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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)
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
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

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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

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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

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Figure 1: Developing and sustaining the research project.

### Phase 1: Survey Study

- **Year One**
  - **Jan:** Phase 1: RA recruitment
  - **Feb:** Phase 1 bid-writing & review
  - **Mar:** Internal recruitment processes
  - **Apr:** Phase 2 RA recruitment

### Phase 2: Interview Study

- **Year Three**
  - **Jan:** ASET bursary application
  - **Feb:** Await Outcome

- **Year Two**
  - **Mar:** ASET conference
  - **Apr:** ICREA conference
  - **May:** ESE conference
  - **Jun:** ULLAGM conference

- **July:** AEI conference
  - **Aug:** ACE conference
  - **Sep:** ACR conference
  - **Oct:** TF conference

- **Nov:** Teaching & Learning Conference
  - **Dec:** VCE conference

**Legend:**
- Funding bids
- Recruitment
- Research Assistant in position
- Dissemination
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
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Designing a Qualitative Study into Multiple Work Integrated Learning Experiences


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