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Challenges of Developing and Sustaining a Research Partnership for Work Integrated Learning

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Developing and Sustaining a Placement Research Partnership for Work Integrated Learning
Overview

- Why research WIL?
- Early approaches to WIL research
- Our research journey – getting started through to building knowledge
- Discussion: Research design, developing resources, cross boundary working
- Conclusions
Why research WIL?

- Work Integrated Learning (WIL) broadly defined as educational activities that integrate theoretical learning with its application in the workplace (Cooper et al., 2010)
- UK context tuition fee reforms (Browne, 2010)
- Universities challenged to design programmes which give the skills, knowledge and experience to increase employability (Bates, 2008)
- UK CIM Survey 75% failures in education contributing to a skills crisis (Woodman & Hutchins, 2011)
Early approaches to WIL research

- I first encountered WIL research in 2007 WACE Singapore.
- Zerwaard reported, up to 1997 WIL research had been ‘limited, uncertain and sparse’ (Zegwaard & Coll, 2007)
- ‘What has been published is good’ (Bartkus & Stull, 2004)
- WIL research now diverse and multidisciplinary, recognition for the potential of WIL as pedagogical philosophy, rather than model of links between education and work (Kjellen, 2010)
• Choices of methodology: demonstrable quality and potential conflict with practitioner researcher
• And articulating the philosophical underpinnings and appropriate research design (Coll & Chapman, 2000)
• Beyond the JCEI, main problem lack of quantitative research, accuracy in methods (convenience sampling) (Bartkus, 2007)
• Coll & Kalnin (2009) reinforced that research should be grounded in theory
The Future

- Two re-invigorated journals
  - JCEI
  - APJCE
- WACE Research Communities
- National Research Communities
  - UK ASET Practice and Research Network
Our research journey – my journey

- Systems engineer, operational and service management in public and private sector, different careers
- Salaries, jobs, degree classifications (Ward, 2006)
- Student Placement Journeys: students, employers and tutors (Ward & Gaffikin, 2007 to 2009)
- Meet with Drysdale, WACE 2010, Graz. Subsequently joined the international research project
- 2010 Director of ASET – International Placements and Collaborations
- 2013 Co-chair ASET Research and Practice Group
The UK Research Team

Prof. Nigel King
Director of CAPR, HHS

Lisa Ward
Head of T&L Institute

Dr. Tina McAdie/Alison Bravington
Senior Lecturer in Psychology, HHS

Fiona Purdie
Research Assistant, HHS

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
Our research journey – UK Research Team

• Literature on limitations of practitioner researchers
• Find experienced local research partners
  – Professor - with expertise in Qualitative Methods
  – Senior Lecturer / Researcher with expertise in Quantitative Methods
  – Note, no tenure in UK universities
• Successful bid to Innovation Fund
  – RA for 40 days ‘Are placement students better psychologically prepared for life and work?’
Our research journey

Challenges

- University bureaucracy – 6 months for approval to start
- Strong field
- Short term contracts -> staff turnover -> RA leaving
- Steering group: careers and SU
- Research ethics, delays
- On-line survey design, marketing campaign balanced with lit review – multi-tasking
- Analysis very tight
- Publication simultaneous (condition of funding)
First Phase – Quantitative Study Results

- 716 undergraduate responses to on-line study
- UK Students who pursue WIL compared to non-WIL peers have
  - Sig higher hope
  - Sig higher confidence in attaining goals
  - Lower test anxiety
- Multiple experiences of WIL
  - As above plus academic self-efficacy
Second Phase – Qualitative Study

• Innovation Funding, ‘The More the Merrier: A qualitative examination of the contribution of multiple WIL experiences to student learning, personal development and preparation for employment.’

• A new RA for 40 days, project underway.
• Mixed methods. The first and second stages of our project fit neatly together
• The quantitative study informs the qualitative study
• Quantitative study – overview of psychological factors
• Large sample size in UK
• Trial interviews developing methods
• Current research underway
Discussion: Developing Resources

- Sustainability of the project is a major issue
- Busy day jobs
- Continuity of team members
- Efforts to find further sources of funding
- Bid writing – matching criteria
- Research Assistants
  - Helps publications
  - Knowledge goes away with them
  - Stop / go project
### Figure 1: Developing and sustaining the research project.

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**Phase 1: Survey Study**

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**Table Main Colors**

- **Green**: Internal recruitment process
- **Blue**: Phase 1: Survey Study
- **Red**: Phase 2: Interview Study
- **Orange**: Dissemination
- **Yellow**: Funding bids
- **Pink**: Recruitment
- **Blue**: Research Assistant in progress

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Discussion – Cross Boundary Working

• ‘Boundary spanning is an area of theory and practice with great applicability to a better understanding of the activity of WIL departments’ (Peach et al., 2011)
• Boundary spanning can be applied to research partnerships bridging local and international boundaries
• Reflects importance of collaboration and dissemination
• Towards shared understanding and new ideas
Conclusions

• Taken on board the lessons from the literature
• Multi-disciplinary, multi-method nature of WIL research
• Heart of the process
  – Research quality
  – Partnerships
  – Dissemination
• Sustainability – challenges
  – RA turnover
  – Bidding for funding
ACEN Conference October 2012

Designing a Qualitative Study into Multiple Work Integrated Learning Experiences


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