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From unskilled to employable: using a qualitative examination of the 'Placement Timeline Research Method' to explore student professional and personal development whilst on multiple WIL experiences.

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**From Unskilled to Employable:  
Using a Qualitative Examination of the  
'Placement Timeline Research Method'  
to explore Student Professional and  
Personal Development  
whilst on multiple WIL experiences.**

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# Overview

- Placements
- Background Research
- Research Methodologies and Tools
- The Placement Timeline Researchers Tool
- Results and Discussion
- Conclusion and References

# Introduction - Models of WIL

## Sandwich Degree

- The predominant model in the UK.
- Works well in business, engineering, science, IT and art and design.

## Professional Placement

- Accrediting professional body.
- In areas such as nursing, social work and teaching.

## Shorter Placements

- E.g. History, Youth and Community

## Informal Placements

- Internships
- Part-time jobs

# Background Research

- An international project led by Drysdale (Drysdale et al., 2011) examined the relationship between WIL and the psychological variables believed to play a role for success in the transition to the labour market.
- Those who pursue WIL have significantly higher hope and confidence in attaining their goals and lower test anxiety than their non-WIL peers.
- Our results suggested that the more MWIL experiences a student had the higher their trait hope, agency, self-concept, self-esteem and academic self-efficacy (Purdie et al., 2011).

- Contrasts with previous evidence, there are no significant differences in self- efficacy between students who pursue sandwich placements (one full year of WIL on a four year degree) and those who pursue multiple placements (Cuzzi et al., 1996).
- Students' emotions and cognitions seem to be more strongly affected by WIL than their academic behaviours.
- Improvement in student's confidence is a key outcome of WIL (Cope, 2000; Ward, 2009).

## Research Team

### Phase one: Research team (Quant)

- Core research team of three with expertise in employability, quantitative, qualitative (respectively), plus research assistant.

### Phase two: (Qual)

- Same core research team, different research assistant.

## Research Aims

- To investigate broad aspects of learning and personal development.
- Sense of progression across WIL experience, rather than comparing task specific aspects of job roles.

# Participants

- 14 Individual interviews
  - Wide range of participants, across diverse subject areas, who have all had MWIL experiences. Cross-sectional.
- Complexity of interview material
  - Lengthy transcription costs, yet provided a rich dataset

Number	Subject Area	Male / Female	Formal WIL	Informal WIL	School
1	Early Years	Female	3	3	SEPD
2	Youth and Community Studies	Female	3	4	SEPD
3	History and Politics	Male	1	6	MHM
4	Nursing	Female	6	2	HHS
5	Advertising and Marketing communications	Male	1	1	BUS
6	Accountancy and Finance	Male	1	2	BUS
7	Textile Crafts	Female	9	0	ADA

Number	Subject Area	Male / Female	Formal WIL	Informal WIL	School
8	Accountancy and Finance	Male	1	0	BUS
9	Podiatry	Female	3	3	HHS
10	Music	Female	2	5	MHM
11	Social Work MSc	Female	1	1	HHS
12	Social Work MSc	Male	3	6	HHS
13	Interactive Multimedia	Male	1	2	CENG
14	Pharmacy	Female	8	0	AS

## Kelly's repertory grid technique

- Roots in personal construct psychology.
- How individuals make sense of their world and their identity.

### Participants thought about:

- Work characteristics of colleagues on placement.
- Their own work characteristics along journey.

### Did elicit perceptions about:

- What makes people employable.
- Whether people are easy or difficult to work with.

**But** harder to see aspects of personal development.

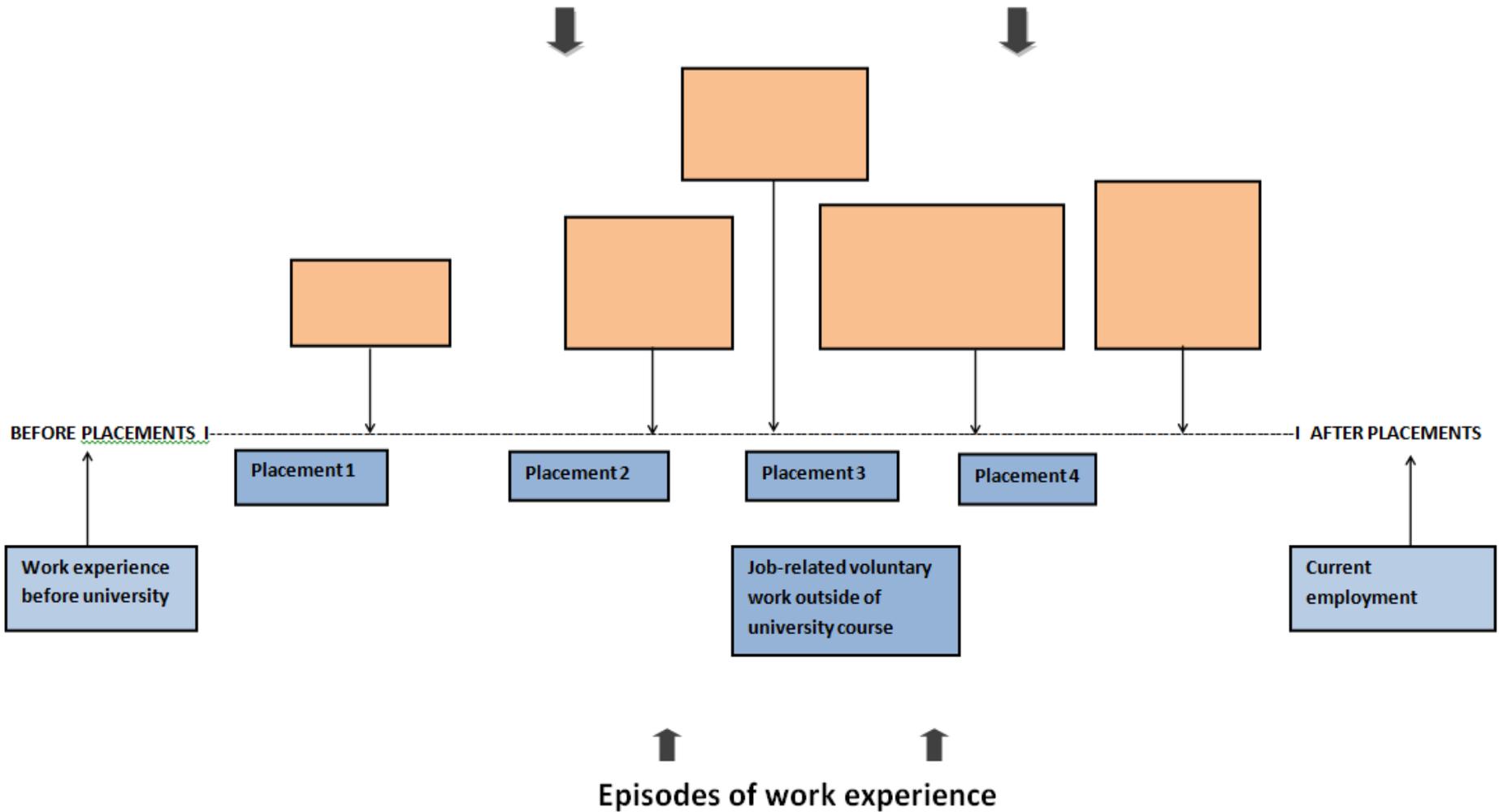
# Development of Placement Timeline Researcher's Tool

## Build upon the Salmon Line (King & Horrocks, 2010)

- Two opposite poles.
- 'Before placements' and 'After placements'.
- Denote work placements underneath the line.
- Key moments in learning and personal development above the line.

Methodological Approach see (Ward et al., 2012)

# Significant moments in learning and development



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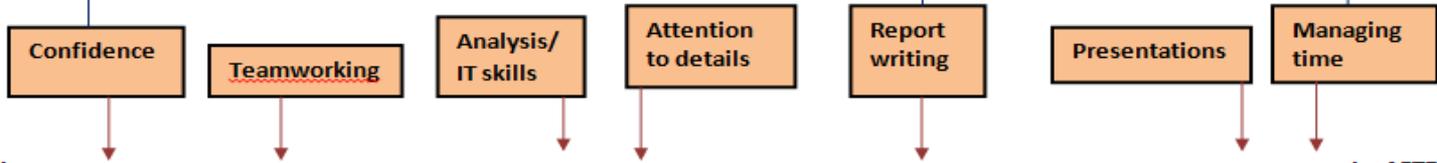


**INTERVIEW 8: Yasir, Accountancy & Finance, sandwich placement.**

The first month was pretty hard, but after that, yeah, I would say I got a lot more confident...as you get more work and you get your hands onto the work, then you know, whenever you're struggling, you know, if you sit down there, obviously the work isn't going to get done itself, so you know, I need to go and ask someone for help.

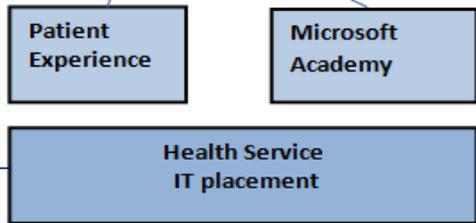
[Writing work reports] makes me think that you don't only have to look at one thing, you've got to be more open, look into more than one source, for example if you're doing a report...for one of the modules, what you've got to do is not only look at the basics, but look into the details, go more like deep down, find the root causes and everything of it, rather than concentrating only on the main picture.

As time goes on, you get more and more tasks. For example when I started off, it was really relaxed, you only had one or two things to concentrate on for the week. But when, whereas now, as time has gone on, coming near the end, I've got a lot more tasks, so I've got to make sure that I'm giving the right amount of time to each project and making sure that I concentrate on the projects that are more important.



BEFORE PLACEMENT

AFTER PLACEMENT



It's my manager who has really given me the opportunity to develop myself and he's really getting me to develop other employability skills, and he's said to me, 'I want you to be able to, you know, show me that you can, you've got the skills, that you've improved from the way you started off', because I know in the first couple of weeks or even months, if he said to me you're going to this meeting yourself, I would have not been able to do it. But because he took me along to the...first couple of meetings, he showed me how everything works.

As a person, I think this placement year just has been the best point in my life...the experience that I've got from working within all these skills...all the opportunities that I've been given...

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# Results and Discussion

## – Thematic Analysis

- Looking for patterns within the data template analysis (King, 2012). Involves the development of a coding structure (a template).
- Used Nvivo
- Template modified as new insights emerge.
- Fits well with Team based research.
- Analysis and preliminary findings.

# Initial Results - Four main themes

Personal  
Identity

Student  
Identity

Making the  
Transformation

Professional  
Identity

# Theme One: Making the Transformation

- Core value anchoring the self, needed again and again.
- Experiential evolution.
- Chance to practice, observe and try new things.
- Linking theory to practice.
- Comparisons of different work situations and personal growth.

# Sub-theme: Making Comparisons

- Effectively reflection
- Reflections on placement **integrated** with educational reflections.
- A skill developed and practiced over time.

‘[the placement] has allowed me to sort of take a step back from education and rather than constantly thinking education, just think about sort of myself, you know, like what positives I’ve got, negatives, what can I do to get a lot better and that’s just sort of how I’ll and once I step back into education, I’ve improved, you, know, certain aspects of myself and I’ll be able to sort of give it a really good go.’

## Participant 6 - Accountancy and Finance

‘Like reflective practice and in my first year I hated it because I just saw it as a bind. But my second and particularly my third year, I found them really cathartic and I found the reflections really [helped me in] how I can process what’s happened to me on a day to day basis on placements and trying to make sense of you know.’

## Participant 4 – Nursing

- Each WIL opportunity provides a new chance to reflect, compare and contrast and ultimately make the transition. The opportunity for reflection is fast tracked as with each new experience there is a new opportunity for reflection.

➔ Fast track reflection

# Theme Two: Personal Identity

- The students' sense of who they are beyond those aspects of self that they see as directly associated with being a student.
- Did not start their MWIL experience as a “blank slate”.
- Sub-theme to explore: **sense of progress**

'I work holistically which I never did before as an auxiliary, but again, you don't do because you don't know what it's like to be a staff nurse,... I think you are very task orientated because it's like "right – we've got ten people to wash, so we'll wash all these ten people". Whereas as a staff nurse, you sort of look at everything else. Erm, I think I'm a lot more chilled because I used to get, I used to get my hair off as an auxiliary. I wasn't impatient, but again, it's just that, it's that lack of knowledge and lack of understanding I think, yeah, I've just, it's quite, when you sort of think back, its only three years, but i think it has got to be three years for a reason, because you've to get in all different placements.'

## Participant 4 – Nursing

'[She [work colleague] always ignored me, she never asked me my name, never, she never even made eye contact with me, that's how, that's how nasty she was, I feel that she was that nasty and when I was reading back at it, it made me think oh my god, I could have dealt with that, now I can deal with that, I'll just go straight up and say hello to her myself.'

## Participant 1 – Early Years

'I've sort of, I've got a real sort of hunger to learn more things now and I'm just sort of reading a lot more and I think when I feel I come back to uni, I'm really going to be in my element, that sort of feel I've grown up a lot and I'll be able to just sort of go into it and analyse everything and plan everything, which I don't think I would have been able to do a year ago.'

## Participant 6 – Accountancy and Finance

However, occasionally a bad placement experience could have a negative impact on the student – at least in the immediate aftermath:

‘I wanted it to be an experience that changed me, but in a good way, not in a bad way and it changed me in a bad way. I became somebody that I didn’t really know because I was tired, I was fed up, I was like really just angry and you know, unwell, under the weather, I was just everything that nobody likes to be, you know.’

## Participant 7 – Textile Crafts

# Theme Three: Student Identity

'They're all very sort of, you know they're all very, you know, they buy me stuff for Christmas and things. They actually treat you like, erm, they're not like you would think, that there is like a system where you have the manager and then it's not very hierarchical, which is something that I like. Everyone's treated equally, erm, no-one's time is worth less than somebody else's and no-one is sort of seen to be more important because of their position, which I think, you know, I think that's really good in that sense.'

## Participant 3 – History and Politics

‘[They] made students equal to staff, so they are staff members, they attend all staff meetings with us. There’s certain things, like safeguarding and confidential stuff ...apart from that, they’re involved in everything. ...But parents don’t need to, obviously they just think that’s our colleague and they’re going with us. But I think it’s really important, the way that people are addressed. For us, when I was at the school, it was just all, ‘the student over there’, and I just think hmmm, I just didn’t like it, it wasn’t for me.’

## Participant 1 – Early Years

‘Some podiatrists were really happy and very informative as a supervising podiatrist. Others, I got the feeling like they were like oh, we’ve got a student with us again, I’m going to be late and fair enough, we often did make them run late because we had questions to ask or some of them, I learnt very quickly, when to ask questions and perhaps no when they were treating, I’d wait until afterwards. But again, it depended on the podiatrist, so that was a learning curve as well.’

## Participant 9 – Podiatry

'I basically got ten thousand pounds worth of funding to go sailing for ten days, which was amazing- ...they treated me as a colleague rather than a young person, I was actually a volunteer on that trip rather than a young person, so that built my confidence because I was like well if I can do it with the kids back home, I can definitely use these skills somewhere else.'

## Participant 2 – Youth and Community Studies:

Overall the growth and development can clearly be seen over MWIL. The boost to confidence of being treated as a colleague rather than a student.

# Theme Four: Becoming a Professional

## The ultimate aim of the WIL experience:

- Developing towards being a professional in a range of environments.
- Philosophies of work
- How the organisations fit.
- Compare the various settings.
- New placements and finding placements
- Building up knowledge

## Sub-theme:

- Finding your place

'I knew where my heart wanted to go, I just knew that I wanted to be at the children's centre and not at the school, and then I had to tell the head teacher that "I'm really sorry, I've made my mind up and I'm going with the other one".'

## Participant 1 – Early Years

‘Well I wouldn’t have picked a degree lightly without thinking about it and I did guess that I wanted to be an accountant.’

‘I think just the main thing that I really know now is that this is something that I do actually want to do, that I have enjoyed my placement year so far and that I do definitely want to make a career out of it.’

## Participant 6 - Accountancy and Finance

# Conclusion

Aim of study was to Explore transitions on multiple placements.

- Students want to see themselves as a work-ready and an effective professional.
- Placement Timeline Research Tool
- Help unlock what is happening with MWIL.

Through personal and student identity

- Through transition
- Ready to be a professional

# Next Steps

- Further in depth analysis
- Sharing findings

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