencies—such as confidence, resilience, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and persuasive communication skills—which participants now apply in their daily work. Participants stressed the function of these competencies in their performance of meaningful work. The participants defined meaningful work in diverse ways, including making a positive impact, aligning with personal values, and achieving extrinsic goals like financial independence.

These four themes can be contextualized within the landscape of existing literature, connecting the findings to theoretical models and empirical studies related to experiential learning, career development, and meaningful work that undergirded the study's conceptual framework (psychological constructivism and career construction theory).

IMPLICATIONS

As this study establishes, collegiate experiential learning presents one promising mechanism through which students can achieve meaningful work. The themes of this study reinforce the findings of previous scholarship by demonstrating how experiential learning can contribute to students' development of career readiness competencies and access to employment opportunities. Uniquely, however, this study found that these competencies and opportunities can serve as pipelines to meaningful work—an under-recognized, second-order benefit of experiential learning.

To this end, the findings of this study have implications for instructional staff and faculty as well as higher education administrators, including provosts, deans, department chairs, and directors of career services or experiential learning centers. This study demonstrates that sales role-plays, as one form of collegiate experiential learning, can support the construction of meaningful work in a variety of ways—by fostering identity formation, inspiring aspirations through connections, facilitating access to employment, and empowering effective performance in the workforce. Through these mechanisms, college graduates enter the workforce prepared to actively construct meaning in their present and future work. This outcome extends remarkably

beyond the conventional targets of post-secondary career development. By cultivating an institutional culture that values experiential learning, administrators can successfully promote holistic career development for students and alumni. Administrators should consider the accessibility of experiential learning to ensure at least some exposure for all students.

Although this study focuses on sales role-plays, the findings are likely applicable to a broader range of experiential learning contexts. The specific experiential learning task—such as pitching a product—may be less important than the experiential learning principles embedded in the activity. When students participate in real-world or simulated experiential learning—whether in the form of sales role-plays, service-learning, or job shadowing—they are often prompted to reflect on their values, preferences, strengths, and growth areas, fostering the self-awareness described in the first theme. The second theme’s emphasis on intentional guidance from faculty, staff, and peers, for example, applies across disciplines and formats, including case studies, clinical experiences, and study abroad programs. The third and fourth themes, which highlight links between experiential learning, competency development, and employment outcomes, are also evident in a wide array of experiential learning models. Students may attach meaning to these outcomes in ways similar to the participants in this study, even when the precise context differs. While sales role-plays provided a useful lens through which to examine the construction of meaningful work, the underlying mechanisms identified in this study are transferable for experiential learning across higher education. The activities can help students uncover aspects of professional work that align—or misalign—with their interests, values, and strengths. Educators should begin by clearly conveying the value of experiential learning to students.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

REFERENCES

Ball, J. (2020). An arts-based, peer-mediated Story Board Narrative Method in research on identity, belonging and future aspirations of forced migrant youth. *Migration, Mobility & Displacement*, 5(1), 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.18357/mmd51202019628>

Bates-Gallup. (2019). Forging pathways to purposeful work: The role of higher education. *Gallup*. <https://www.gallup.com/education/248222/gallup-bates-purposeful-work-2019.aspx?thank-you-report-form=1#ite-248231>

Another finding from this study is the need for experiential learning to authentically represent the realities of professional work. When students are exposed to an accurate portrayal of a profession, they can better assess their own alignment with it. Also emerging from this study is the importance of variety in experiential learning. Whether team-based or individual, industry-specific or interdisciplinary, virtual or in-person, all formats of experiential learning were found to aid in meaningful work construction. A diversity of experiences allows students to explore many professional contexts and, oftentimes, identify multiple career pathways that align with their values, preferences, strengths, and aspirations. Thus, educators are encouraged to embed variety into their use of experiential learning.

In light of the changing workforce, experiential learning should be designed to reflect emerging industry trends. The cluster analyses revealed that experiential learning played a strong role in facilitating access to employment specifically in software sales. By incorporating exposure to both established and emerging industries, educators can better prepare students to pursue meaningful work opportunities in an evolving job market.

Overall, the findings reveal that experiential learning can foster a meaningful awareness of self and work, inspire meaningful work aspirations through connections, facilitate access to meaningful employment, and empower meaningful work enactment. These findings have implications for higher education policymakers, higher education administrators, experiential learning educators, and future researchers. Through the aforementioned recommendations, there can be a more thoughtful integration of experiential learning practices into educational systems in ways that better prepare students for meaningful work.

[To read the full dissertation, visit this link.](#)

Billups, M. J., & Poddar, A. (2018). Entry-level salesperson selection: An engaging experiential exercise for sales management students. *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, 26, 19-24. <http://www.mmaglobal.org/publications/JAME/JAME-Issues/JAME-2018-Vol26-Issue1/JAME-2018-Vol26-Issue1-Billups-Poddar-pp18-24.pdf>

- Bonesso, S., Gerli, F., & Pizzi, C. (2015). The interplay between experiential and traditional learning for competency development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, (6). doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01305
- Bowering, E., Frigault, C., & Yue, A. R. (2020). Preparing undergraduate students for tomorrow's workplace: Core competency development through experiential learning opportunities. *Canadian Journal of Career Development*, 19(1), 56–68. <https://cjcd-rcdc.ceric.ca/index.php/cjcd/article/view/25>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Burga, R., Leblanc, J., & Rezanian, D. (2020). Exploring student perceptions of their readiness for project work: Utilizing social cognitive career theory. *Project Management Journal*, 51(2), 154–164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972819896697>
- Canhoto, A. I., & Murphy, J. (2016). Learning from simulation design to develop better experiential learning initiatives: An integrative approach. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 38(2), 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475316643746>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Coker, J. S., Heiser, E., Taylor, L., & Book, C. (2017). Impacts of experiential learning depth and breadth on student outcomes. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 40(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825916678265>
- Cummins, S., Nielson, B., Peltier, J. W., & Deeter-Schmelz, D. (2020). A critical review of the literature for sales educators 2.0. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 42(3), 198–216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475320941917>
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
- Dik, B. J., Steger, M. F., & Autin, K. L. (2020). Emerging perspectives: Calling, meaning, and volition. In S. D. Brown, & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (3rd ed., pp. 237–270). Wiley & Sons.
- Dugan, R., & Lee, N. Y. (2023). Selling on value: Using the purposeful choreography as the basis of an innovative sales role play. *Marketing Education Review*, 33(2), 136–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2022.2159437>
- Ensher, E., & Ehrhardt, K. (2022). Antecedents and outcomes of callings for university students: An examination of mentoring and insight experiences. *Journal of Career Development*, 49(2), 326–343. doi:10.1177/0894845320941103
- Esters, L., & Retallick, M. (2013). Effect of an experiential and work-based learning program on vocational identity, career decision self-efficacy, and career maturity. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 38(1), 69–83. doi:10.5328/cter38.1.69
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2015). *Applying educational research: How to read, do, and use research to solve problems of practice* (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Gilbert, B. L., Banks, J., Houser, J. H. W., Rhodes, S. J., & Lees, N. D. (2014). Student development in an experiential learning program. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(7), 707–713. doi:10.1353/csd.2014.0072
- Johnson, A., Billups, M. J., & Poddar, A. (2022). The mandatory internal role-play sales competition: Effects on classroom efficiency and sales center intent. *Marketing Education Review*, 32(1), 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2021.1910522>
- Knight, P., Mich, C. C., & Manion, M. T. (2014). The role of self-efficacy in sales education. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 36(2), 156–168. doi:10.1177/0273475314528805
- Kolb, D. A. (1974). *The experiential learning theory of career development* [Working paper]. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Alfred P. Sloan School of Management.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
- Labov, W. (1972). The transformation of experience in narrative syntax. In W. Labov (Ed.), *Language in the inner city* (pp. 354–396). University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Lee, Y., & Sabharwal, M. (2016). Education-job match, salary, and job satisfaction across the public, non-profit, and for-profit sectors: Survey of recent college graduates. *Public Management Review*, 18(1), 40–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.957342>
- Loe, T. W., & Chonko, L. B. (2000). Promoting sales programs: The National Collegiate Sales Competition. *The Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 20(1), 11–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08853134.2000.10754216>

- Lohr, S. L. (2022). *Sampling: Design and analysis* (3rd ed.). CRC Press.
- Magnotta, S. R., Peev, P., & Steffes, E. (2020). Everyone's a winner: The initiation and effectiveness of an intracollegiate sales competition. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 42(3), 243–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475320947774>
- Mani, S., Kothandaraman, P., Kashyap, R., & Ashnai, B. (2016). Sales role-plays and mock interviews: An investigation of student performance in sales competitions. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 38(3), 183–198. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475315606785>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage.
- National Science Foundation. (n.d.). National Survey of Recent College Graduates. <https://www.nsf.gov/statistics/srvyrecentgrads/#sd&tabs-1>
- National University Library. (2023, November 2). Qualitative narrative inquiry research. <https://resources.nu.edu/c.php?g=1013605&p=8398152>
- Nevison, C., Drewery, D., Pretti, J., & Cormier, L. (2017). Using learning environments to create meaningful work for co-op students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 36(4), 807–822. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1229268>
- Pelletier, M. J., & Hopkins, K. H. (2018). Intercollegiate role play: Creating a sense of reality and uncertainty in the sales classroom. *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, 26, 26–30. <http://www.mmaglobal.org/publications/JAME/JAME-Issues/JAME-2018-Vol26-Issue1/JAME-2018-Vol26-Issue1-Pelletier-Hopkins-pp25-30.pdf>
- Ranta, J. A., Davis, D., & Bergstrom, A. (2020). Career confidence: Fostering professional self-efficacy through student-run agencies and integrative learning. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 75(2), 196–209. doi:10.1177/1077695819884175
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative analysis: Qualitative research methods*. Sage.
- Riessman, C. K. (2007). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage.
- Sarfo, J. O., Debrah, T. P., Gbordzoe, N. I., Afful, W. T., & Obeng, P. (2021). Qualitative research designs, sample size and saturation: Is enough always enough? *Journal of Advocacy, Research and Education*, 8(3), 60–65. <https://doi.org/10.13187/jare.2021.3.60>
- Spanjaard, D., Hall, T., & Stegemann, N. (2018). Experiential learning: Helping students to become 'career-ready'. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 26(2), 163–171. doi:10.1016/j.ausmj.2018.04.003
- Steger, M. F., Dik, B. J., & Duffy, R. D. (2012). Measuring meaningful work: The work and meaning inventory (WAMI). *Journal of Career Assessment*, 20(3), 322–337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072711436160>
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Upadyaya, K., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2015). Development of early vocational behavior: Parallel associations between career engagement and satisfaction. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 90, 66–74. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2015.07.008>