Observational research in work-integrated learning

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Observational research has a long history in many disciplines, such as education and organizational studies, yet has had slow uptake in the scholarship of work-integrated learning (WIL). Observational research enables the researcher to journey inside workplace or community sites where actions and conversations unfold, to unpack the complexities of work, learning and practice. This paper looks at observational methodologies and their use in WIL research, highlighting practical methods for accessing and generating data, and discussing criteria for judging the quality of observational research. It introduces WIL researchers to alternative methods to elicit data, to consider making their bodies, thoughts and reflections part of the research itself.

Keywords: Ethnography, methodology, methods, observation, work-integrated learning

> *To make explicit the meaning, the significance, of everyday practices in any kind of truly explanatory manner requires going beneath the surface to those messy spaces of our lives where we commonly don't explain why we do what we do* (Pader, 2006, p. 174).

What could we learn if we located WIL research to where practice unfolds? What new knowledge could we discover if we went beneath the surface, into the deep dark waters where learning, work and practice transpire in messy exchanges? A place that may resist obvious patterns or categories, an emergent place, a place that is challenging for a student, familiar to its workers, and incredibly rich for the pioneering researcher. The research field of WIL is growing, with new insights into a range of WIL factors, issues, perceptions and programs shaping collective knowledge and practice in the WIL community. Yet despite the proliferation of WIL research, there remain questions and uncertainties when it comes to understanding what happens when students go on placement (Dean, Sykes, & Turbill, 2018). While students' experiences and perceptions of placements can be readily accessible, simply by asking, it can also be limited because people can't always "explain why we do what we do" (Pader, 2006, p. 174).

In this paper, the workplace or community site is introduced as a rich space for WIL research, specifically through observational methodologies that place the researcher alongside action to witness and make explicit the significance and meanings of placement practice. Predominant methodologies in WIL such as case study or mixed methods research (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018) keep the researcher at a distance to where learning and practice is located. Reflexive methodologies and insider research position the researcher inside inquiry, however, to date have largely not engaged with observation in the workplace (Dean et al., 2018). By utilizing observational methodologies, researchers could learn of the factors, social, cultural and material, that enable, constrain and shape what is possible. Such insights are necessary to help inform fundamental issues in the WIL domain, such as how to effectively design WIL assessments (Dean, Sykes, Agostinho, & Clements, 2012; Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014; Higgs, 2014; Hodges, Eames, & Coll, 2014; Jackson, 2018), examine the transfer of learning (Jackson, 2016; Tennant, 1999) or relate with partners through richer understandings of the embodied and situated practices of supervisors.

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In a community as interdisciplinary as WIL, with a range of presuppositions and assumptions, there is a need to be explicitly reflective about methodologies adopted and procedures to access and generate data, beyond a simple description of settings and sources (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Fleming and Zegwaard (2018) propose WIL researchers "communicate clearly the methodology that underpins the study as well as the methods used so that the appropriateness of the research approach applied to the context of the research can be critiqued" (p. 206). To this end, in this paper I aim to model these explicit statements for observational research in WIL, using vignettes from my research experiences. I also draw attention to how quality in observational methodologies might be judged. Researchers may be familiar with quality indicators such as reliability, rigor and generalizability. Yet for observational research, a different set of criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of research is applied and discussed in this paper.

To introduce observational methdologies, methods and processes, I first look briefly at observational methodologies and their use in WIL research. Next, I highlight methods for accessing and generating data, before finally discussing how the quality of our selected methods and processes may be evaluated or judged. It is my hope this paper will be a practical resource for WIL researchers, those new and those more experienced, to explore potential methods, concepts, research spaces and topics related to conducting observational research.

OBSERVATIONAL METHODOLOGIES

In order to examine phenomena in context, practice-based researchers have argued that it is critical to employ observational methodologies that situate the researcher in the workplace site (Ybema, Yanow, Wels & Kamsteeg, 2009). Observational research avoids the researcher's dependence on the perceptions, understandings and accounts of respondents, opening themselves up to discover aspects of WIL that participants "may be unaware of, or which, for other reasons, they find difficult to articulate" (Alvesson, 1996, p. 467). Perhaps the most common methodologies that deploy the researcher to the practice site include case studies, action research and ethnography. While there are extensive examples of WIL studies employing case study and action research methodologies, or other similar local WIL research projects in one's own context (Lucas, Fleming & Bhosale, 2018), few of these are located at the workplace or community site. To a much lesser extent, only a handful of studies in the last decade have adopted ethnography in WIL or service-learning research (e.g., Dean, Sykes & Turbill, 2012; Polin & Keene, 2010; Watson, 2008). Ethnography has been widely used to investigate workplace phenomena and has contributed substantial knowledge to the study of organizations. Its potential in those same workspaces, with an application to WIL, is yet to be fully realized.

Ethnography

In a broad sense, ethnography is a form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and experiential accounts of both researcher and participants (Denzin, 1997). Ethnography is a methodological sensibility that enables a close-up understanding of the social world by enduring extended periods of "hands-on time digging in the field" (Dawson, 1997, p. 404). In doing so, new insights into what might be considered ordinary or routine to some, but curiosities to others, are revealed (Ybema et al., 2009). Centrally, ethnography is a process of sense-making of situated actors whereby the ethnographer's physical proximity is also the instrument for ethnographic knowing (Yanow, 2012). Given this entanglement in the construction of data, ethnographers remain reflexively aware of their geographic (physical and spatial) and demographic (access and limitations) characteristics when writing their accounts (Yanow, Ybema, & van Hulst, 2012).

The application of ethnographic research is diverse and widespread. Given that WIL is conducted across higher education and workplace spaces, the potential and scope of ethnography to bestride different domains is useful. Ethnography has been adopted to investigate educational phenomena such as language and literacy (Heath & Street, 2008), policy (Walford, 2001), teacher education (Frank & Uy, 2004), and evaluation (Fetterman, 1984) to name a few. Ethnography has also been used extensively to investigate workplace phenomena, for example, the effects of managerial decisions, the role of materiality, the silences in organizational discourses, and the importance of social interactions, among others (Yanow, 2012).

In my WIL research (Dean, Sykes, & Turbill, 2012; 2018), I have employed ethnography to investigate the learning practices of business students on placement. I was interested in what interns did on placement to learn work (discipline) practices and how social, contextual and material relations are productive of or constrain informal learning. Ethnography was selected as it meant I could spend weeks following, participating, conversing, observing, and being in the same spaces as interns. I followed three interns in their respective placement sites and observed what they did (and did not do) and said (or could not say), who they interacted with, what they used, how they used it, when they used it and with whom. This amount of time and detail meant I could build a narrative of informal learning on placement that represented authentic practice.

A Slow Uptake in WIL Research

A simple exploratory review of papers in the *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* over a five year period (2014 - 2018), reveals interviews and surveys/questionnaires as preferred methods for empirical WIL research. Of the 137 papers across 19 issues, 44.5 percent (61/137) are empirical studies employing survey or questionnaire methods and 34 percent (47/137) are empirical studies employing interview or focus group methods. There were no papers that explicitly employed observation in placement sites as a method. Two papers used observation-of-self to examine aspects of their own academic practice using insider researcher enquiry (Fleming, 2018) and critical ethnography (Jovanovic, Fane & Andrew, 2018). These two papers borrow similar research reflexivities to ethnography. Two different papers mention observations but do not use it in their research. The first mentions the potential usefulness of observation, stating "other data sources, for example, observations of students' interactions and behaviours whilst on placement would have added depth to the exploratory case study" (Brewer & Flavell, 2018, p. 179). Another discusses having to rethink their initial design to include observations, due to a low participant response (McEwen & Trede, 2014).

Outside this five year period, there is also scarce uptake of observational methodologies in WIL studies, including those studies from which important theoretical models of workplace learning and knowledge transfer are derived. For example, in the 1990s and early 2000s seminal work was developed by Stephen Billett (1992; 1994; 1995; 1996; 1998, 2000) that conceptualized workplace learning for the vocations and for learning in natural settings. Notwithstanding these salient contributions to understanding informal, workplace learning as distinct to formal learning, it is noted that observational methodologies were not selected as the main source for empirical data collection. Instead empirical studies (Billett, 1994; 2000) foregrounded critical incident interview techniques, which in the case of the later paper (Billett, 2000) were conducted on-site over a six month period and included regular visits to sites "observing and interacting with workplace staff which often included others than those directly involved in the project" (Billett, 2000, p. 276). It might also be noted that participants were not engaged in a WIL program, but instead were workplace employees, which further suggests that a gap remains in utilizing observation in WIL research to deepen our knowledge through watching how work, learning and practice unfolds.

Despite this limited uptake, it is my belief that observational methodologies can offer much to deepening our understanding of WIL placement phenomena. In my study I was able to critique existing models and trajectories of informal learning on placement, the findings of which had direct applications to the way in which the assessment items were designed. It also contributed new insights into how interns learn on placement and the way in which they transitioned into the space (Dean, Sykes, & Turbill, 2012). These findings would not have been unearthed if I had chosen to interview students or their supervisors. It required "hands-on time digging in the field" (Dawson, 1997, p. 404).

APPROPRIATE METHODS FOR OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH

In order to locate research in WIL spaces, a researcher must consider using multiple methods to combine contextual and temporal observations with the more perceptual and in-depth probing gathered from interviews (Dawson, 1997). Elsewhere I have discussed six methods that I used for my ethnographic study (Dean et al., 2018), including writing field notes and reflexive writing. Here, however, I want to expand on and illustrate the way in which four of these methods were applied in my research and illustrate these methods with examples.

Participant Observation

The researcher's role can move along a spectrum of observation and participation. At the 'more observational end', for example attending formal meetings between employees, one's role is more 'observer as participant'. At the 'more participant end', such as helping carry items, brainstorm an idea or chatting over lunch, one's role is more 'participant as observer'. These roles have also been referred to as being an insider/ outsider in observational methodologies. Being an insider suggests knowledge of, or membership to, a cultural group so that one can identify with the subtleties, practices, discourses and symbols acted upon (Geertz, 1983). Being an outsider suggests a degree of externality, as an observer or stranger to the local context (Neyland, 2007). In the last decade however, a third dimension has been introduced, an alongsider (Carroll, 2009). As an alongsider, a researcher assists participants to make sense of what's going on (Carroll, 2009). Such sense-making may occur in action or post-action, such as during interviews, through asking questions such as "how do you know what to do here" or "can you tell me what you think just happened". It is essential that researchers are aware of these roles and reflect on how – and why - they may change during time in the field.

Participant observation can help make explicit underlying patterns that occur in everyday life. What are considered robust empirical research material to some are "simply the trivia of everyday life to others" (Pader, 2006). Participant observation forces researchers into direct contact with social and material phenomena for an extended period where, as a result, an appreciation for routines, norms and contexts is developed. For this reason, it has been described as "the fine art of hanging out - with a difference" (Pader, 2006, p. 163). As a research method in WIL, participant observation has the potential to reveal insights into the unexplored, given that outside the context of practice, many are unable to articulate the specifics of what they do (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Suchman, 1987).

My positioning as a researcher with the three interns in my research moved along the insider/outsider/alongsider spectrum. With each intern I sat nearby, jotting down notes in my book and speaking mostly when spoken to. Although my physical presence impacted the space, I allowed interns and employees to navigate our engagement. For example, much of my time with the first intern, Anna, a human resource management intern, was spent as an outsider. For the most part I positioned myself at the back of the room so I could observe Anna working at a desk, which changed each day depending on who was in the office and where she could find an unallocated desk space. Anna was

heavily involved in her work, and often treated me as if I was not there. This became particularly obvious on one occasion when she conducted an orientation with two new work experience students. As she showed them around the business, I received strange glances from the students to whom I hadn't been introduced. My researcher positioning with the second intern, Ben, an international student who was studying finance, differed. Ben was welcoming and made intentional efforts to find ways to help with my research. I found this insider positioning beneficial. At times Ben asked about his progress, how he compared to the other interns, how many pages I had written and if I was getting what I needed. This made me wonder if he was getting the feedback he needed from those in the workplace and spurred reflections on my (im)position as a researcher.

Reflexive Participant Interviews

Reflexive participant interviews are opportunities to ascertain deeper or different perspectives on issues, as well as allowing for processes of cross-checking fieldwork observations, theories or findings (Schaffer, 2006). In general, interviews uncover perceptions that can assist individuals to make sense of what they do and why they do it (Barley & Kunda, 2001). In addition to interview data, the interviewer may also consider paying attention to issues 'beyond tape-recorder knowledge' (Alvesson, 2011) such as the social, power and contextual relations that are implicated in the interview process.

In WIL research, reflexive interviews could be conducted before, during and/or after placements to question, elicit insight or prompt deeper thinking around student's or workplace supervisor's expectations, perceptions and experiences. The researcher may occasionally focus the interview on a specific critical incident or activity recorded in field notes to elicit more information or meaning on a phenomenon or to draw the participant's awareness to something of interest. It may be useful here to use "tell me more" questions, for example, "When your supervisor showed you how to do X, I noticed that your response was X. Could you tell me more about that?"

There are a range of interview techniques that are commensurate with observational methodologies to unpack what happens in practice. Nicolini's (2009) creative interview technique called 'interview to the double' (ITTD) is useful to articulate and represent skillful practice during interviews. ITTD is a method that invites the interviewee to assume the role of 'knower' and provide the necessary details to instruct the interviewer, or 'double', on how to perform certain professional tasks. When combined with other methods, ITTD can highlight a participant's criteria for judging the appropriateness of the situated activity and capture multifaceted, complex elements of practice. Other interview techniques that may be considered include Soss's (2006) practice-centered view of interviewing through talking as means of landing on meaningful explanations, or Scaffer's (2006) ordinary language interviewing that scrutinizes the meaning of a word in order to evoke insight into the various social realities constructed through the use of the term.

I found ITTD useful in participant interviews to correlate intern and supervisor's descriptions of the same practice. For instance, I asked Ben and his supervisor to use ITTD to instruct me how to perform a finance activity they both regularly had been involved in. This technique allowed me a way of reading together descriptions from the supervisor as 'knowing practitioner' and intern as 'learner' to uncover the degree to which each articulated certain aspects of practice. This process revealed judgements, tacit knowing, hidden meanings, use and organization of materials, and dimensions of informal learning.

Accessing, Collecting and Copying Artefacts

Artefacts are intimately involved in shaping the way an activity unfolds (Nicolini, 2013). The analysis of texts, documents or artefacts in tandem with other data can foster understanding of the social phenomenon being studied (Silverman, 2001). A researcher may question: how and for whom the artefact is created; why it was created and when; whether it has evolved in some way; what has and has not been included (if a document); how is it shaping what is being performed; and, how the artefact is being used (Silverman, 2001).

In my WIL research, the types of artefacts that I copied included subject materials, learning outcomes, assessments, lecture slides and handouts, marking material, reflective logs, placement program documents and workplace documents, products or artefacts such as emails, reports, to-do-lists, instructions and other correspondences (with permission). These were copied or collected at certain points in time, or over a period of time, to observe changes in the way it is used, it looks or has evolved. For example, examining how a student may write and sign-off on emails initially and towards the end of a placement may reveal thoughts on identity and professionalism progression. In my study, I photocopied one intern's to-do-list, see Figure 1, to track how this materiality transformed over time and how it was used and depended upon.

Photographs

Photographs can also be used as a complimentary source for producing data (Warren, 2009). Photographs can serve as visual aids to re-frame situational experiences, sociomaterial configurations (things in the space), contextualize practices and trigger memories (Warren, 2009). Used in interviews, photo-interviewing (Warren, 2009) can be a starting point for the generation of conversation and co-interpretation.

In my WIL research, interns volunteered to take photos of their learning spaces while in industry. This helped me to understand what they saw or were attuned to, as well as assist in capturing what they saw and did on days I was absent. On Ben's placement, he often spoke about barriers to learning due to the lack of technological advances in the finance unit. Ben described the computers on his placement as 'ancient' and reflected how many of the processes were performed manually, making progress slow. He insisted on taking his own photos, seen in Figure 2, to demonstrate the materials and tools he used to perform his role in finance. These photos were used in his post-placement interview to assist in sense making and connections around the use of tools and his learning.

As seen from this example, opportunity arises in observational methodologies for students or other WIL stakeholders to collaborate in the research process, in a co-production of data generation, meaning-making and storytelling. Engaging students or partner communities and organizations is unique but can potentially enrich the process as collaborators of research inquiry (Bilous, Hammersley & Lloyd, 2018). This authentic, situated approach invites participants to become co-researchers in the construction and understanding of their own lived experiences, which adds value and depth to the new knowledges being uncovered.

FIGURE 1: An intern's daily to-do-list at the beginning and end of placement.

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FIGURE 2: Ben's photos of his placement spaces and work artefacts.

NEITHER RIGOROUS NOR OBJECTIVE? JUDGING QUALITY

The data gathered through a selection of methods is subject to judgement to assess its quality. Interpretive research, including that which is exercised through observational methods, is often critiqued for being fundamentally flawed in the generation of data due to the reduced distance of researcher and participant. According to Yanow (2006), in interpretive research the idea that close distance implies reduced quality and objectivity is fraught, claiming "[t]he positivism-inflected assumption is that physical distance removes social realities from the sphere of the observer's influence". This is resolute for Alvesson (1996, p. 459) who postulates "the researcher is part of a socially constructed world and can hardly adapt a neutral position to that which one is studying".

Yanow (2006), like Alvesson (1996), challenges the ingrained positivist assumptions of what it is to be 'rigorous' and 'objective' in interpretive studies. All too often, interpretive research is held to the same evidentiary judgements concerning social realities as those studies with positivist presuppositions. Grounded in a positivist reality, the validity of data generated in a study may be judged according to the rigor and objectivity of its research procedures, such as a well formulated hypothesis, dependent and independent variables, measurement accuracy and testing, statistical significance, generalizability and reduction of bias.

When it comes to substantiating interpretive approaches, however, the prospectus for evidentiary standards has less to do with minimizing researcher distance or imposition, and more to do with criteria for trustworthiness. The presuppositions of interpretative research that espouse a socially constructed social world, uphold criteria for quality data residing in the researcher's reflexivity (Alvesson, 1996; Yanow, 2006). Reflexivity means that the researcher remains self-aware of their own assumptions and

of how his or her questions, presence or movements open or impede interpretive possibilities (Alvesson, 1996). It is through this reflexivity that justifications for small scale studies such as single-site field work or studies with low participant numbers can be articulated for their ability to go deep, "beneath the surface" (Pader, 2006).

Small Scale Studies

The popularity of single case studies in WIL suggests a familiarity with the usefulness of small scale studies. Advancing small-scale studies has been a focus for research in disciplines such as educational and organizational research for many years (Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Although unable to make statistical generalizations, the specificity of small scale studies can help refine conceptualizations and draw new conclusions and distinctions (Tsoukas, 2009). While the number of participants or case studies may be few, small in-depth studies are far from insubstantial:

> … the large number of hours of engaged observation, the number of conversations held, the number of interactions, and the ensuing number of observation and/or conversation and/or interaction analysed over the course of the research project – any one of which would yield a large 'n', indeed (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 15).

This resonates with organizational scholars such as Dawson (1997) who agree the focus need not be on working the generalizability of data. This is because in these in-depth, longitudinal studies even "…*one* is significant" (Dawson, 1997, p. 404, emphasis added).

Alvesson (1996), a leading advocate for interpretive-reflective approaches in the leadership field, also argues for the importance of local studies as a means of challenging existing approaches. He says that in order to advance a field of research with new empirically supported ideas and theories, we need to move away from "abstract, general categories and efforts to standardize meaning towards an increased focus on local patterns" (Alvesson, 1996, p. 464). In many well-known approaches to research, the meaning creation can be one-sided, that is, it is decided by one person, the 'authoritarian' or researcher. In these local contexts, personal, cultural and institutional meanings can be derived in co-creation with participants and thus enabling multiple voices to create narrative and unearth meaning. Taken together, these are just a few justifications of small scale research that are transferrable to the WIL domain and that can warrant employing observational methodologies.

Trustworthy Research

Several common questions are proposed to qualitative researchers to ascertain the quality of their research: how exactly did you do this research? how do you know that your study's representations are recognizable by the people you studied? and, how can we be sure that you didn't simply look for confirmatory evidence? Techniques for answering these questions and evaluating qualitative research can be historically traced to scholars such as Miles and Hubberman (1984) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). These scholars, among others, have put forward certain terms for judging the quality of research such as credibility, transparency, authenticity or trustworthiness.

Researchers utilizing observational methodologies will need to find ways to explicate the credibility of their research procedures, processes and data. One framework that may be useful for this is Schwartz-Shea's (2006) evaluative criteria for interpretive research. Schwartz-Shea (2006) distinguishes two orders of interpretive evaluative criteria for judging the quality of qualitative organizational studies as outlined in Table 1. First-order terms are ubiquitous processes in interpretive research for judging

quality and include thick description, trustworthiness, reflexivity and triangulation. Second-order concepts are less well known, however are also useful techniques for achieving trustworthy research, these are informant feedback/member checks, audit and negative case analysis.

TABLE 1: Evaluative criteria for interpretive research (adapted from Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

Evaluative criteria	Description
First-order evaluative measures	
Thick description	Characterizes the judgement that interpretive writing contains sufficient detail of an event, setting or person that becomes evidentiary data of context-specific meanings.
Trustworthiness	A prevalent umbrella concept to denote the deliberate, transparent and ethical processes to judge the quality of research as trustworthy.
Reflexivity	Used in participant-observation research a 'reflexive journal' is kept by the researcher to record information about *self* and *method*.
Triangulation	Triangulation is described as a technique using different analytical tools to understand a phenomenon leading to a process of cross checking.
Second-order evaluative measures	
Informant feedback/ member checks	An approach whereby participants evaluate the accuracy of research material.
Audit	An 'audit trail' is kept by the researcher to record activities and procedures, including connections made to theories, for the purpose of demonstrating temporal and systematic processes of how the study and ideas unfolded.
Negative case analysis	Involves checking the researcher's initial meaning making and challenging those assumptions and ideas.

In the research I conducted with interns on placement, I followed these criteria for trustworthy research. During fieldwork, I conducted myself in an ethical manner (according to practices approved by human ethics council) and ensured my goals were made transparent to those with whom I interacted (trustworthiness). As our relationship grew, the interns opened up to me and I ensured them of their privacy during these conversations. I recorded field notes while onsite and immediately made reflective entries after every placement day, interview or other relevant communication (reflexivity). I wrote rich accounts of events in my field notes to provide details on sayings and doings, body language, facial expressions, relationships and exchanges, spatial and temporal conditions (thick description). At the back of the field notebook, I kept an audit trail recording dates, times, locations, collection of any workplace or learning artefacts and times of photographs taken (audit). During analysis, I performed iterative readings of data and other notes assisted in confirming or questioning my position and presuppositions (negative case study analysis). In sum, these were some of the steps taken to ensure my study followed transparent and ethical guidelines, and appropriate protocols for performing trustworthy research practices.

CONCLUSION

There is much potential to grow our knowledge community if we were to start considering the practice site as a rich research space, waiting for exploration. The vastness, diversity, complexity and variability of placement sites, means that we need not look far for topics or issues to investigate. Examining phenomena in context opens up a range of new topics, issues or ideas in WIL pertaining to organizational culture, work practices, learning, pedagogical environments, stakeholder relationships or motivations, as well as more specific investigations of technologies, materiality, events or processes for example. This paper has demonstrated how observational research allows WIL researchers to ask different questions, questions that enable us to use our bodies, senses and reflexivity as the instrument for knowing. However, researchers new to the methodology must take care to ensure the methods and procedures for gathering data are transparent. Because of the relatively low uptake of the methodology, it is important to communicate to the community how to judge the quality of this research through evaluative criteria commensurate with interpretive research. Without explicit articulation of criterion and descriptions of how the study meets these evaluations, the study may run the risk of being held to standards underpinned by other scientific presuppositions.

As with all research methodologies, various challenges and limitations arise when conducting observational research. These challenges may include the degree of detail and time it takes to gain institutional human ethics approval, gaining access to an appropriate work site for prolonged durations, the substantial time investment for researchers collecting data in the field, and developing rapport and trust with participants. As the workplace is a complex site, there may be logistical and physical constraints on when to observe and where to be located while observing. Due to the scope of this paper, these challenges and limitations have not been expanded upon. Other topics of interest aligned to observational research that also have not been unpacked in this paper include commensurate theoretical frameworks, approaches to analysis or ethical considerations. The aim of this paper, however, was discuss observational research as a potential methodology in WIL. In doing so, the paper advocates for the workplace or community site where actions and conversations of students and supervisors transpire and are witnessed first-hand by the researcher, as a rich site for new research in WIL that will enable the community to learn more about what occurs on placement.

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About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues dealing with Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE). Since then the readership and authorship has become more international and terminology usage in the literature has favored the broader term of WIL, in 2018 the journal name was changed to the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning.

In this Journal, WIL is defined as "*an educational approach that uses relevant work-based experiences to allow students to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work as an intentional component of the curriculum*". Defining elements of this educational approach requires that students engage in authentic and meaningful work-related task, and must involve three stakeholders; the student, the university, and the workplace. Examples of practice include off-campus, workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (Co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurships, student-led enterprise, etc. WIL is related to, but not the same as, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's main aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, co-op/WIL practitioners, and researchers. The Journal desires to encourage quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of effective practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the New Zealand Association of Cooperative Education (NZACE), www.nzace.ac.nz.

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily of two forms; 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider best practice submissions.

Research publications should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data. And a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

Topical discussion articles should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Best practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal also seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of best practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.