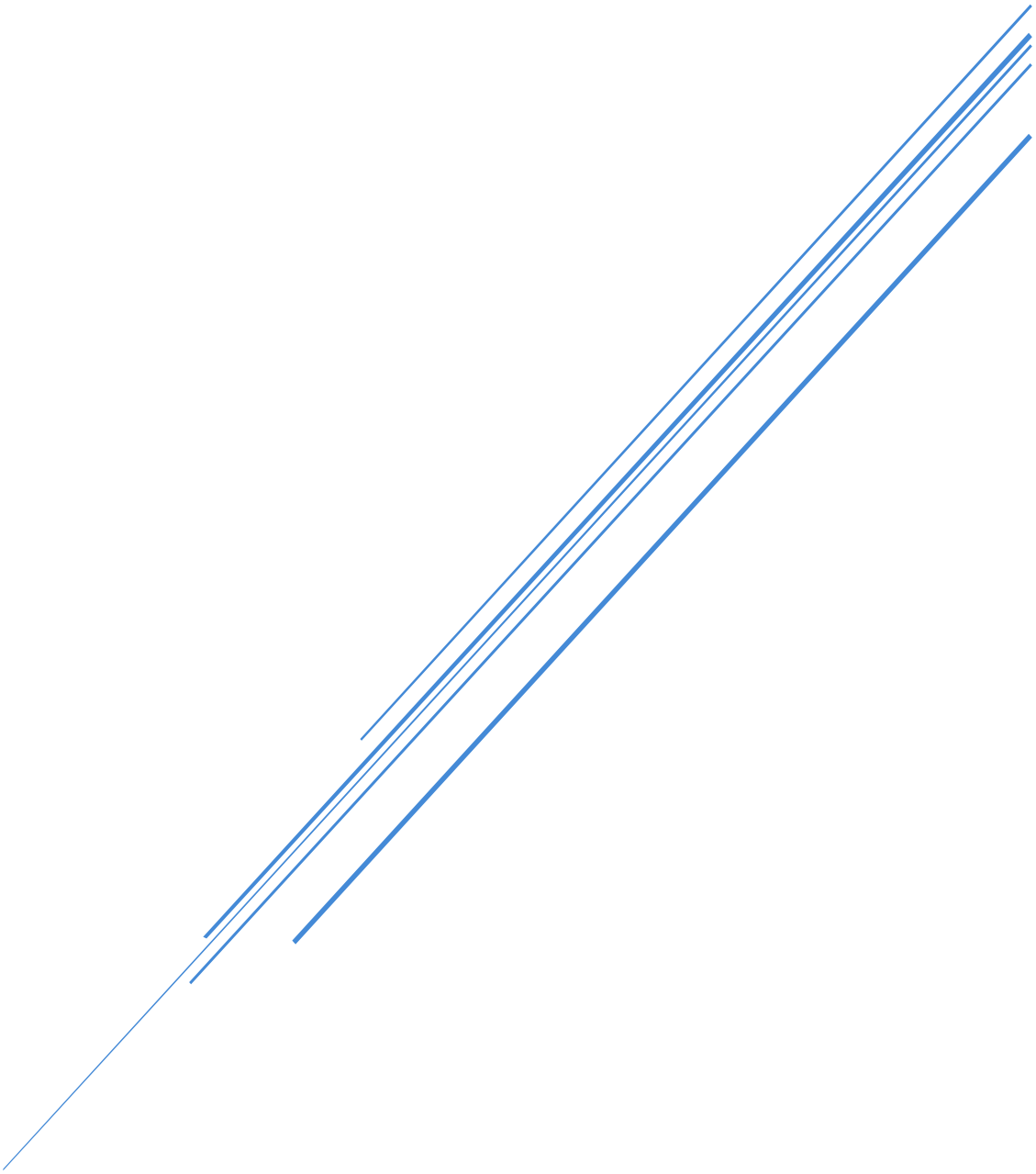
TIMS 3311 ASSESMENT 2

Reflective Diary and Critical Reflection



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Critical Reflection Essay

Introduction

Overall WIL Experience

I am a final-year Business and Civil Engineering student at The University of Queensland, eager to apply five years of learning to real-world contexts. This essay reflects on my Work Integrated Learning experience with Chatstat, a UQ-affiliated social enterprise using AI to detect harmful online behaviour and promote wellbeing. Throughout the semester, my team applied Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation to explore how Chatstat could best serve K–12 schools, gaining meaningful insights into entrepreneurship, teamwork, and my own professional development.

Personal Lessons

Before this course, I had never worked with a startup or applied my business knowledge in a real-world environment. Most of my studies had been technical engineering projects or theoretical business cases, so this was my first chance to combine both skill sets to create something meaningful.

I discovered I was far more confident in professional communication than I expected. I learned how to engage stakeholders, ask purposeful questions, conduct interviews that reveal real insights, and present myself professionally. I also became more comfortable handling ambiguity, something not often encouraged in engineering projects, and became more empathetic and research-driven in how I approach problems.

The highlights were seeing everything come together. Meeting with Chatstat's founders and witnessing their passion for protecting children online was inspiring. Another standout moment was when our team reconvened after our first interviews; we all realised independently that schools weren't drawn to Chatstat's current model but came to the same improvement idea. That alignment became the foundation for our new MVP.

There were also challenges. Early on, we didn't fully understand Chatstat's product or how to explain its value, which made the first interviews difficult. I also struggled to

find participants, after many unanswered calls and emails to schools, I turned to my personal network to connect with parents and teachers. Despite the setback, this approach gave us valuable feedback and ultimately led to our Lean Startup pivot.

If I could redo anything, I'd spend more time early clarifying the product and maintaining consistent communication with Chatstat. Still, those challenges taught me to adapt, stay resourceful, and keep learning, skills that feel more valuable than any mark could reflect.

Networks Established

This project helped me build networks I wouldn't have accessed otherwise. Working with Lawrence, Nandan, and Ivy from Chatstat offered real insight into how social impact and business sustainability can coexist. Their passion reminded me that entrepreneurship can be both commercial and purposeful.

Through interviews with teachers, parents, students, and wellbeing staff, I gained perspectives far beyond my engineering background. Coming from an academic and engineering-oriented environment, hearing from people outside that world was eye-opening. It showed me how context and lived experience shape people's priorities and how empathy drives better design, a core principle of Design Thinking.

Our academic mentor, Jack Andrews, also guided our process and reflection, helping us connect theory with practice. Collectively, these relationships taught me that collaboration across disciplines creates more human-centred innovation and stronger outcomes.

New Knowledge, Insights, and Skills

The Past

Before starting TIMS3311, my understanding of entrepreneurship was mostly theoretical. I have completed all my engineering courses and am finishing off my final business subjects, but most of my experience with startups came from case studies and simulations. I understood the theory behind value propositions and business models, but not what it looked like in practice. I was more focused on technical thinking, analysing how and why a business would succeed or fail on paper rather than understanding its customers or validating its assumptions in real life. This course became my first real opportunity to apply those ideas and see what works in the messy, uncertain world of entrepreneurship.

Key Learnings

We have learned about Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation multiple times throughout the TIMS program, but this was the first time I experienced them organically rather than academically. During this course, I didn't consciously think, "I'm applying Lean Startup now." It was only through reflection that I realised that's exactly what we were doing.

Design Thinking came through in our empathy interviews, when we were talking to teachers, students, and parents to understand their frustrations, privacy concerns, and experiences with online harm. This helped us define the problem clearly before designing any solution. We were essentially *prototyping through conversation*, testing reactions to Chatstat's concept and learning from their responses.

Lean Startup guided how we structured our work. Our hypothesis matrix helped us prioritise customer segments and identify public schools as the highest pain point. Each phase, from research to interviews to our pivot, this followed the build–measure–learn cycle. The pivot to a parent-licensed MVP, where schools fund access but parents manage it directly, was a direct result of that iterative learning process. It balanced privacy and wellbeing in a way that schools, parents, and students could all accept.

Effectuation was probably the quietest but most constant framework. We didn't have big budgets or advanced tools, so we made progress using what we already had, connections, public data, and time. The affordable loss principle helped us make low-risk decisions, and the crazy quilt principle described exactly how our partnerships with Chatstat, Jack, and interview participants evolved. We co-created outcomes instead of following a fixed plan.

These frameworks stood out because they modified my though processes. They shifted my mindset from problem-solving to firstly problem-understanding, from planning the perfect solution to learning through action. They also showed me that theory and practice aren't separate. Sometimes you just need to stop and think about what you're actually doing, and sometimes all the frameworks fall into place.

This experience will help me in my future career by teaching me how to create and test assumptions quickly, communicate complex ideas clearly, and connect with different types of people. I recently interviewed for and accepted a role as a Construction Management Graduate, and I actually used lessons from this course during my interview. When answering interview questions I spoke about how I learnt to balance multiple sets of criteria, from the university, from Chatstat, from my team, and from myself, as well as how I learned to prioritise and organise my time. Those examples came directly from this experience, which I think helped me stand out and convey how I respond in different practical situations.

The Future

This course has already had a tangible impact on my career trajectory. It helped me articulate my strengths and experiences during job interviews and gave me real examples to draw on. It also made me more interested in the intersection of engineering, business, and innovation. I now understand that the skills behind entrepreneurship, which are empathy, iteration, and adaptability, these are just as valuable in project management or infrastructure projects as they are in startups.

More personally, this course helped me become more disciplined with my time. It didn't have fixed weekly tasks like other courses, but still required consistent effort. Learning to manage my own workflow, balance competing priorities, and stay accountable has made me feel much more prepared for full-time work next year.

Course Feedback

What I valued most about TIMS3311 was the real-world application. At the start of semester, I was a bit daunted by how open-ended it seemed. I was worried I'd run out of time or not do enough, but by making the effort to apply my knowledge practically, I felt like I was learning something real, not just memorising theories for an exam.

If I could suggest improvements, the first would be encouraging more consistent communication between students, the client, and Jack. Our team went a few weeks without a proper meeting, which made it hard to stay aligned in the beginning. Second, it would be great to include a marked short end-of-semester presentation where teams can showcase what they achieved, I think it would make the experience feel more complete. Lastly, perhaps adjusting class times could help, as late sessions were tough for those balancing work commitments.

Conclusion

Overall, my WIL experience with Chatstat has been one of the most rewarding parts of my degree. It let me apply everything I've learned at UQ, from engineering logic to business strategy, in a real, socially impactful setting. I've grown from someone who preferred structure into someone who can handle ambiguity, think creatively, and communicate with confidence.

Through Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Effectuation, I learned to empathise, iterate, and make progress with the resources at hand, lessons that will guide how I bridge innovation and impact in my future career.

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Diary Entries

Entry 1: Meeting Our Startup

Our first meeting with Chatstat marked the beginning of our WIL journey, it set the tone for what the semester was going to involve. We met with Lawrence, the founder, and his team, Nandan and Ivy, who gave us an overview of Chatstat's mission and its existing products. The team made it very clear that this wasn't just a business, it was a purpose-driven startup built around protecting young people from online harm, they described it as more of a social enterprise. Lawrence's passion for wellbeing and child safety stood out, and it made me and my team feel genuinely invested in the work we were about to do.

We were introduced to the different audiences Chatstat aims to serve, which are parents, schools, universities, and workplaces, as well as the features across the platform, including real-time monitoring, AI-driven alerts, and privacy-first reporting. I was surprised at how established the startup already was, yet how open they are to new perspectives. Lawrence and the team wanted us to explore how Chatstat could best serve K–12 schools, asking us to run interviews and market research to understand how educators would perceive its value and what they might realistically be willing to pay for the service.

At the time, I felt both curious and a little uncertain. The challenge felt very real: schools operate in a complex ecosystem where privacy, funding, and ethics are all an issue. But it is also an exciting issue, this was an opportunity to apply Design Thinking from the start, using empathy to understand user pain points before suggesting solutions. The project would later evolve into a real example of Lean Startup thinking, where we would be testing assumptions and iterating based on evidence. We would also use effectuation, since we were starting with the limited means we had (connections, data, and curiosity) to co-create value with Chatstat.

Walking away from that first meeting, I felt motivated and ready to bridge the gap between innovation and impact.

Entry 2: Desktop Research and Hypothesising

After our first meeting with Chatstat, our next step was to understand where the product, or variation of it, could create the most value. Our team met with Jack to clarify what was expected from the desktop research and hypothesising stage. He encouraged us to think broadly and use this stage as an opportunity to apply Design Thinking, to empathise with different user groups before narrowing our focus.

I began by talking with friends, family, and peers about where a tool like Chatstat could make a difference. These informal conversations helped me realise how many different industries face online risks, from schools to corporates to sporting events. The idea of using Chatstat at sports clubs or live events stood out; players and teams are often targeted online during competitions, and real-time monitoring could protect both wellbeing and reputation.

To structure these ideas, I created a hypothesis matrix comparing several potential market segments, public schools, corporates, and sports organisations, rating each on pain intensity, budget, decision speed, and scalability. This exercise helped me and my team think more strategically and move into a Lean Startup mindset, creating various assumptions and hypothesis we could later test through interviews.

Following Chatstat's request, I then focused my desktop research on K-12 public schools, particularly around Brisbane. I reviewed Department of Education and eSafety policies, as well as wellbeing frameworks from schools like Brisbane State High and Indooroopilly SHS. Reading about real cases such as the Redlands tragedy and Tyrone Unsworth's story was confronting; it showed how delayed reporting and lack of early detection can lead to devastating outcomes.

By the end of this stage, I felt ready to move into interviews. The research gave me a clear direction and a deeper sense of empathy, confirming that the problem Chatstat is tackling is both urgent and deeply human.

Entry 3: Interviews

Once the desktop research was complete, our next step was to validate our hypotheses through interviews. We wanted to understand how schools currently manage online safety, what challenges they face, and whether Chatstat's solution could realistically fit into that ecosystem. Using a Design Thinking approach, this was

our “empathy phase”, listening, observing, and learning directly from the people who experience these challenges every day.

We spoke with a wide range of participants including teachers, parents, students, wellbeing coordinators, and even a Master of Teaching graduate. I also had plenty of informal conversations with friends and family, which gave additional context about online behaviour and how parents view privacy. One of the most eye-opening discussions was with the Master of Teaching student, who explained the strict policies that limit how schools and teachers can interact with students outside of school hours or on social media. This highlighted a huge barrier for Chatstat’s original school-led model, even if teachers wanted to use it, the liability and privacy risks were too high.

These interviews also made me appreciate how complex and emotionally charged this issue really is. Students wanted protection but not surveillance, parents wanted reassurance without losing trust, and teachers just wanted clarity and less responsibility for things outside school grounds.

In Lean Startup terms, this phase was our measure and learn stage, we were testing our assumptions through real-world conversations. We also applied Effectuation by adapting to each opportunity, following connections as they appeared, and co-creating insights with interviewees rather than forcing a fixed agenda. I left these discussions with a stronger sense of empathy and the realisation that our initial direction might need to change.

Entry 4: Changing Approach

After completing our first round of interviews, our team came together to reflect on what we had learned. It quickly became clear that our current understanding of Chatstat’s model didn’t align with what schools actually wanted or were allowed to do. We realised that if we couldn’t fully understand or believe in the product ourselves, we couldn’t expect others to. This was a moment of self-awareness and personal development for me, recognising that confidence and clarity are essential when communicating a product’s value.

We revisited our interview notes and identified key patterns. Students wanted privacy, parents had mixed opinions, some were protective, others hands-off, and schools were hesitant due to legal and ethical risks. This combination made it obvious that the school-led monitoring model wasn't feasible. Guided by Lean Startup thinking, we decided to pivot toward a new MVP: a parent-licensed model, where schools would fund access but parents would manage it directly. This version balanced wellbeing with privacy and removed the burden of data handling from schools.

This shift felt like a natural outcome of our Design Thinking process, moving from empathy and definition to ideation and prototyping. We also demonstrated Effectuation, working with what we had, feedback, insights, and creative thinking, rather than chasing a perfect plan. Personally, I found this to be a big turning point. It was when our project stopped being theoretical and started feeling entrepreneurial. We weren't just analysing a company anymore; we were shaping a real solution that could help people.

Entry 5: Catchup With Chatstat

A few weeks later, we met again with Lawrence and the Chatstat team to share our findings and present the pivot we had developed. It felt like a full-circle moment, we had started the semester learning about Chatstat's vision, and now we were contributing ideas that could genuinely influence its direction.

We explained our proposed parent-licensed model, where schools would purchase licenses but parents and students would have direct access to Chatstat. The feedback was encouraging; Lawrence and the team were already exploring something similar, offering promo codes to parents through schools. However, we discussed some key differences, particularly around privacy and data handling, and agreed that more validation was needed through another round of interviews.

This meeting reflected everything we had learned about collaboration and iteration. It was a real-life example of the Lean Startup cycle, building, measuring, and learning in continuous loops. It also showed Design Thinking in action, as our empathy-driven insights had directly informed a new prototype idea. Throughout this process, we acted effectually, using the relationships, resources, and feedback available to us to co-create with Chatstat rather than just observe from the outside.

Personally, this catchup was rewarding. It showed that our work had real impact and that Chatstat genuinely valued our perspective. It also built my confidence in presenting ideas professionally and communicating research-driven recommendations. Leaving that meeting, I felt proud of our progress and motivated to continue refining our model through further interviews and feedback.