# Curating work-integrated learning: 'Taking care' of disciplinary heritage, local institutional contexts and wellbeing via the open educational resources movement

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) has become commonplace in many higher education institutions across Australia. Similarly, there has been rapid integration of digital technologies for supporting teaching, learning and assessment in this domain. In the rush to address associated challenges within the sector – such as massification, limited placements, resourcing issues and staff turnover – the time to pause, take care of and meaningfully build upon WIL practices within this new digital context is often bypassed. This paper explores the role of the open educational resources (OER) movement for not only protecting and promoting the practices which practitioners care about in WIL – but also in shaping innovation that is mindful of local institutional contexts, disciplinary heritage and wellbeing. The notion of 'curating work-integrated learning' is introduced to critically reflect upon the OER movement via the lenses of multidimensionality, multimodality and mindfulness. Despite the quick turnover of technologies and shifts in the global educational market, there is a need for 'slow innovation' which invites a more ethical vision for shaping the future of higher education in the digital age. *(Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2016, 17(1), 1-8)*

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## 'TAKING CARE' OF WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

This paper explores how the concept of 'curating' can be applied to work-integrated learning (WIL) practices so as to better recognize gaps – and achievements – in regard to the intermingling processes of both preserving and innovating best practice. For example, the specific places in which WIL operates open up a range of obvious, and not so obvious, directions and repercussions. This idea of the 'seen' and 'unseen' is captured in the expression 'practice immeasurables' (Higgs, 2014) which characterize professional practice:

> Immeasurables are those typically deep aspects of practice that are impossible or difficult to measure and, at times, to articulate. They are often deliberately or inherently hidden and undisclosed, they are often marginalized, they are essentially invisible, unobserved or unspoken, they can be complex and hard to articulate and they are difficult to name. (p. 257)

There is immense potential for collecting the wealth of measureable and immeasurable knowledge gained from WIL practitioners and academics from across rural, remote and metropolitan Australia. We argue that curating these together can build a strong history and rich narrative for future generations of academics.

While the words 'curator', 'curating' or 'curation' often denote museums and art galleries – it is the broader notion of curation (and its etymology) which interests the authors. Kreps (2010) highlights how "If we return to the original meaning of a curator as a caretaker, then

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we can see how individuals or classes of people - such as priests, shamans, spiritual leaders or royal functionaries - also have been curators" (p. 313). The idea of 'taking care' of WIL practices appealed to the authors not only due to its primary concerns of preservation and protection – but also for its connotations of a broader regard and value for a capability approach, freedom and wellbeing (Sen, 1999). We propose how 'curating work-integrated learning' can assist in fostering a capability approach in higher education pedagogy which values the right and freedom to education, openness of disciplinary heritage, and wellbeing.

The word 'curation' also helps to foreground the intermingling of human and non-human components within WIL. For example, it shifts the focus from an anthropocentric view of the student, practitioner, educator, and other staff – to a broader socio-material assemblage of place, objects and people. As digital technologies become more ubiquitous in contemporary society, how these technologies are shaping curation is apparent. For instance, Yakel (2007) articulates how the term 'digital curation' is "becoming the umbrella term for digital preservation, data curation, and digital asset and electronic records management" (p. 338). There is a need to explicitly link this notion of digital curation to WIL so as to make more visible the often invisible work being done by WIL academics. This is not to reduce such work to management efficiencies of accountability, or transparency – but rather to document, respect and build upon the monumental work already often being done.

What imperative is there to explore the interrelationship between 'curation' and 'work-integrated learning'? As WIL practices rapidly evolve, there are existing hidden innovations, often occurring in isolation, that need to be brought to the fore. There is a need to identify, share and link good practices – so as to inform and shape future WIL practices. While there may be a history of this already taking place in particular disciplines and institutions, we suggest that there has not been a conceptual framework to articulate this process (for both the value of when it is being done – plus to highlight the loss when it is not being done). 'Curating' offers a way of contemplating the unique and nuanced practices of WIL:

> We are now presented with the opportunity to redefine curating as social practice, by acknowledging the interplay among objects, people, and society. By defining curating as social practice, we can also become more aware of how curatorial work is relative to particular cultural contexts. No one set of practices or curatorial traditions is universally applicable or appropriate. (Kreps, 2010, p. 321)

This social practice lens helps to frame how curating WIL is about acknowledging the diversity, dynamism and variety of the work already being done – which is often creative and innovative, but at times remains unseen or undervalued. We suggest that the notion of 'curating' may help to disrupt the conformity, linearity and rigidity of managerial expectations which submerge the richness and temporality of WIL practices.

In the rush for student numbers and the marketization of universities, as evident in the current Australian experience, there is a dire need to stop and pause. For example, the 'rush' is evident in the large student class numbers which can potentially hinder the student experience, high staff turnover without transitional mentorship of new staff – plus the often invisible workload for WIL academics (Simpson & Gates, 2014). Drawing upon Sen's (1999) capability approach helps to reframe this top-down discourse toward a more human-centered optic which prioritizes people's wellbeing and freedom. It is important that WIL practices which enhance the development of students' professional and social capabilities do not become endangered; also critical to curation is that WIL innovations that are currently

hidden, or unsung, be brought to light. We propose that these processes of care, collaboration and co-creation can be facilitated by the notion of 'curating work-integrated learning'. This socio-technical perspective recognizes the new affordances enabled by the open educational resources (OER) movement, but not at the expense of human obligations, that is, the freedom and opportunity offered by the OER movement must not discount the wellbeing and choices of those involved in WIL practices.

## THE OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) MOVEMENT

A critical focus on Open Educational Resources (OER) is proposed as key to taking care of work-integrated learning heritage, plus mindfully shaping future innovations. Particularly in view that: "the OER movement and its ramifications are still in their infancy compared with other fields of educational theory and research" (Bossu & Gray, 2013, p. 23). The OER movement is central to international narratives focused on supporting the right to education in the 'information society' (UNESCO, 2012); it is defined as "digitized materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research" and spans three areas: learning content (courses, courseware, module, learning objects, journals), tools (software, learning management systems, online learning communities) and implementation resources (licenses, design principles) (OECD, 2007).

Within the Australian context, the researchers in a project funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) have developed a free online curriculum development course to support OER and open educational practices in Australia (Bossu & Fountain, 2015). The authors highlight:

> …(the) role of the open learning community of practice is to support members to rework and remix relevant OER to respond to the needs of academic staff working in the local and national contexts, especially in relation to disciplinary standards and regulatory frameworks in higher education (p. 129).

Yet these processes of opening up the freedom of learning and resources are not seamless, nor uneven; a range of barriers, constraints and tensions are evident from international experiences. For example, an OECD report *Giving Knowledge for Free: The Emergence of Open Educational Resources* (OECD, 2007), suggests a number of ways to 'lower the threshold for participation', including: training educators about the use and production of digital learning resources and copyright law; integrating institutional level incentives, such as integrating it within the professional development process, criteria for excellence in teaching etc; alongside logistics that take into account aspects such as licenses, compatibility, open standards and open source software.

Another important dimension beyond professional development, institutional support and the supply chains of educational resources and expertise are the new ethical aspects which need to be brought to light. In a report highlighting best practice of open educational resources, Bossu and Gray (2013) highlight the central role of OER for the 'pedagogical imagination' in the context of the global education market; stating how "OER does not exist in a morally neutral world" (p. 7), there is a strong need to consider implications for indigenous and/or disadvantaged groups – plus distinctions of class, race, ethnicity and gender. A corresponding critique of the OER movement is how it is often aligned with 'negative liberalism' which "concerns itself entirely with the removal of obstructions to personal liberty, and offers no vision for how freedom might actually operate in practice"

(Knox, 2013, p. 823). This notion of autonomy needs to be problematized, as Knox suggests, via further research into: the pedagogical implications of openly accessible information; issues stemming from a two-tier education system; the role of teaching; presumptions about self-directed learning - plus the commodification of education. In addition to this, a report identifying the "poor use of OER could be due to the fact that OER practices and initiatives have not yet been included in the current strategic plans of most participating institutions" (Bossu et al., 2014, p. 39). As we are still at the beginning of understanding the full extent and possibilities of OER within the Australian higher education landscape, we propose a way of mindfully and creatively integrating these opportunities within WIL curation.

## CURATING WIL PRACTICES VIA THE OER MOVEMENT: A 'SLOW INNOVATION' APPROACH

Curating is as crucial to WIL as it can be to scholars of 'lost languages' and lost cultural 'ways of knowing'. There is a concern that some pockets of rich knowledge and practices may become lost amidst the rapid changes occurring within higher education and society. If we understand 'slowing down' as being more reflective, participatory and mindful (rather than lethargic) – how can we begin to do so? We propose how the OER movement can become a key foundation for curating WIL practices which are mindful of disciplinary heritage, local institutional contexts and fostering a capability approach. Yet this approach requires pausing and interrupting the discourses of marketization and commodification which often take quick-fix approaches to educational innovation. A way of fostering a more reflective rhythm is 'slow innovation', "an alternative, complementary approach to innovation: an approach that provides room for exploration, reflection and learning, so that participants in an innovation process can constructively combine practice and theory and engage in joint learning and joint creation" (Steen & Dhondt, 2010, p. 2). Building upon this, Swirski and Simpson (2012) proposed 'WIL innovation flow' as a way of countering fast and unthoughtful innovation in higher education; this is done through acknowledging the complexity, artifacts, co-creation and social-ecology which embodies a more holistic approach. Such a heuristic device also attends to Johnston's (2011) call for more research into the "theoretical assumptions of WIL, providing evidence of the transformative potential of education for a just and productive society" (p. 181).

Curating WIL is a way of practically and productively countering the quick-paced, neoliberal discourse within higher education. This supports Johnston's (2011) claim that:

> In order to negotiate the tensions between the promise of the university as the critic and conscience of society operating within neoliberal economic realities, more research is needed to supply detailed, specific methods of teaching that contribute to a broader project of imagining a post-neoliberal future. (p. 181)

Curating WIL is a way of taking the time to be conscious and considerate about not just the history of the WIL sector, but its current and future practices as well – especially in relation to the challenges and opportunities of digital technologies. It is not simply about digitally archiving, or accumulating resources – it is also about taking stock of where we have come from, and where we are heading as learners, educators, practitioners and staff. While this may be happening to some extent in a number of disciplines already – for many others this is not currently so. For instance, in an Australian mixed-method study (Busso et al., 2014) participants highlighted "that there has been insufficient institutional support to encourage and promote the adoption of OER in their institutions" (p. 39).

Based upon a 'slow innovation' ethos the authors propose a theoretical framework (Figure 1) for exploring the role of the OER movement in curating, or taking care, of work-integrated learning (dimensions of which are described in further detail below). In tune with the complexity, artifacts, co-creation and social-ecology of 'WIL innovation flow' (Swirski & Simpson, 2012), curating WIL invites a greater awareness and understanding of the multidimensional, multimodal and mindful dimensions of WIL practices.

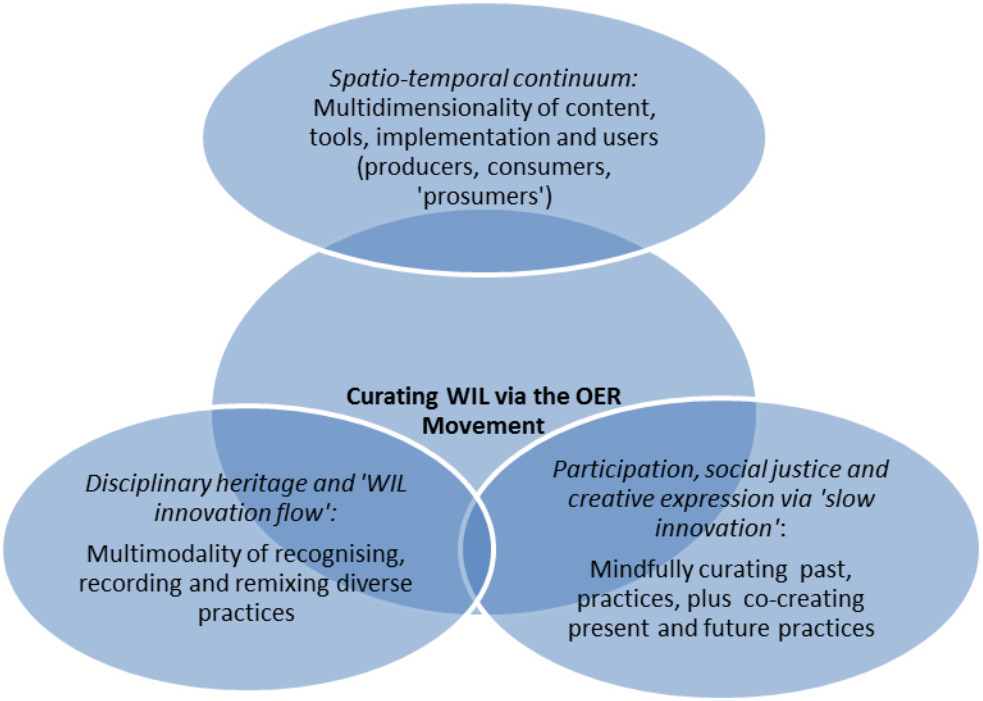


FIGURE 1: Curating work-integrated learning via the OER movement

The multidimensionality of curating WIL foregrounds the continuum of material and non-material relationships and history which shape WIL practices – which now span local, regional and global contexts. This opens up new forms of spatial and temporal scales: temporally, resources are no longer static, but dynamic and open to re-use and remixing over time; spatially, they are open to being tailored for local, particular contexts – while still drawing on and learning from best practice from a university nearby, or faraway. Examples of this are highlighted in two case studies of rural and remote workplace learning (Simpson et al., 2013). Such a localized curating process highlights the multidimensional tapestry of WIL in its particular positions and places, thereby not letting them become 'endangered', or threatened. This notion of multidimensionality aligns with the complexity aspects of 'WIL innovation flow' (Swirski & Simpson, 2012). Increasing awareness of this enables educators, practitioners and other staff to identify the localized challenges and opportunities which impact WIL practices – and how this can lead to more situated responses and better-tailored innovations. The notion of 'curating' is therefore distinct from other forms of qualitative research and analysis – it suggests a reflexive, activist approach for preserving and innovating best practice. The OER movement offers way to identify, collate and share these rich resources - which can be supplemented even further by relevant international resources.

The multimodality of curating WIL highlights the various ways in which we can critically reflect upon and record WIL practices. The term 'multimodality' (Kress, 2010) provides a lens toward understanding the scope of aural, visual and textual modalities which can all contribute to enhancing the communication and understanding of WIL. But how are we collecting and curating such rich insights and progressions within WIL communities of practice? The authors argue that multimodality recognizes the diverse ways in which we can express and share our practices not just in text-based forms, but through video and sound as well. The process of archiving activities, sharing resources and collaborating on new networks and initiatives takes on new possibilities and directions as we understand how multimodality can enrich not only the record of WIL practices, but its renewal as well. This negates the value of sharing knowledge and the support network which can so richly inform WIL. How can we collect and curate these 'unsung practices' and rich pockets of knowledge which sometimes slip by unacknowledged? Acknowledging multimodality of how we collect and curate WIL practices can inform this journey of 'taking care' of WIL practices. While text-based documents are important – there is a wealth of other expressive ways in which the aural and visual can also be documented and shared. Again, some disciplines are doing this already through the creation of podcasts, vlogs, vodcasts and Moodle sites; for example, on the New Zealand Ako Aotearoa National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence website (2015) there is space to develop public or private online communities of practice. We recognize such national and institutional digital repositories are extremely valuable – yet the way in which resources are collected and shared could be enhanced much further. The material prospects of multimodality – its aural, visual and textual possibilities – aligns with the 'artifacts' aspect of WIL Innovation Flow (Swirski & Simpson, 2012) has scope for much further innovative development. Even though 'digital curation' has become a common term within the Information and Library Sciences (Yakel, 2007) it is still relatively underexplored in WIL – especially in relation to the OER movement.

The mindfulness of curating WIL emphasizes the need to shape future practices from a holistic, social-ecological approach; this corresponds with the 'social-ecology' aspect of WIL Innovation Flow (Swirski & Simpson, 2012). Such a perspective recognizes that immediate, short-term gains should not be the sole priority; rather, longer term social, ethical and material repercussions and relationships must be taken into consideration as well. Issues of participation, social justice and equity therefore need to be key in how the open education movement unfolds (Tait, 2013). Moreover, this opens up creative possibilities and forms of expression in relation to then novel ways we curate past practices – plus co-create present and future practices. This mindfulness and 'curatorial imagination' draws upon the principals of respect and reciprocity – that the actions and choices we take now will be to the advantage of a collective, longer term wellbeing. This mindfulness draws upon Sen's (1999) capability approach and its potential for alternatively framing neoliberal discourses, infrastructures and delivery models of open learning (e.g., Harreveld, 2010).

## TOWARDS A 'CURATORIAL IMAGINATION'

Work-integrated learning (WIL) has become increasingly popular across the higher education sector as a way of developing students' professional and social capabilities. Alongside its many possibilities are a number of tensions in some of the ways it is being assembled and operated. As a way of addressing these, we invite readers to pause and recognize the richness of WIL practices to date, alongside the role of digital technologies to help curate and support innovations which are mindful of local institutional contexts,

disciplinary heritage and a 'capability approach' (Sen, 1999). That is, in the rush to offer (or expand) WIL in the context of the OER movement, what should not be lost is the complexity, wellbeing and freedom of what constitutes learning, equity and social justice. Based upon the principles of 'slow innovation in higher education' and 'WIL innovation flow' (Swirski & Simpson, 2012), higher education can become more holistic and mindful in its assemblage. The notion of curating work-integrated learning via the OER movement is proposed as a way of not just preserving the past, but also as a way of innovating present and future practices as well. It is argued that such explorations can both inspire and humble us to not simply capture, share and distributed what we think is endangered, or unsung – but also the need to shape digital infrastructures and critical dialogue that fosters wellbeing. By taking the time to examine the OER movement in relation to dimensions of multidimensionality, multimodality and mindfulness we argue that WIL can not only richly embrace its history and heritage – but also engender co-creative and ethical trajectories for educational futures. Barnett (2013) invites us to consider the role imagination has to play in expanding the idea and institutional form of the university towards an ecological ethos. Amid the algorithmic lights, bells, whistles, and coded promises that the OER movement offers, the rhythm of a 'curatorial imagination' invites us to steady our pace and consider such pedagogical and moral bearings.

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