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## Editorial: Advancing Non-placement Work-integrated Learning Across the Degree

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## Editorial: Advancing Non-placement Work-integrated Learning Across the Degree

### Abstract

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is on the rise as many universities adopt strategic targets for student workplace preparation as an element of their tertiary studies. Through WIL, students gain real world experiences, transferable skills and build professional networks. WIL is often understood as a placement activity, whereby students spend extended periods of time in industry, typically at the end or near end of their degree. These placements are designed to encapsulate the theoretical learning of a degree through the opportunity to apply knowledge and practise skills in a physical workplace. While there is much evidence in the higher education teaching and learning scholarship that attests to the benefits of placement-based WIL for all stakeholders, innovation in WIL that integrates work practices with learning is also occurring without time on placement or within a workplace. In recent years, WIL activity has extended beyond limited conceptions as describing only placements, to include a range of simulated, virtual, authentic and industry-based activities. The uptake of non-placement learning activities presents as opportunity to investigate the benefits, utility and innovation of this growing pedagogy to contribute meaningful insights to higher education scholarship and practice. This special issue is being published during the trials of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency. This global pandemic has shattered economies, touching every domain of life, including completely disrupting higher education. The call for papers for this special issue was conceived and advertised well before the universal lock down. There was evidence to suggest universities were exploring and experimenting with new ways of engaging with industry partners and that these models were offering extraordinary benefits to student learning and application of knowledge. The COVID-19 situation escalated these experiments, determining virtual WIL and projects or activities leveraged through technological platforms, as the fortuitous survivors. There is no doubt that WIL pedagogies and programs have been hit hard, however, this hardship for some has been described as cause for a learning revolution. For WIL research, this could be the impetus for questioning dominant modes of WIL and extending our understandings and knowledge of the impact of alternative WIL models.

### Keywords

experiential learning, non-placement WIL, professional education, skill development

## Acknowledgement of Country

*The editors of this special issue of JULTP would like to invite you, the reader, to take a moment before you delve into the pages of these thoughtful contributions to reflect on and acknowledge Country. In Australia, where this journal has been developed, this is an opportunity to acknowledge, and pay respect to the Traditional Owners and ongoing custodians of the land – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At the beginning of any gathering, we acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country on which we are meeting and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We encourage you to take a moment to reflect on the Country where you are today and acknowledge those who came before you, wise ones that surround you today and those who will care for Country in the future, and appreciate all that they have done, are doing and will do in the future to love, nurture and protect the land.*

## Recalibrating work-integrated learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is on the rise as many universities adopt strategic targets for student workplace preparation as an element of their tertiary studies. Through WIL, students gain real world experiences, transferable skills and build professional networks. WIL is often understood as a placement activity, whereby students spend extended periods of time in industry, typically at the end or near end of their degree (Patrick et al. 2009). These placements are designed to encapsulate the theoretical learning of a degree through the opportunity to apply knowledge and practise skills in a physical workplace. While there is much evidence in the higher education teaching and learning scholarship that attests to the benefits of placement-based WIL for all stakeholders (Silvia et al. 2018), innovation in WIL that integrates work practices with learning is also occurring without time on placement or within a workplace (Kay et al. 2019). In recent years, WIL activity has extended beyond limited conceptions as describing only placements, to include a range of simulated, virtual, authentic and industry-based activities (Rowe, Mackaway & Winchester-Seeto 2012). The uptake of non-placement learning activities presents as opportunity to investigate the benefits, utility and innovation of this growing pedagogy to contribute meaningful insights to higher education scholarship and practice.

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This special issue of JUTLP provides insight into advances, research and emerging practices in the area of non-placement WIL (NPWIL). NPWIL is the broad term that describes educational activities that engage students in authentic experiences that integrate theory with expanding practices and notions of work. NPWIL prioritises virtual, remote and class-based settings, often alongside and with involvement from industry and community partners. NPWIL provides an alternative experiential learning model to those requiring extended time inside a workplace. Examples may include (but not limited to) authentic industry projects, simulations, field work, creative studio work, digitally enabled or virtual WIL and other NPWIL experiences. By focusing on research and practice that specifically cultivates NPWIL, this special issue seeks to contribute to a broad understanding of WIL, and the diverse and innovative teaching and learning practices designed to build student readiness for work.

This special issue consists of three types of manuscripts. Original research manuscripts are empirical or conceptual papers grounded in scholarship that investigate key research questions to shed light on a particular area and gap in knowledge. These manuscripts will be familiar to readers of JUTLP and to higher education research. However, in this special issue, we are pleased to introduce two new forms of manuscripts that align to the aim and scope of JUTLP, that is, to extend “the body of knowledge describing effective and innovate teaching and learning practice in higher education”. *Practice Papers* articulate innovative teaching and learning initiatives, highlighting quality practice and student-centred outcomes. These Practice Papers, while grounded in a discipline, discuss the benefits to student learning, align to theoretical teaching and learning principles, and reflect on processes to shape recommendations for educators. Alternatively, *Position Papers* offer an author’s opinions and reflections by critically examining an emerging area of higher education teaching and learning. Position Papers are synthesised within scholarly literature and aim to explore contemporary issues and recent trends in order to project implications or recommendations for future practice. Through the combination of these three types of manuscripts, this special issue takes pause to recalibrate placement notions of WIL, given the research, and significance of emerging models of NPWIL in the current climate.

## **Non-placement WIL as a valuable learning enterprise**

The call out for this special edition attracted WIL educators from around the globe, all of whom had the desire to share their experiences practising and researching NPWIL. Within the pages of this journal you will find articles from urban city centre higher education institutions as well as their remote and rural counterparts from across Australia and contributions from New Zealand and South Africa. The papers contain important findings across interdisciplinary fields of study including accounting, public health, music, education and engineering as well as two pieces that are exemplars of university wide implementation of WIL activity. They are exemplars of general university wide programs and student capabilities, as well as specific examples of NPWIL activities such as simulations, e-portfolios and gallery walks.

The first paper in this special edition of JUTLP comes to us from the University of Melbourne in Australia, where Durham, Jordan, Naccarella and Russell share their findings from a longitudinal study administered online with graduates from the University of Melbourne, School of Population and Global Health MPH Program. Their interest is located in students’ perceptions of their technical skills and employability readiness at graduation and whether it was curricular or extracurricular experiences that helped them to gain these skills. The authors give us insight that can be applied in other disciplines and help us to identify the importance of general employability skill and technical

skill development, giving voice to the all-important student. From here, we move to specific examples of non-placement WIL activities offered through a breadth of degree programs.

Gallery walks are the topic of our next instalment from the University of Johannesburg in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ramsaroop and Petersen describe the creation and presentation of NPWIL gallery walks within a teacher education program, where school children are invited to the safety of the University campus to enjoy a learning experience created by groups of pre-service teachers. Their paper on how service learning influences the development of teacher competencies for professional practice is sure to inspire the reader to develop and trial gallery walks in their own contexts and has left the editors moved and longing to visit a gallery walk in South Africa. The lessons they describe hold promise for other professional fields.

The utility of simulated internships in an undergraduate accounting program is the focus of the third paper from the University of New England's Business School in Armidale, Australia. In this research, Bayerlein explores the role of students' previous work experiences with their learning in an online environment, and how they impact on the achievement of cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Bayerlein further shows that the lived experiences of students within the simulation were much more multifaceted and diverse than anticipated. Higher educator providers and students alike will benefit from the findings' challenges and opportunities arising from the analysed simulation.

The fourth contribution to our special edition comes from the University of Sydney, Australia. Rowley and Yeo come to us from the Conservatorium of Music and introduce us to a model of circular mentoring that supports, mentors and guides the development of professional identity and self-efficacy in undergraduate music students. This unique piece highlights the use of student-created experiential narrative e-portfolios in a closely monitored non-placement WIL activity offered through a creative studio work called the *Inclusion Project*. Findings show that this newly established framework can make significant progress in the confidence of students in their performing abilities and career readiness.

The fifth contribution comes from the home university of the editors, the University of Wollongong (UOW), a regional campus an hour south of Sydney on the eastern coastline of Australia. Dean, Eady, Yanamandram, Moroney, Glover-Chambers and O'Donnell are a group of academics and professional staff working together to enhance and advocate for the delivery of WIL across all faculties and schools at UOW. Using a broad definition of WIL encompassing both placement and non-placement activities within and external to credit-bearing units, they offer a WIL framework to purposefully design WIL across a degree program. Their paper provides an opportunity for the reader to conceptualise the development, implementation and mapping of WIL through an institution-wide approach.

The sixth paper by Hayes and Cejnar is from the University of Sydney, Australia and focuses on the perceptions of students who undertake interdisciplinary industry-based projects. The authors investigate students' learning through analysing students' *Letters to Successors* (Brookfield 2017) after completing an industry and community project. This insightful article highlights positive student experiences using this reflective approach, whereby students write letters to future 'successors' to the program, and identifies that working with others, focusing on tasks, recognising the uniqueness of the experience and having fun were critical for students' success in the project.

Their paper inspired the editors to write our own Letter to Successors for future special edition editors.

## **New ways of disseminating practice and perspectives in JUTLP**

This Special Edition features three Practice Papers articulating various practices of NPWIL and describing ways in which WIL educators responded to moving WIL online during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. In the first paper, Atchison and Kennedy, from the University of Wollongong, Australia, present the relocation of a geography field trip to accommodate for virtual learning delivery using online resources. Their pedagogy is grounded in Aboriginal ways of knowing and learning, and the authors grapple with the complexities of privileging and respecting Indigenous pedagogies and practices in educational design on Country while being off-Country. Moving into an interdisciplinary space, Piggot and Winchester-Seeto from the University of New South Wales, Australia, describe the design and development of a new project-based experience whereby students work in multi-disciplinary teams with partners from a range of organisations. Moving fully online for this NPWIL project presented several opportunities and reflected industry and student's ability to adapt and respond in difficult circumstances. The third Practice Paper by Hodges and Martin from Massey University, New Zealand, emphasises the importance of developing WIL experiences across both on-campus and online settings for the development of future health professionals in a monitored and supervised environment. This paper identifies how an exercise prescription clinic moved swiftly online and responded to the challenges of engaging with clients across a range of settings, with a view to enhance both personal and professional learning outcomes.

Three Position Papers are also presented in this issue, reflecting and arguing for NPWIL through different lenses. In the first article, Winchester-Seeto and Piggot, from the University of New South Wales, Australia, critique the universal premise of Universities as a facilitator of employability, by challenging what it is that we are preparing students for beyond the institution. Given that work-spaces are changing, they speculate that perhaps we need to move away from ideals of the *workplace* and think about how we can prepare students for entry into a broader *workforce*. In the second paper, similarly, drawing out the complexity of producing work ready graduates, Pelden and Banham, from Edith Cowan University, Australia, demonstrate the dilemma for teaching counselling students through WIL. They call for counselling educators to reconsider how counselling is taught and the opportunities presented by NPWIL practices that reflect the realities of the current health landscape. The last paper in this issue, draws out an important and emerging issue in WIL around equity and international students' access and opportunity. In this paper, Andrew from Edith Cowan University, Australia, demonstrates the lack of availability of WIL for Master of Public Health students to speak to the broader issue of unhelpful higher education and industry perspectives of international students. They argue that a strengths-based approach is needed to mitigate the issue of inequity and call for a flexible, universal and culturally sensitive approach to WIL.

## **What can we learn from this Special Issue?**

The collective knowledge in this issue suggests that there is significant value in authentic, practice-based experiences outside or alongside a physical workplace. The papers in this issue are united in the argument that there is benefit to student learning through NPWIL activities. This is a growing

area in which innovations, hybrids and new models will emerge as educators tweak and improve programs and shape experiences to accommodate student and industry partner's needs.

To realise the expanding benefits of NPWIL, there are several areas of interest for future research that have been identified in this issue. Conceiving of WIL across a whole course, rather than in discrete units of study, is increasingly being taken up as an approach that is essential to preparing students for work. Program teams are encouraged to adopt a shared responsibility for intentionally designing and facilitating WIL through integrative activities that are aligned to students' learning outcomes, assessment, and teaching and learning plans. Scaffolding a variety of WIL activities, including those that are NPWIL across a degree, will expose students to multiple opportunities to practise the roles or activities that they are likely to assume upon graduation. What we need to see next are examples and evaluations of the benefits of these scaffolded approaches for students and their employability. There needs to be greater articulation and integration of different forms of WIL across a course to enable multiple touchpoints of career development learning to aid reflection on the discipline and imagine future career possibilities.

The COVID-19 situation has been complex and messy and experimental in many cases, while for some, it has provided rich learning opportunities. What comes next though is the need to evaluate and reflect on these rapid changes, to maintain those activities that provided quality learning outcomes or that streamlined processes for industry, students or educators. With an increase in virtual and online experiences or platforms, attention towards equity and access for all students, including the scalability of programs, warrant further investigation and will be critical areas of interest. It's important that as a community of educators, we think deeply about what comes next, after the journey through our tertiary courses and programs, to not only support the transition into work but to ensure that students can respond to 'work' in all its emerging guises.

## Acknowledgement

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