Work Integrated Learning (WIL) practitioners’ perceptions of the value of Communities of Practice.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Education in Tertiary Education at Massey University (Manawatū), New Zealand.

Leanne Nicholas
2017
Abstract

Work integrated learning (WIL) practitioners design and deliver situated, experiential learning opportunities for a growing number of programmes within the New Zealand tertiary sector. Professional development opportunities for WIL practitioners’ should lead to effectively designed and delivered WIL programmes for learners. Due to the limited availability of formal professional development opportunities, much of WIL practitioner development is through informal and incidental on-the-job learning (Lazarus, Oloroso, & Howison, 2011). Greater collaborative learning opportunities have been advocated as beneficial by the WIL community (Brown, 2010). In addition, professional development initiatives are increasingly focusing on Communities of Practice (CoP) to support situated learning for educators. The pressure on teachers required to design, teach, administer and manage WIL experiences, raises issues of how best to develop and support them in effectively fulfilling their roles.

This qualitative study explores and interprets the experiences and perceptions of WIL practitioners of the value of communities of practice. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. A recursive approach to the data collection and analysis stages (an adaption of the Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011) five cycles of value creation framework) was adopted.

The study findings indicate a lack of common understanding of WIL terminology, and that WIL practitioners want greater access to WIL networks, expertise, best practice and related policy information. The many and varied relationships of WIL practitioners, provide inherent values, upon which to benchmark and develop their practices. However, the invisible nature of many WIL activities, hidden within programmes, makes it difficult at times for WIL practitioners to identify each other, connect in networks and develop relationships. WIL practitioners want more collaborative learning opportunities and sharing of best practice resources. In spite of this, WIL practitioners are seeking out expertise that assists them to be more competent, knowledgeable and effective practitioners.

The study has highlighted that WIL practitioners are engaging in, and gaining value from, the very same process of learning within CoPs, that they co-ordinate for their students. WIL CoPs are valuable mechanisms for WIL practitioner development that should be acknowledged and encouraged.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Linda Rowan and Dr. Daniela Rosenstreich for your unwavering support, kind words, motivation and guidance throughout my study.

I would like to thank my study partner, Joany Grima, for your technical and philosophical wisdom.

Finally, I would like to thank the participants who gave freely with their time, without whom the study would not have been possible.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements ...................................................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... iv
List of Figures ............................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................. vi
Glossary ....................................................................................................................................... vii
Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................................ 1
  1.1 Background to this study .................................................................................................... 1
  1.2 Context ................................................................................................................................ 3
  1.3 Research aim and questions ............................................................................................... 3
  1.4 Outline of the methodology ............................................................................................... 4
  1.5 Significance of this research ............................................................................................. 4
  1.6 Overview of the thesis ........................................................................................................ 5
Chapter Two: Literature Review ................................................................................................... 6
  2.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................ 6
  2.2 Work integrated learning (WIL) - Experiential learning ..................................................... 6
  2.3 Defining WIL ...................................................................................................................... 8
  2.4 WIL practitioners’ development ...................................................................................... 12
  2.5 Collaborative Knowledge Building in WIL ................................................................. 15
  2.6 Learning in the workplace and Communities of Practice (CoP) ..................................... 17
  2.7 Measuring value creation in COPs ................................................................................... 21
  2.8 Considering online CoPs .................................................................................................. 22
  2.9 WIL Networks and Associations .................................................................................... 23
  2.10 Conclusions and research questions ............................................................................. 24
Chapter Three Methodology ....................................................................................................... 26
  3.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 26
  3.2 Research Approach ........................................................................................................... 26
  3.3 Method of data collection ................................................................................................. 27
  3.4 Ethical considerations ........................................................................................................ 28
  3.5 Research procedures ......................................................................................................... 31
  3.6 Data analysis ..................................................................................................................... 32
  3.7 Trustworthiness of the research ....................................................................................... 35
List of Figures

Figure 3.1: The main stages of the research process 27

Figure 4.1: Key themes emerging from participant interviews 39

Figure 4.2: Terms used during the interviews 40

Figure 4.3: WIL practitioner relationships and networks 44

Figure 4.4: Perceptions of value gained from the connections and relationships 47

Figure 4.5 The WIL Domain- pedagogy and policy 52

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Characteristics of CoPs 20

Table 2.2 Value creation framework 21

Table 3.1: First set of initial codes- value related 33

Table 3.2: Second set of initial codes- other themes and concepts 33

Table 3.3: Initial themes and sub-themes identified 34

Table 4.1: An overview of the participants and their WIL experiences 38

Table 5.1: Taxonomy of work integrated learning 65
Glossary

Community of practice (CoP)
A learning partnership including the collective intention to steward a domain of knowledge and to sustain learning about it; used interchangeably with community.

Cooperative education
A structured educational programme which combines classroom learning with productive, relevant work experience. Term inter-changeable with WIL.

Industry project
An academic assessment that requires the student to work on an industry related issue, in collaboration with an industry partner.

Internship
A temporary placement within a profession, normally as part of a programme of learning. Can be paid or unpaid.

Network
A set of relationships, personal interactions, and connections among participants who have personal reasons to connect.

Placement/Practicum
A type of work integrated learning that requires the student to be situated in the workplace

Value creation
The perceived worth of the learning enabled by community of practice and networking involvement

Work integrated learning (WIL)
An umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum

Work experience
Often used in the secondary system to denote time spend experiencing work as part of the career development process