



Embedding Career Development Learning and Work-integrated Learning at Universities

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Abstract

Work-integrated learning (WIL) programs are becoming popular with students, government, employers, and universities. A major benefit of a WIL program is the increased employability of students, and this matches well with the present trend whereby students expect a pay-off from their investment in education. Curriculum is one of the important products that universities offer to their stakeholders, but the curriculum has received less attention than might be expected. This paper discusses issues related to designing a WIL program for a post-graduate degree program. The importance of WIL programs in general is followed by discussion on how WIL, work and knowledge are related to each other. Issues relating to designing a successful WIL program are discussed by its faculty, academics and the employers as stakeholders in the program. The WIL program's implications for the post-graduate curriculum are also discussed.

Keywords: Curriculum, experiential learning, work-based learning, work-integrated learning.

Introduction:

It follows that for work-integrated learning, the delivery of career development learning should be based upon a lifelong learning perspective and framework. Accordingly, work-integrated learning can be subsumed under and serve as a practical vehicle for the broader notion of career development learning. Career education should be integrated with the curriculum, rather than added as an extraneous service, with its delivery shared by various parties (e.g., educators, employers, parents) and not simply by specialist groups. Career development learning could be delivered through specific modules, general cross-curriculum integration, or separate from the academic curriculum. The modular approach would entail either delivery of generic content relevant to all, customization of generic modules to suit a department or discipline, or modules that are specifically designed for the needs of a particular discipline. Furthermore, career development learning could be delivered by the university Career Service independently or in partnership with academic staff. In this section we overview conceptual, educational, and administrative frameworks that can be used to underpin career development learning and work-integrated learning.



Principles of Practice

Through an iterative process involving stakeholders in various surveys, forums and consultations (see the project methodology in Appendix A), the principles of practice listed below were developed for the design and delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning.

- Flexible partnerships support effective career development learning.
- Workplace experiences can provide genuine career development learning opportunities for all students. Multiple experiences and contexts enrich this learning.
- Career Development Learning is student centred, and designed to actively engage students in the workplace experience.
- Career development learning supports quality student centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students' lives.
- Universities encourage students' career development and workplace learning by supporting their capacity to systematically reflect, record, and articulate the acquired skills and experience.
- Quality assurance across the experience contributes to better outcomes.

Lifelong Career Self-Management

Cutting across employability, employability skills, and graduate attributes, is the idea of lifelong career self-management. This implies and subsumes the former through its emphasis upon developing and sustaining an individual's economic viability over his or her life. It goes beyond mere employability skills. However, it also implies ideas of personal growth, development, and extension—akin to the roundedness of graduate attributes; yet it entails a contemporary view of career that is holistic and balanced.

11 main career competencies within three main areas:

Area A: Personal Management

- Build and maintain a positive self-image
- Interact positively and effectively with others
- Career Development Learning Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning to the student experience
- Change and grow throughout life

Area B: Learning and Work Exploration

- Participate in life-long learning supportive of career goals
- Locate and effectively use career information
- Understand the relationship between work, society, and the economy

Area C: Career Building

- Secure/create and maintain work;
- Make career enhancing decisions;
- Maintain balanced life and work roles;
- Understand the changing nature of life and work roles;
- Understand, engage in and manage the career building process.



Areas B and C, Learning and Work Exploration and Career Building are the more relevant for the current project. Nevertheless, a holistic view of student experience and development should take into account personal management. Lifelong career development learning should take account of the competencies and establish them as key learning outcomes.

Learning Domains and Criteria: DOTS

A key objective of this project was to select a broad theoretical framework for career development learning which has been proven as relevant to the higher education sector internationally. Given the outcomes of the preliminary research processes of the project, we concluded that the conceptual framework which best satisfied criteria in terms of integration with the world-of-work, self-reflection, and transferability across settings was the DOTS framework. We chose the DOTS model of career development because it:

- has sustained decades of implementation in the higher education sector;
- may be represented in a succinct format, unlike more complex models; and
- lends itself to being readily understood by individuals who are not necessarily schooled in the theory of career development (e.g., academics, students, employers).



Using the DOTS framework, the key benefits of career development learning, with respect to lifelong learning and employability, pertain to the learning domains and criteria of: self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision making, and transition learning.



Self awareness

- Identify knowledge, abilities and transferable skills developed by one's degree
- Identify personal skills and how these can be deployed
- Identify one's interests, values and personality in the context of vocational and life planning
- Identify strengths and weaknesses, and areas requiring further development
- Develop a self-reflective stance to academic work and other activities
- Synthesise one's key strengths, goals and motivations into a rounded personal profile.

Opportunity awareness

- Demonstrate knowledge of general trends in graduate employment and opportunities for graduates in one's discipline
- Demonstrate understanding of the requirements of graduate recruiters
- Demonstrate research-based knowledge of typical degree-related career options and options in which one is interested

Decision making

- Identify the key elements of career decision-making, in the context of life planning
- Relate self-awareness to knowledge of different opportunities
- Evaluate how personal priorities may impact upon future career options
- Devise a short/medium-term career development action plan
- Identify tactics for addressing the role of chance in career development
- Review changing plans and ideas on an ongoing basis

Transition learning

- Demonstrate understanding of effective opportunity-search strategies
- Apply understanding of recruitment/selection methods to applications
- Demonstrate ability to use relevant vacancy information, including ways of accessing unadvertised vacancies
- Identify challenges and obstacles to success in obtaining suitable opportunities and strategies for addressing them
- Demonstrate capacity to vary self-presentation to meet requirements of specific opportunities
- Demonstrate ability to present oneself effectively in selection interviews and other selection processes

These processes of career development learning may also be considered as cyclical stages, with a person progressively moving through each, all the while generating understanding of himself or herself and pragmatic solutions to career-related problems or challenges. They also serve as a clear and simple model for arranging work-related learning experiences toward the end of career development learning.

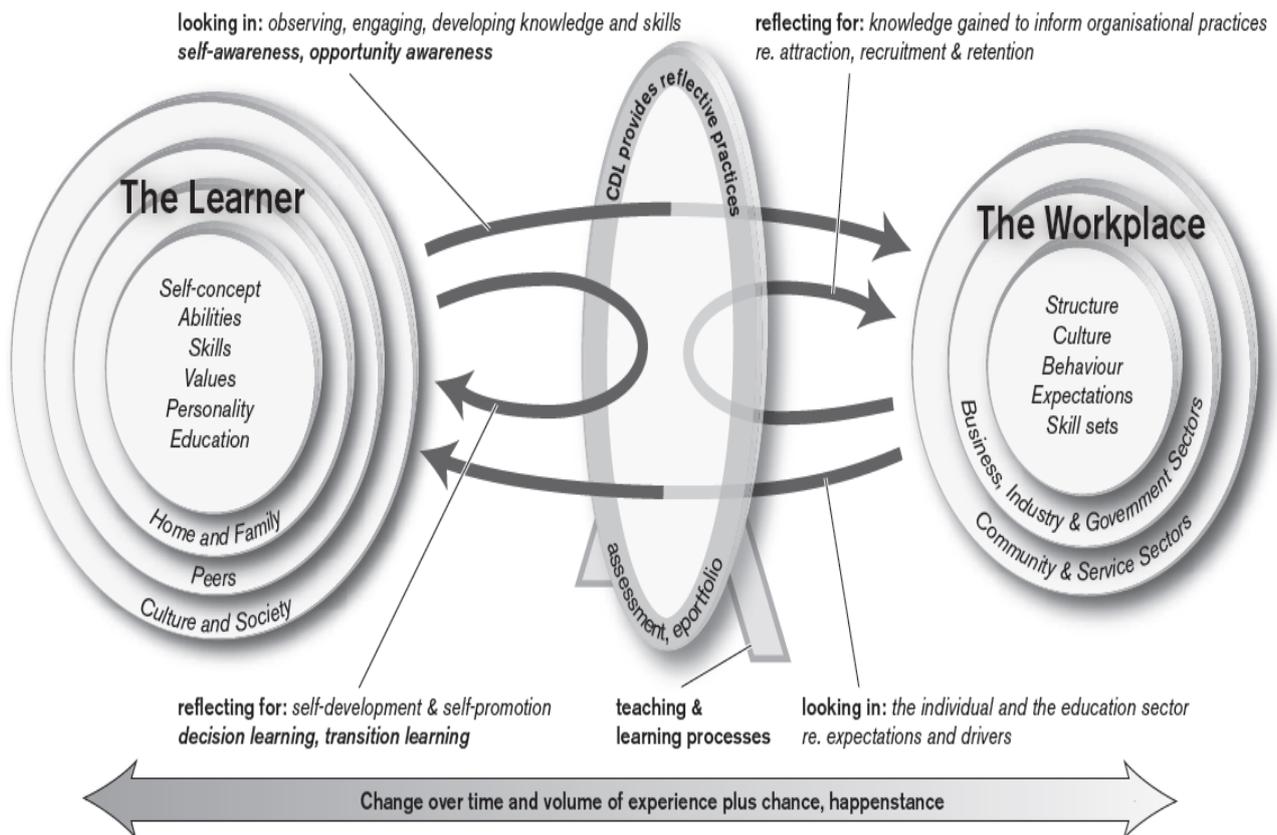
Reflective Learning: Two-Way Mirror

Workplace experiences where career development learning is effectively embedded provide benefits to the student, their educational institution, and the workplace. A critical success factor in the workplace experience being transformational for all parties is that the underpinning reflective practices are designed around career development learning. The metaphor of the *two-way mirror*



embodies the unique capacity which career development learning brings to the experience. Therefore, career development learning becomes the process which brings clarity and understanding to workplace experiences. The graphical model of career development learning and work-integrated learning depicted as two-way mirror was derived from the national symposium.

CDL & WiL: Looking from both sides of the two-way mirror



The Learner's Perspective

Career development learning occurs as a result of a range of internal and external variables. The internal elements are influenced most directly by the immediate environments of peers, home, family and community and, these are inevitably, influenced by the prevailing external variables such as culture/society/government and legislation. Individuals are uniquely influenced by: self concept & self esteem; personality; ethnicity; physical attributes; aptitudes; age; skills; interests; ability; values; sexual orientation; gender health; disability beliefs; work knowledge. In this domain of influence the following will have an influence on family, peers and ultimately individuals: media; employment market; education institutions; workplace legislation; workplace contexts; political decisions; globalisation.



Before: Looking into the mirror

Before the workplace experience, the learner can reflect upon themselves in order to make informed choices about a suitable workplace experience.

During: Looking through the mirror

During the workplace experience, the learner can gain insights into the structure and culture of the workplace and its requisite skills sets and expectations. This can be achieved through observation and engagement in work related activities. Career Development Learning Maximising the contribution of work-integrated learning to the student experience.

After: Looking into the mirror

After the workplace experience the learner uses reflective practices which leads to the transformation of the experience into learning and can inform their career and academic decision making. This can also be used for self development and articulation of experiences and skills for potential job search activities.

The Workplace Perspective

Before: Looking into the mirror

Before hosting the workplace experience, an organisation reflects upon their internal contexts, establishing appropriate projects, task and related skills requirements to conduct the activities, as well as identifying current staff who have the right skills to oversee the project and who may benefit the most from the experience.

During: Looking through the mirror

During the workplace experience, the organisation gains knowledge and understanding of future workers and their capacities and drivers, as well as the university sector itself.

After: Looking into the mirror

After the workplace experience the organisation reflects upon new ideas and approaches brought to the organisation and considers how these may be incorporated in future business processes. Staff involved in project supervision would also reflect upon their own skill development and factor into their own career and development plans. In addition the organisation reflects upon knowledge of future workers to inform their attraction, recruitment and retention strategies.

Useful strategies/programs that support and encourage the reflective processes may be captured through various assessable and non assessable activities, such as e-portfolios, portfolio building, journals and post experience reports and presentations.

Fundamentals of a Quality Framework

As self-accrediting institutions operating in a competitive environment replete with various systems of external benchmarking, each university has its own quality assurance policies and procedures for academic courses and services. University courses and units align their curriculum around agreed upon learning criteria for each discipline, perhaps in compliance with externally-established standards set by professional bodies. Measures of students' performance against those criteria (e.g., assessment) provide one form of quality control; indicating how a university education is preparing students to meet the demands of their discipline. Similarly, the diffusion of employability skills and graduate attributes into curriculum and concomitant indicators of their being taught within degrees



provides another dimension of quality. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that institution-specific policies and procedures could be extended to cover the delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning. Consultation with stakeholders throughout this project revealed a need to develop a quality system for the delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning.

Cross-sector Comparison

Whilst the high school sector is not the focus of this report, it is informative to briefly overview some of the attempts to generate a quality framework around workplace learning within the school sector.

Six elements in the guidelines for high quality workplace experiences:

1. Efficient, effective and appropriately resourced internal organizational arrangements;
2. Strong and enduring relationships with clients and stakeholders;
3. Managing demand for places sensitively and effectively;
4. Workplace preparation arrangements are systematic and consistently rigorous for employers and students;
5. Aim for mutually beneficial and rewarding workplace experiences for employers and students of all backgrounds; and
6. Reliability of the outcomes of the student's workplace experience.

The list of number of pertinent points that should be considered by stakeholders in career development learning and work-integrated learning in higher education settings:

- Provision of specific descriptions of the learning objectives including identified industry competencies and employability skills;
- Relevance of the tasks undertaken by the student in the work integrated learning and the students university course/ program;
- Suitability of the work integrated learning experience (duration and form) for the student and employer needs and preferences;
- Effectiveness of outlined processes for monitoring and supervision of placements effectively; and
- Ensuring multiple and rigorous sources of information for assessment processes. (e.g., up to date records of tasks and reflections in workplace learning records and student journals, supervisors' comments, competence against the relevant industry standards and direct observation of competencies performed in workplace settings).



Concluding remarks

Employers have indicated that students are often not prepared for the workplace and call on universities to produce more employable graduates by providing transferable skills that can be taken into the workplace. Students' subject matter knowledge is usually satisfactory but by improving and developing their competencies such as interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication and problem solving skills, value will be added to their intellectual capabilities making them more employable. Employers are expecting graduates to be work-ready and demanding a range of competencies and qualities of them. Educational institutions should be critical of their programme offerings and question if they are nurturing the appropriate competencies and consider how best to ensure these are developed.

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