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

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degree of**

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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.

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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

