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Ward, Lisa J., Bravington, Alison, McAdie, Tina M. and King, Nigel

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)
This Millennium

- 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

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
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
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 pursues 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.
Discussion: Research design

- 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

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
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*Figure 1: Developing and sustaining the research project.*
‘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


Selected References (2)

Lisa Ward BSc MSc FHEA
Head of Teaching and Learning Institute
University Teaching Fellow
University of Huddersfield
Room CS10/19
Tel: 0044 1484 47 1578
Email: L.ward@hud.ac.uk