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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  
Senior Lecturer in Psychology, HHS

Fiona Purdie/Alison Bravington  
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.
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

Inspiriting tomorrow’s professionals
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Figure 1: Developing and sustaining the research project.

Inspiring tomorrow’s professionals
• ‘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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