Placement experience and learning motivations in Higher Education: a comparison between practical- and study-based programmes

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose Placement-based learning is claimed to benefit educational outcomes in undergraduate programmes, with students gaining employability skills and the application of skill-sets in 'real world' situations. Most courses incorporate experiential learning; however, work placements remain exclusive to the aims of the academic programme. This report explores the changing learning motivations between students enrolled on: a) a practical-based programme, involving work placement (BA Adventure Education (Ad Ed)), and b) a study-based programme (BSc Sport and Exercise Science (SES)). In addition, motivation was examined between courses at each year.

Design/methodology/approach A 44 item Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire was completed by first and final year undergraduates studying BA Ad Ed and BSc SES courses in the academic year 2011/12. Questionnaires were triangulated with focus groups, lecturer observations and statistical analyses.

Findings Learning motivation was influenced by: a) knowledge of academic grades, b) link between theoretical content and work experience, c) opportunity for reflection, and d) multidisciplinary nature of degree programmes. Furthermore, the majority of final year Ad Ed students showed understanding of the job market, degree transferability and career availability upon graduation.

Originality/value Where placement experience prepares British undergraduate learners for employment and provides insight into career demand, placements may also demotivate, particularly where careers do not necessitate degree qualification.

Keywords: Learning motivation, Adventure education, Work placements, Experiential learning, Undergraduate students

Running Heads: Placements and student motivation

Introduction

Experiential learning in education

The concept of experiential learning provides a connection between education, work and personal development (Kolb, 1984). Central to the learning process, experience is fostered when educational objectives are aligned to work requirements. Kolb's (1984) definition of experience is, in part, attributable to the group dynamic research of the social psychologist, Kurt Lewin. In the Lewinian model, development of experiential knowledge is goal directed and established via feedback. This perspective emphasises active experimentation with personal knowledge according to: a) *concrete experience* (the validation and testing of concepts), b) *observation and reflection*, c) *abstract conceptualisations* (formation of logic, concepts and ideas) and d) *concept testing* (testing ideas in new situations and environments). These experiential learning processes can be fulfilled in Higher Education through work placements, as their adaptability to subject-specific learning styles allows interdisciplinary use. Experiential learning methods in Higher Education are well-documented (Kolb and Kolb, 2005); however, to date, it remains unclear how work placements may influence student learning motivations. This paper aims to explore the experiences and learning motivations of undergraduate students from two courses of related discipline, but of unrelated course structure.

With educational objectives corresponding to work demands, the workplace becomes an educational environment, imposing both social and physical demands absent in the classroom alone. With examples varying from laboratory practicals to field placements, the nature of this mode of learning is subject-dependent. An early example of experiential learning was adopted by Walsh and Golins' (1976) Outward Bound Process model. The advantages offered by experience-based learning, in this case adventure education, are distinguished in seven processes. A motivated learner is placed in a prescribed physical environment, requiring social interaction. To overcome problem solving tasks, the individual must consider opposing thoughts, and then select the most appropriate action. Where successful, this 'adaptive cognitive dissonance' results in learning that can be referred to in similar occurrences (McKenzie, 2003).

With learners gaining employability skills and an appreciation of 'real world' skill-set applications (Crebert et al., 2004; Ryan et al., 1996), work placements are seen as conducive to educational outcomes (Little and Harvey, 2006; Mandilaras, 2004). Short-term experiential learning, such as laboratory practicals, presents a unique and valuable educational opportunity. Yet, unlike more long-term placements, they lack a behavioural environment, insomuch that the

student has less responsibility and ownership of their actions (Potter et al., 2012). Furthermore, outdoor work placements may foster pro-environmental behaviour, allowing the student to become the active enquirer (Nicol, 2013). Placements may profit academic performance, yet the impact upon learning motivation remains vague. McKenzie (2003) found: achieving individual success, skill development and the physical challenge, as prime motivators for learning with Outward Bound students. Work experience within Outdoor Education not only satisfies these, but may also raise individual self-awareness via group processes. For example, reliance upon others, group interaction and problem solving in unpredictable situations (Hattie et al., 1997). These may foster divergent learning styles between disciplines due to contrasting professional practices formed through work-based training and career-specific pressures. However, regardless of the academic field, work experience is likely to benefit both the student and employer (Kerawala and Silles, 1998).

The value of work placements

Considering educational performance, the inclusion of a placement year has been seen to benefit academic grades regardless of course subject, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status (Reddy and Moores, 2012). There may be lasting benefits for personal development following long-term direct experience, yet during, the course characteristics may guide learning motivation, and therefore course outcomes (McKenzie, 2000). Furthermore, failure to accomplish success may demotivate, particularly where success is ill-defined, intangible or intrinsic in nature. Most courses now offer opportunity for experiential learning; however work placements remain exclusive to the aims of the academic programme. Blackwell et al. (2001) suggested six recommendations of good practice for work placements to be conducive to learning experience. The placement should be: purposeful, monitored for quality assurance, accredited (towards a programme award or external qualification), formatively assessed, contribute to a portfolio, and offer reflective discussion. With this the case, one may hypothesize that a degree programme involving a year's work placement will promote learning motivation. This is may occur through: the application of theory, work-based developmental learning, independence from academic constraints, and skill mastery in new environments.

Study background

The conception of this research was based upon observations of student attitude, conduct and motivation during taught laboratory practicals between: a theoretic-based cohort (BSc (Hons)

Sport and Exercise Science (SES)), and a theoretic-practical-based cohort, experiencing a year's placement (BA (Hons) Adventure Education (Ad Ed)). It was hypothesized that experiential learning through work placement would enhance the learning motivations of the undergraduate students of our cohort. This informed the main investigative aim of exploring differences in learning motivations between first and final year students enrolled on the respective courses. Does learning motivation differ from first to final years? If so, is this related to the inclusion of a work placement in Year Three? To better understand the second question comparisons were made between courses for the same year groups. This report is not concerned with drawing contrasts between course programmes. Instead, from a broader perspective, we examined the effect of placement-based study on learning motivations in undergraduate students. Academic programmes involve work placement and experience to varying degrees. Previously, the provision of experiential learning in programmes has been studied relating to outcome measures of academic performance. Yet, to date none have compared two courses with shared content, but dissimilar experiential learning opportunities.

Method

Participants and research design

The study sample was drawn from 193 undergraduate students enrolled on a) BA (Hons) Ad Ed and, b) BSc (Hons) SES courses (academic year 2011/12) at the host institution. Purposive sampling was used, with all first- and final year students approached from each respective course. The undergraduate Ad Ed programme involves four years of study, including a placement year. Whereas the SES programme requires three years study, without work experience. The main research question was: *how does placement experience influence the learning motivation of undergraduates?* This was addressed by comparing motivational differences between first and final year students of each respective course. This also allowed us to explore the additional research questions: *does learning motivation of*: a) *newly enrolled,* and b) *final year undergraduates vary between courses?* Therefore, comparisons were made between courses at: a) Year One, and b) the Final Year**.**

Data collection

Triangulated data collection involved: lecturer observations, a questionnaire with statistical analysis and focus groups. The author of this paper was a lecturer; therefore to enhance the reliability of the observation and questionnaire results, focus groups were included providing individual student evidence to elaborate on these findings. In the first instance, the investigator took observational accounts from seminar and laboratory practicals for the respective courses. Themes arising from these observations were discussed, and then refined with an independent author, to form early research hypotheses.

Secondly, to quantitatively capture issues of learning motivation, the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990) was completed by all 193 participants. This survey was completed in class during the final two weeks of the semester, with participant anonymity. The SES sample included: 80 Year One responders and 46 at Year Three. The Ad Ed cohort involved: 36 Year One and 31 Year Four students.

The MSLQ 44 item version (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990) was used in preference to the 81 item version (Pintrich et al., 1991), due to: ease of in-class administration, risk of superficial responses (owing to questionnaire length) and, validation in students of different groups (Science and English). The self-reporting survey contained the two subsections, motivational orientations and learning strategies. Each subsection is further divided into six subscales involving: intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, task value, control beliefs, self-efficacy for learning and performance, and test anxiety (motivational orientations); and rehearsal, elaboration, organization, critical thinking, metacognitive self-regulation, effort regulation, and help seeking (learning strategies). Response for each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 7 (*very true of me*) as it applies to their present course programme. This instrument has demonstrated a good degree consistency in positively, predicting student performance in Higher Education (i.e., Grade Point Average)(Crede and Kuncel, 2008; Robbins et al., 2004), and school settings (i.e., in-class work, essays and exam grades) (Pintrich and De Groot, 1990). The MSLQs role was to provide indications of where student learning motivations may differ (or be similar) between the courses, with regard to the specific sub-scales. An independent author reviewed and summarised the MSLQ findings separately; the investigator and independent author then drafted semi-structured questions to be used for the student focus groups.

Follow up focus groups of five to eight students were conducted to elaborate upon the questionnaire responses. These allowed open discussion of MSLQ-related themes and those of the course in general, from different student perspectives. These sessions were directed by the

investigator using semi-structured questioning in an informal meeting room (as opposed to the lecture hall for the questionnaire). Predetermined questions were used to lead, with unplanned questions used to accommodate for the spontaneity of group discussion. A total of four sessions were carried out; two per course, for first and final year students. Those involved in the discussions were approached purposively, cross-representing gender, academic ability, race, perceived motivation and age. The focus group's role was to add depth to initial observations and MSLQ findings, providing a more comprehensive view of a) how and why learning motivations may differ between the courses and, b) student interactions between courses. They also allowed insight into specific group interactions, behaviour and the shared experiences between students. To further establish study validity, data triangulation provided information sources from: participants (students), the researcher (lecturer) and programme staff; methodological triangulation provided qualitative/quantitative findings to study the research question.

Data analysis

Means and standard deviations were calculated for group MSLQ responses falling into each subscale (*motivational orientations*: intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, task value, control beliefs, self-efficacy for learning and performance, and test anxiety; *learning strategies*: rehearsal, elaboration, organization, critical thinking, metacognitive self-regulation, effort regulation, and help seeking) using Microsoft Excel 2010. Grouped data for individual subscales were analyzed with a two-way ANOVA for year of study (First and Final) and academic programme (SES and Ad Ed). The specific differences in subscale responses for: year and, programme were assessed with a Bonferroni adjustment, accounting for multiple comparisons. Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS Statistics, version 20 (IBM Corp, Armonk, NY), with significance set at $p < 0.05$; these data provided a quantitative measure of the qualitative MSLQ findings.

Academic programmes

The individual course programmes are tailored to the skill-sets required for the respective career paths. Therefore, indicative course content varies between courses. The SES programme develops underpinning, scientific knowledge via taught modules in Year One before application through elective pathways in Year Three. The overarching aims of this course are to: provide scientific background, train learners to provide advice concerning training/performance, and to equip with skills to undertake further research enquiry in a sport and health context.

In contrast, the Ad Ed is a four year programme with three underlying themes: individual critical reflection of the Ad Ed process, group dynamics and teaching strategies in specialised environments, and the impact of users on outdoors. Students are given the opportunity to gain theoretical and practical experience in natural settings from Year One, with progression to a year placement during Year Three. Specific programme aims involve: understanding group dynamics, developing practical skills, consideration of weather impact of practice, appreciation of learning in adventure environments, and understanding how human physiology responds to environmental stress.

Both courses are structured to facilitate the development leadership, problem-solving and decision-making, albeit in disparate contexts. Whereas SES fosters learning in relatively stable laboratory environments, straddling the clinical and the applied, Ad Ed teaches through interaction with unpredictable, dynamic and less stable outdoor environments.

Results and discussion

To date, none have compared how undergraduate work placements can influence student learning motivations between two related courses. This paper triangulated findings from lecturer observations, a questionnaire and focus groups to explore potential differences in learning motivations between first and final year students on a) an Adventure Education course and, b) an Exercise Science course. Relating to the three research questions, our findings triangulated from i) initial classroom observations (from the principal author), ii) learning motivation questionnaire responses (the MSLQ) and, iii) student focus group discussions. Each method informed the next, whereas certain focus group conversations also allowed us to revisit specific questionnaire responses that were initially considered serendipitous. The findings below firstly arose from the MSLQ responses (analysis of specific subscales), and secondly, were elaborated upon by the focus group conversations. Specific subscales and focus group responses were then categorised under one of the three research questions.

Question 1: *How does placement experience influence the learning motivation of Adventure Education undergraduates?*

Subscales: intrinsic goal motivation, extrinsic goal motivation, test anxiety, task value, help seeking

From the focus group discussions it was evident that regardless of the course, similar themes arose relating to attitudes, learning motivations and self-management in first year students. A number of Ad Ed Year One learners appeared informed and motivated, yet vague in their responses, as one said:

Quite motivated, yeah…cos…well, I know where I want to go. I have pretty clear goals (Liz).

Some Year One students expected information to be 'spoon fed'; reliant upon the guidance and support of academic staff. Contributing to this was the uncertainty of workload during the final year's study, and how to achieve higher academic grades. This was also common for the SES Year One cohort, indicating similar learning characteristics upon university entry. In a UK university, Fazey and Fazey (2001) found Year One students tended to display a degree of autonomy on an individual level, yet they sought 'permission' to show demonstrate and develop their abilities. Relating to this was lower test anxiety found for Final Year students (*negative scoring*, 3.5 v 4.4; $p = 0.008$); those familiar with Higher Education assessment (see Table 1). Yet Final Year students suggested assessment feedback and knowledge of grades could act to either motivate, or demotivate. Assessment was seen to demotivate where students felt effort was not commensurate with grades or when higher grades were no longer attainable. This may explain why Ad Ed Year One respondents reported higher task value than Year Four learners (6.2 v 5.7; $p = 0.002$). Furthermore, the lack of assessment feedback knowledge may reflect the greater intrinsic motivation seen in SES Year One students, when compared to Year Three (5.7 v 5.2; $p = 0.0001$). These questionnaire data were supported by focus groups responses, which suggest that Final Year Ad Ed learners were more motivated to do work in comparisons to SES students; dedicating more time to scholarly practice:

I'm more motivated to do work now than in the first and second year. I'm spending much more time reading, researching and actually being a student (Chris).

Not exclusive to Ad Ed students, the perceived and observed differences in self-management and maturity were noticeable in the Final Year SES when compared to Year One learners. Yet, Final Year Ad Ed students were more mature in their personal and professional conducts in comparison to Year One learners. Where entry students were often disorganised and unprepared during laboratory practicals, Year Four students were, on the whole prepared for the session content, having completed supplementary tasks. That Final Year students (particularly Ad Ed) appeared more organised and motivated for study may, in part, be attributed to longer exposure to peer

learning and formative assessment opportunities. Formative assessment can supplement peer learning to meet undergraduate expected learning outcomes (i.e., grades: fail to, special distinction pass), by limiting potential negative elements (such as incompatible learning styles/personalities) (Hassan, 2014); work placement arguably offers more opportunity for this. However, the impact of placement experience was difficult to ascertain due to extracurricular work experience gained in both degrees. Subject-related differences should be accounted for when exploring experience and learning motivation. As noted by Reddy and Moores (2012), for vocational courses, overlap between academic content and work experience is likely to be greater than that for non-vocational courses. From the author's view, the placement seemed to equip Ad Ed students professionally for future study and employment, arguably to a greater extent than the SES course. In particular, foresight with which to plan future careers and personal development. As illustrated by one in the focus group:

> I had an awesome time in New Zealand, but I can't physically go back and work. I haven't a
> Visa. But it's not too bad; I'm planning to work and get some experience and money so
> I've a   safety net (Rob).

Elsewhere the reality of another year's study, coupled with discovery that vocational experience is more valuable than academic, for some Outdoor careers, acted to discourage:

> I'm less motivated this year after my year out, because I missed what I had in the work
> experience year. I've spoken a lot to three lads who have instructed and they haven't
> degrees   (Jack).

The above statement implies a lack of understanding that those with degrees have greater long-term career progression. This is not only in subject knowledge and transferable skills, but also through positive attitudes towards further learning. Furthermore, placements present access to those working within industry and provide examples of everyday employment demands. This allows identification of strengths and weaknesses, as well as suitability to specific roles. Kolb and Kolb (2005) relate experiential learning not only to the direct experiences, but also 'total experiential life space', which encapsulates the student's physical and social environment, and quality of relationships. Such space differed between our SES and Ad Ed cohorts, particularly in the final year. Where SES students appeared unclear to the range of careers post-degree, Ad Ed counterparts gave the impression they were in a position to appreciate the job market and were

aware of graduate destinations. This was encapsulated by a Year Three SES student who was asked how a placement could benefit their employability:

> You don't know exactly what you want, but without being in that environment, you don't know what you're missing or where to look (Liz).

This suggests the social 'environment' offers the additional benefit of accessibility to employees and networks. The Ad Ed placement is yearlong, with the individual situated in the working, demographic and geographic environment. As such, work experience orientates individuals to career paths; career options alone can present an external goal (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). Regardless that placement varied, most students displayed an enthusiasm to 'get back out there and explore'.

Researching placements not only identifies employment opportunities, but helps the individual align their perceived qualities to specific job roles (Blackwell et al., 2001). A minority did not enjoy their placement, as the placement failed to satisfy expectations, but all found they benefited from reflective break from the rigours of academia. Higher Educational courses should not only impart information on the student, but also allow ample opportunities for students to express their learning (Kolb and Kolb, 2005). Affording students time to 'think about thinking'; placement experience was an escape for some, reinforcing the link between theory-and-practice:

> I really liked the course and the year out. The great thing is, you can actually put the theory of the first two year's into practice and see that it [*the theory*] actually works (Chris).

In observation and informal conversation, the students valued the process of: a) studying theory, b) making generic applications, and c) then applying to specific applications. This process was suggested to be consolidated through assessment and feedback.

Table I. Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) responses for BA (Hons) Adventure Education and BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Science courses.

Questionnaire component	BSc (Hons) Sport & Exercise Science		BA (Hons) Adventure Education	
	Year One	Final Year	Year One	Final Year
Intrinsic goal motivation	5.8	5.2 *	5.6	5.4

Extrinsic goal motivation	4.7	4.4	4.7	4.5
Task value	6.0	5.4 *	6.2	5.7 *
Control of learning beliefs	5.6	4.9 *	5.2 †	5.1
Self-efficacy for learning	5.1	4.7	4.8	4.5
Test anxiety	3.9	3.9	4.4	3.5 *
Organisation	4.9	4.9	4.3 †	4.7
Metacogntive self-regulation	4.3	4.5	4.7 †	4.4
Help seeking	5.6	5.4	5.3	5.1

Significant difference ($p < 0.05$): within course, between years (*), between courses, Year One (†).

Question 2: *Does learning motivation of newly enrolled undergraduates vary between courses?*

Subscales: self-efficacy for learning, control of learning beliefs, metacognitive self-regulation

The first university semester tends to be introductory, familiarising students with academic workload and self-management demands. Few stated the Secondary-to-Higher Education transition was an unexpected 'step up'. Focus group discussions revealed confidence with the current Year One workload, which was supported by questionnaire high self-efficacy for learning (Ad Ed: 4.8, SES: 5.0; $p = 0.05$) in both courses. Self-efficacy for learning has been shown to positively predict student academic performance for the Grade Point Average in US universities (Crede and Kuncel, 2008). Although Year One students felt challenged, many mentioned they should be presented with a greater workload. With learners enrolling from varying academic backgrounds, delivery during the first semester of Year One allows for differentiation. However, the consensus was a gradual introduction into the respective course programme:

...doing my A-Levels I wasn't [*spoon fed*] and it doesn't feel like a step up from those yet (Jordan).

This may frustrate, particularly where students feel they aren't being challenged in relation to: what they previously studied, and their expectations of Higher Education. For others, the steady workload increment during the initial few semesters of Year One may motivate, as one SES Year One learner stated:

So far it's been pretty much the same as we learnt last year. Which is good, because you're not coming in thinking, 'Oh my God, I don't know anything', you're like, 'Yeah, I can actually do   this' (Holly).

Considering the majority were not familiar with independent study or having ownership of their learning, perhaps students should be better equipped to pursue self-study prior to Higher Education, similarly that work placement prepares for employment (Crebert et al., 2004). A notable hindrance was subject-specific reading; this was more commonly mentioned by Ad Ed Year One learners.

...it takes me a long time to read. Yeah, takes a real long time. We had to do 42 pages the other day, but things like that you only need the beginning and end. That's what someone said   (Liam).

In contrast, Year Four Ad Ed students understood the value of course-specific reading and research. They also stated appreciation for modules that they didn't enjoy and those which did not have immediate career applications. Final Year learners were much more appreciative of, and equipped to continue life-long learning; particularly the relevance to employers (Blackwell et al., 2001; The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, 2008). Elsewhere, their first year equivalents could not yet see wider applications and implications. For a number, if the subject material was difficult and not concurrent with present interests, they did not appreciate how it could contribute to their knowledge and further learning. This was unexpected in the Ad Ed groups given that the majority had an understanding of what they required in a career. Final Year students could see broader relevance and applications of modules they didn't necessarily enjoy studying:

...I don't like Psychology, but what you can take from that...the main themes...well you can still use the theory with any groups...(Chris).

From classroom-based observations and group interviews, little difference in organization and time-management between first and Final Year Ad Ed students was found. Where Year One learners demonstrated an organised approach to study, they seemed to lack the self-discipline and the focus of Year Four students. Similar was seen for the SES. In this case, Bachelor of Science degrees prepare students for the methodological nature and rigours of scientific enquiry. Prioritisation was also seen to be further developed, particularly in the Year Four Ad Ed. These skill-sets are fostered to an extent during undergraduate study, but to a greater extent via experiential learning (Crebert et al., 2004). When comparing motivation for reading and research between Year One, Ad Ed students displayed reluctance to embrace the theoretical approach to study. Equally, this was influenced by the academic background of the person, as a previous BTec student stated:

> …coming into this A-Level environment…where you do it off your own back type of thing…it puts you off a bit. We've shedloads of reading…(Alun).

This also suggests the traditional scholarly practises of reading and writing may favour study-based A-Level courses, as opposed to those vocation-based. The same student further stated that study-based programmes lend themselves to an 'academic meritocracy', orientated to results, as opposed to personal development. This may apply to SES, a Bachelor of Science, but not Ad Ed, a Bachelor of Arts. For Year One, SES had marginally higher control of learning beliefs (5.6), in comparison to Ad Ed (5.1; $p = 0.013$), implying greater confidence that efforts to learn will lead to positive outcomes. Yet, first year students are typically at a formative learning stage, many still unaccustomed to independent learning (Hassan, 2014); at this stage engagement is crucial for academic grades and progression to Year Two (Kuh et al., 2008). As stated in the Ad Ed programme specification, during Year One students are 'encouraged to diversify knowledge' in a range of physical environments to promote understanding of adventure, risk and competence. With residential experience each semester, learners are exposed from the beginning to the end of the degree. In contrast, where SES students gain extensive laboratory practice, they must take the onus to approach avenues for applied practice. This may be biased towards those with access to opportunity and contact networks, but it also teaches students to use initiative and research the job market. At this stage the questionnaire indicated little difference in metacognitive self-regulation (*negative scoring*, Ad Ed: 4.7, SES: 4.3; $p = 0.01$), suggesting similar ability to monitor and manage academic progress. When asked to comment on the alternative course, it was common for Ad Ed students to mention the volume of reading and assessment associated with the SES route.

This was also confirmed speaking to pupils from SES Year One who described the frenetic academic pace of their degree:

> …at the end of this semester we have exams, then the next semester exams. You can't wait. You've always got a checkpoint you're working towards, so you have to keep up (Dave).

Again, considering the same students expressed confidence in the initial semester workload, this comment raises the question about the self-management and work-life balance. Interestingly, it was suggested by the SES group there existed a 'stigmatism that intelligence is bad', with one highlighting that:

> I think there are still people doing the work, but they're trying to appear that they are not (Hamish).

This is indicative of the level of maturity of some Year One students. Yet equally, as a potential result of regular group work, an observer would suspect fewer social barriers between Ad Ed Year One learners.

Question 3: *Does learning motivation of Final Year undergraduates vary between courses?*

Subscales: Control of learning beliefs, Organisation

Focus group interviews and observations made it clear that the scarcity of opportunities and access to professional placements, present majors issues for SES students. The SES undergraduate degree enables learners to develop, and apply, underpinning scientific theory relating to sport and health sciences (The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, 2008). For many, an SES degree prepares for further study, be it: an internship, an MSc or PhD. During undergraduate study prolonged experience is highly valued, and therefore notoriously difficult to attain. On being asked on the inclusion of a placement-based year, a SES Year Three said:

> …I think a whole year of doing that would have motivated me more than the third year at the moment (Lucy).

For SES study, experiential learning is limited to the laboratory, and in some instances in the field. Between courses this did not influence control of learning beliefs (Ad Ed: 5.1, SES: 4.7; $p = 0.29$) or organization (Ad Ed: 4.7, SES: 4.9; $p = 0.47$). SES study is campus-bound, without residential

experience, and workload is incremental each semester. For laboratory and clinical practice, participants are commonly classmates, connoting both positive and negative outcomes:

> I like doing clinic in year three; I've learnt loads of basics to use in a clinic, but actually using them with injured athletes…(Steve).

Using fellow students as 'clients' allows regular access and may 'prime' applied practice, yet taken informally, these situations may pose artificial settings in which to foster professional development. These 'study-based' experiences address course specific outcomes and advance various transferable skills. However, the occupational risks and inherent environmental dangers associated with Outdoor-related careers offer unique learning opportunities (McKenzie, 2000; Walsh and Golins, 1976). In as such, the two respective courses programmes progress different skill in varying degrees.

What seemed to demotivate Ad Ed students was the continuation of academic readings. They understood the need to maintain knowledge, having returned from a year in industry, yet many expressed a reluctance to return to the constraints of academia. As one typified:

> I don't want any more journals. I want to learn life as opposed to academic…(Chris).

In the Ad Ed programme, the placement encapsulates major elements of Year One and Two's study. This application of theory, in itself was rewarding:

> I really liked the course and the year out. The great thing is, you can actually put the theory of the first two year's into practice and see that it [*the theory*] actually works (Sarah).

Not only can students work towards the placement, knowing they can apply themselves in an area of interest, but the year may offer time for self-reflection. Experiential learning via placement may facilitate what Schön (1983) termed the 'reflective practitioner'; those reflecting upon an action, as to engage in continued professional development. Learning objectives are, in part, determined by the individual and placement supervisor. Therefore, students can apply prior knowledge to tasks beyond academic constraints. Reflection allows insight into: the individual's strengths and weaknesses, the appreciation of related learning processes, and identification of continued professional development (Fleming and Martin, 2007). More than keeping a placement diary, Nicol (2013) advocated the use of auto-ethnography, whereby the writer contextualises their life in the social and physical environment; thus, applying theory-to-practice and encouraging pro-environmental behaviour. Where degrees cannot embed work placements into

their programmes, time and opportunity should be allowed for students to reflect upon their thinking. Particularly, as Blackwell and co-workers (2001) found, learners think they know their skills-sets, but often do not. A SES Year Three noted:

> …I think the experience year would have given me a fresh start. You learn from the person you're working with anyway. I think being away would have worked for me (Steve).

Placements provide the individual with distance and time away from their course. Yet for many, reflection ends upon completion of the placement. Leberman and Martin (2004) reported on this, advocating the need for post-course reflection to ensure transfer of learning. Students may learn how to reflect appropriately, yet for many this remains a difficult skill to embed in working-life. Where SES students had little experience of reflecting, they were motivated by the multidisciplinary structure of their course. This provides students with broad experience of disciplines and insights, which they can later specialise in (The British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences, 2008). Module variety was interlinked by common themes, showing students the divergent applications of their degree:

> I think it's good that it makes us do everything. Because it opens up your options, I mean how much we complain that we don't get to choose and don't enjoy our modules, I think that everything is available to us (Mark).

In contrast to the SES, there appeared an element of frustration that some Outdoor careers do not necessitate degree qualification. However, this finding illustrates limited understanding that, for most, academic degrees offer long-term career development and progression in organizations. Therefore, Final Year Ad Ed students were demotivated by: a) a return to academia, and b) the perception that vocational experience is more valuable than academic qualifications in outdoor-related careers. In contrast, SES counterparts were motivated by: a) the multidisciplinary course and b) the varied assessment styles, and demotivated by: a) a lack of application, and b) the repetition of academic routines.

Conclusions

The aim of this report was twofold, exploring potential changes in learning motivations during undergraduate degrees involving: a) a practical-based programme, with a work placement (BA (Hons) Ad Ed), and b) a study-based programme, without a work placement (BSc (Hons) SES).

Secondary was to compare learning motivations between same year groups of respective degrees. The following can be concluded:

Experiential learning in the Ad Ed programme was unique compared to that of SES, partly due to: longevity, insight into working practices, and 'real life' applications. Students suggested these fostered a greater link between academic content and work experience. Inclusion of placement-experience prepared learners for employment and offered understanding of daily work life. Some also established professional networks for future employment.

Work placement provided greater understanding of the job market, degree transferability and career availability. Where little difference was seen in organization and self-management between courses, Ad Ed learners were better equipped with professional practice and job-related skills. A placement was also seen to offer reflective time beyond academic constraints, strengthening links between theory and practice. This was not shared by the SES cohort, where securing a long-term placement remains a major issue for many.

Year One students of both courses were informed and motivated, yet reliant upon the guidance and support of academic staff to direct their learning. This was due to limited experience of summative assessment at degree level. In contrast, knowledge of academic grades was as a major motivational factor for Final Year counterparts.

Final Year students of both degrees valued course-specific reading, and understood the importance of life-long learning. Nevertheless, there was some resistance to supplementary reading amongst Year One Ad Ed students, particularly those who failed to appreciate the broader applications of some modules. Less so for Year One SES, these were motivated by the multidisciplinarity of their course. There was no difference in organization and time-management between years, however final year students displayed greater self-discipline, focus and an ability to prioritise.

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