

# The building blocks of relevant work experiences

DAVID DREWERY<sup>1</sup>

T. JUDENE PRETTI<sup>2</sup>

*University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada*

---

Relevant work experiences are central to the success of work-integrated learning (WIL) programs. However, how relevant work experiences are created is unclear. This study explores students' previous experiences to identify the "building blocks" of relevant WIL work experiences. Semi-structured interviews with undergraduate cooperative education (co-op) students were used to explore students' previous WIL work experiences ( $n = 17$ ). A thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified four building blocks of relevance: social integration, optimal challenge, congruence with field of work, and acquisition of knowledge and skills. Implications of these building blocks for WIL stakeholders seeking to create desirable work experiences, especially employers and employer-facing staff, are discussed.

Keywords: Integration, relevance, co-operative education, interviews, thematic analysis

---

Creating relevant work experiences is important to student success in work-integrated learning (WIL) programs. Relevance is the degree to which students perceive that their work experiences are connected to their academic training and career aspirations (Nevison et al., 2017). Ferns et al. (2014) stated that "successful student outcomes are reliant on the *relevance* and authenticity of the learning experience" (p. 2, emphasis added). Indeed, the relevance of students' work experiences is associated with several desirable outcomes ranging from better student performance at work (Drewery, Pretti & Barclay, 2016) to greater learning outcomes from the experience (Sharma et al., 1995; Smith & Worsfold, 2014).

The work context in which students are situated may be related to the relevance of their work experiences. Work context refers to the suite of situational characteristics that exert influence on variables at work (Johns, 2006). For example, students may be situated in an environment that encourages learning. Such an environment supports the exploration of new ideas and the search for development opportunities (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). The more that the organization encourages learning, the greater the opportunity for students to find connections between their coursework, work experience, and career plans (Nevison et al., 2017). This suggests that the context in which students work can influence the degree to which their work experience is relevant.

However, it is not yet clear how contextual features of students' work are related to the relevance of their work experiences. The focus of previous research has been on the role of relevance in establishing other outcomes. Nevison et al. (2017) were interested in understanding relevance as a mechanism by which organizational culture influences the meaningfulness of students' work. Smith (Smith, 2012; Smith & Worsfold, 2014) has examined relevance (or *alignment*) as an antecedent to the authenticity of students' work experiences and the learning outcomes of such experiences. Less research has explored the dynamics underlying relevance itself. If relevance is important to establishing desirable outcomes, it would be useful to understand conditions that render work experiences more relevant.

The purpose of this study is to identify the basic *building blocks* of relevant work term experiences. By building blocks, we mean the features of the work context to which students attribute the relevance of

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Dave Drewery, [dwdrewery@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:dwdrewery@uwaterloo.ca)

<sup>2</sup> Author is Associate Editor of IJWIL. To maintain anonymity of the reviewers and preserve the integrity of the double-blind review process, the review was managed by the Editor-In-Chief outside the IJWIL administrative process

their work experiences. The research question that drives the study is as follows: what conditions (i.e., building blocks) do students associate with work experiences that are most relevant to their academic studies and future career goals or plans? The study addresses this research question through a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with co-operative education (co-op) students who were asked to reflect on the relevance of previous work experiences. Insights from the study contribute to our understanding of how relevant work experiences might be created.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present research is guided by a theoretical framework of relevant work term experiences. A theoretical framework is a system of concepts and assumptions that guide research (Maxwell, 1996). It organizes notions that are important to understanding the phenomenon of interest. In this case, the theoretical framework offers a conceptualization of relevance and its relationship to other outcomes of work experiences. It also introduces the notion of work context which, it is suggested, is central to exploring the building blocks of relevant work experiences.

### *Relevant Work Experiences*

WIL is a form of education that integrates academic training with work experiences. The notion of relevance is at the heart of this pedagogical approach. This is reflected in definitions and descriptions of WIL. For instance, Smith (2012) defines WIL as “a curriculum design in which students spend time in professional, work or other practice settings *relevant* to their degrees of study and to their occupational futures” (p. 247, emphasis added). Ferns et al. (2016) also wrote that WIL programs embed “*relevant* real-world learning into the curriculum resulting in students being better prepared to enter the workforce” (Ferns et al., 2016, p. 363, emphasis added).

It is no surprise then that scholars have sought to define relevant work experiences. Definitions of relevant work experiences include two component parts (Nevison et al., 2017; Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015; Sharma et al., 1995). First, relevance has been described as a connection between students’ academic training and work experiences. Relevant work experiences are those that connect in some way to the content that students learn in the classroom. For example, a kinesiology student learning about muscular rehabilitation might find working with clients in a rehabilitation setting relevant. Such work might provide a clear link between academic theory and the practical application of that theory in the workplace.

Second, relevance has been described as a connection between the work experience and one’s expected career plans (Nevison et al., 2017; Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015). Students have expectations for their career paths, and they assess the extent to which each work experience is instrumental toward such expectations. For instance, a student who plans to become a lawyer might assess their work term as a law clerk to be highly relevant to their career plan. The skills the student might develop and the social connections they might build during the work term could be viewed as helpful toward their goals.

### *Relevance as Antecedent to Other Desirable Work Experience Outcomes*

Our understanding of work term relevance has been situated in research that focuses on desirable outcomes of students’ work experiences. Such outcomes include the extent to which students learn from their experiences and develop skills associated with greater employability (Smith & Worsfold, 2014). Students’ perceptions of relevance may be associated with such outcomes. For instance, Smith and Worsfold (2014) found that students’ perceptions of alignment between their work experiences and

academic experiences was positively associated with self-reported team skills development and work-readiness. This is consistent with a broader theory of learning that suggests the more personally relevant a situation is, the more mental energy the student is willing to invest and the greater their learning will be (Biggs, 2001).

Similarly, relevance has been identified as a characteristic of a satisfying work experience. Students' satisfaction with their work experience is desirable because it influences students' persistence toward career goals (Mau et al., 2008). Such satisfaction encourages students to stay on track toward the career they aim to have. The more personally relevant the work experience is, the more satisfying it is (Drewery, Pretti & Barclay, 2016; Smith & Worsfold, 2014; Sharma et al., 1995). This may be intuitive given that WIL programs strive to offer relevant work experiences (Ferns et al., 2014). Students likely seek out relevant work and develop expectations that their work will be relevant.

Collectively, the research reviewed above suggests the importance of creating relevant work experiences to students' success in WIL. Further, it suggests that understanding conditions underlying relevance could inform strategies for creating more successful WIL programs. However, previous research has not yet identified conditions that might be responsible for relevance (see Nevison et al., 2017 for exception). What are the conditions, or basic building blocks, of relevant work experiences? Moreover, what are the implications of such building blocks for the way in which WIL stakeholders might best create relevant work experiences? The present study seeks to address this by exploring students' work conditions.

#### *Work Context and Relevant Work Experiences*

The present research builds on initial evidence that work contexts might influence students' perceptions of work term relevance (Nevison et al., 2017). The physical environment in which students work, the contextual features of their relationships to others, and any factors that might bear on their role performance, including the presence of demands (e.g., role conflict) and resources may characterize students' work experiences (Ghitulescu, 2012; Johns, 2006). For instance, one may contextualize students' work in terms of a close social bonds with other coworkers (Ghitulescu, 2012). Further, work context also represents the bigger picture of students' work, such as the industry in which their work is situated. As an example, the organizational sector (e.g., public versus private) may be an important variable that contextualizes some work (Wright, 2004).

Work contexts influence individuals' work experiences in several important ways. For example, they impact employee confidence and motivation as well as performance. Work contexts characterized by conflict, complexity, and ambiguity can introduce confusion and stress, and result for the student in reduced motivation (Wright, 2004) and poor resilience (Ghitulescu, 2012). Alternatively, work contexts in which students are provided clear instruction and social support offer greater opportunities for a motivating a successful experience (e.g., Wright, 2004). This suggests that work contexts are useful to understanding how people experience work.

Emergent evidence further suggests that work contexts may help us understand the relevance of students' work experiences. In one study (Smith, 2012), students were asked to report perceptions of relevance (called alignment) and organizational onboarding tactics, such as whether their employer provided adequate training at the beginning of their work experience. Correlational analyses suggested that the greater students' perceptions of support from the organization during the onboarding process, the more relevant their work experience. This is consistent with other results

(Nevison et al., 2017) that suggest work contexts supportive of learning can enhance the relevance of students' work experiences.

## METHOD

Drawing from the notion of work context (Johns, 2006), and situated in the emergent literature on work term relevance (Smith, 2012; Nevison et al., 2017), the present study aims to identify the fundamental building blocks of a relevance work experience.

### *Data Collection*

Upon clearance from an institutional review board (project #40304), data were collected from co-operative education (co-op) students (n = 17) at a Canadian university. At this institution, co-op students search for jobs rather than being placed in them. Typically, they compete with others for jobs across several industries and do so multiple times (between three and five) throughout their degree programs. As such, they are exposed to jobs that might vary in terms of relevance. This situation made for a desirable setting in which to explore the dynamics of relevance.

Potential participants were invited to the study through their institutional email addresses which were obtained from the institution's co-op department. Those who agreed to participate took part in semi-structured interviews conducted in early 2019. All interviews occurred in-person, were conducted by a single interviewer, and were 40-minutes long on average. Table 1 shows students' academic programs and the number of work experiences that they completed. Participants represented a variety of academic programs in the social sciences, science, engineering, and professional programs. With the exception of one participant, all participants had more than one WIL work experiences prior to the study.

TABLE 1: Participant codes, academic disciplines, number of previous WIL work experiences.

Participant Code	Academic Discipline	Number of WIL Work Experiences
P1	Accounting/Finance	Six
P2	Engineering	Four
P3	Engineering	Six
P4	Engineering	Six
P5	Engineering	Six
P6	Science	Five
P7	Health Studies	Five
P8	Health Studies	Five
P9	Environmental Studies	Four
P10	Environmental Studies	Five
P11	Engineering	Six
P12	Science	Five
P13	Science	Five
P14	Accounting/Finance	Four
P15	Accounting/Finance	One
P16	Environmental Studies	Five
P17	Accounting/Finance	Five

*Interview Guide*

After welcoming participants, the interviewer described the focus of the study, which was students' perceptions of the relevance of their work experiences. The interviews then unfolded around two main questions. The first was "what does a relevant work experience mean to you?" Students were asked to provide examples of particularly relevant experiences and particularly irrelevant experiences. In this regard, interviews were based on the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) which is used to identify salient examples of a phenomenon (in this case, relevance).

The second question posed to participants was "what aspects contributed to the relevance of your experience?" Students were asked to identify the factors that might have explained the extent to which their experience was relevant to them. The goal was not to identify causal factors. Rather, we sought to identify building blocks that may be associated with relevant experiences. Probing questions were used where appropriate to encourage greater detail in responses.

*Data Analysis*

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts from the interviews provided the data to be analyzed. They were analyzed in the tradition of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). The lead author reviewed the transcripts and made a set of codes that summarized ideas that were common across the interviews. Code development was iterative; it occurred throughout the data collection process. Later in the coding process, the authors discussed and resolved discrepancies by returning to the data, often to confirm interpretations. Codes were then developed into broader themes that more generally described participants' responses. The analysis resulted in an account of the building blocks that participants identified as responsible for creating relevant experiences.

## FINDINGS

*Relevant Work Experiences*

Participants' definitions of relevant experiences were consistent with those offered in the literature. Two aspects of relevance were mentioned: academic connections and career connections. First, relevant experiences were those that had a close connection to students' academic programs. For instance, one participant said that relevance meant whether the experience was "relevant to my program kind of the thing and [what] I'm learning in my program" (P8). Another participant added "at first I would think, oh relevant to your coursework, so in marketing you did a project on this type of campaign. Well in your co-op are you going to do a project of this type of campaign" (P13).

Academic connections involved previous academic experiences as well as future ones. Such connections were greater when students could apply what they had learned in their courses to their work tasks. For example, Participant 6 said that "relevance was definitely to the techniques that I've been learning in my classes. I just never had a chance to perform them yet." This connection was also strengthened when work was relevant to future academic training. For example, Participant 17 noted their experience was relevant because "after that co-op I'm using what I've learned in that co-op in school as well."

Relevance also involved connections between the WIL work experience and students' careers. Participant 9 said relevance "means that it applies to, not only the program I'm in, but it also applies to, I guess, what I'm working toward after work, career wise." Participants reflecting on less relevant experiences said, "in terms of the day to day work [...] wouldn't have been something for life or I see

myself doing as a career" (P1) and "you don't think its going to apply to any work you're going to do [in the] future" (P17).

The interviews suggested that these two aspects of relevance were independent of each other and either one could account for a relevant experience. For some participants, relevant experiences were based on a strong academic connection even when the experience was unrelated to a career goal. For example, Participant 7, a health promotion student working in an agricultural business, said that their experience "was relevant in the fact that I was able to apply some health promotion tactics to it. But irrelevant in the fact that it was in the food industry and wasn't really something that I wanted to go down."

For others, relevant experiences involved clear career goals but weak links to coursework. One engineering student (P3) told us that "stuff like fluid mechanics, circuits, electromagnetism, thermal dynamics, I could go on, are not relevant to what I do and I would never use them again in the workplace". Another participant (P16) shared that "once you get into the workplace, like whatever program you took, it doesn't matter, it kind of becomes irrelevant, which I definitely didn't know or didn't think about prior to having a couple of co-op terms." Instead, what mattered for these participants was the link between the work and the career to which they aspired.

Of particular interest in this study were the features of the work context or building blocks that contributed to relevance. Four such building blocks were identified: social integration, optimal challenge, congruence with field of work, and acquisition of knowledge and skills.

#### *Social Integration*

There was a sense of social integration that was consistent with reports of relevance. This sense was described as feeling like a "full-time" employee. For instance, Participant 16 said that they "don't feel like a student or a co-op while you are there. You're a full-time employee, this is how it's going to be, get ready because you're doing this in eight months when you graduate." Participants who felt this way also reported having a relevant experience. Asked why their experience was relevant, Participant 3 responded that "the co-ops are treated as full time. So, I felt the sense that we very much were like we had similar responsibilities and we could ask questions just like anyone else to the CEO."

Inherent in this theme was that social integration provided participants with opportunities for informal social learning and such learning was relevant to students. Participant 13 described that:

Everyone in the office had a Bachelor of Science so seeing how they apply their degrees was interesting to me, that kind of made it relevant like "oh yeah after this, I worked here and I worked here and I took this chemistry course" it's just talking to co-workers was a really good part to make it relevant. (P13)

Reiterating the same theme, Participant 7 shared the following:

I was able to make connections with people that are in my field and able to talk to them about, through informational interviews, just like "What's your experience? How did you get to where you were?" Just asking for advice and things like that. In previous experiences I hadn't been able to.

*Optimal Challenge*

Participants who felt an optimal level of challenge in their work also thought that their experience was more relevant. Participant 8, a health studies student, said the following of their relevant experience:

I was able to collect the data, analyze the data and prepare an abstract for submission and a poster. [...] I get responsibility and also kind of building my own, like helping to integrate my personal goal into the workplace, building my CV.

Students who were not challenged reported that their experiences were less relevant. For Participant 16, one previous work experience “was not relevant because it was repetitive [...]. I already know it. Like I don't need to do it for four months, I could've done it for two weeks, and it would have been same value to me.” Participant 9 also told us that their experience was not very relevant because “it's just menial tasks that don't push you in any direction at all. You're just kind of stagnant. It's not relevant when you're doing something mind-numbing and you don't need to have any kind of education to do it.” (P9).

*Congruence with Field of Work*

An additional feature of relevant WIL work experiences was a connection between the experience and one's “field” of work. Participants had in mind a field (e.g., business, engineering, medicine) in which they aspired to work. They evaluated whether their WIL work experience was congruent with that field. The greater the congruence, the greater the relevance of the experience. This was reflected in participants' descriptions of relevant experiences. For instance, Participant 17 said that “for it to be relevant would be to gain experience in that field [...]” and later added “I am in environment and business, so I actually have to study environmental investing and then apply that to work and talk about that with clients as well as it's likely where I'll go after I graduate.”

The central role of congruence was echoed by others. Participant 12, aspiring toward a career in medicine, said their experience was relevant because it “has to do with medicine and science” and added later that relevance occurs “pretty much within [the] medical field and probably within physics but medicine or science.” Relevance was inhibited for participants who worked outside of the field that they hoped to join. For example, Participant 7 (a health student) said that a previous experience working in an accounting firm was “irrelevant in the fact that I wouldn't consider it necessarily in the health study, in the field that I would be wanting to go into.”

*Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills*

Central to the discussion of relevant experiences was the acquisition of knowledge and skills. When participants described highly relevant experiences, they also reported that they learned something valuable. When asked about what would make an experience relevant, Participant 17 stated “if any of those positions helps build those skills then that's definitely a relevant job.” Participant 12, a science student, described a relevant experience in the following way: “My first one was relevant because I got to read about tons of current research in science [...] So that was super relevant.” These students acquired new information or skills and such acquisition was associated with the relevance of their experiences.

Some students expected that the experience would be irrelevant to them, but learning new things seemed to reverse that. This was common for those working in a field perceived as different from the one they aspired toward. For example, Participant 3 shared they “still learned new things, maybe not

in the way I wanted to, but I learned, like, about product design, about how to manage myself in a very unsupervised environment and how to deal with that.” Similarly, Participant 12 said “the field was like somewhat different, but the skills I gained were so super relevant, and that’s important to me.”

Many students acquire knowledge about their career paths. That form of acquisition had a complicated relationship with relevance. For most, learning about or confirming one’s career path was a relevant learning experience. But for others, learning about *what not to do in the future* was an equally relevant learning experience. Participant 1 articulated that their experience was relevant because it helped them to identify “what I don’t like [...] I learned from a bad experience, not a bad experience, but from a lesser experience. That is why it’s relevant.” Participant 9 captured this in the following way:

The more relevant ones are the one that give me a clear idea of the future path I want to try and carve out for myself. Even if it’s, even if it’s me knowing I don’t want to do that. Yeah that was still very relevant for me because I would never have known that. And I maybe would have gone the wrong direction.

## DISCUSSION

The present study identifies four building blocks of students’ work contexts that may be important to creating relevant WIL work term experiences. First, greater social integration was associated with greater relevance. When students felt that they were part of the organization, often as a full time employee, they had a more relevant experience. This is consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977). According to that theory, a sense of closeness to others provides a relational context in which learning from those others occurs. Students are more likely to observe others and learn from them when they feel close to such others than when they feel distant from them. As well, close relationships are associated with support for informal learning (Saks & Gruman, 2012). When students are fully integrated into the organization, existing members might offer opportunities for students to experience authentic work. For instance, small gestures such as asking students’ opinions on organizational matters could create a sense of authenticity about the experience. Such authenticity is conceptually linked with relevance (Smith, 2012).

Second, optimal challenge might bolster relevance. Participants who were challenged and who had the tools to address that challenge experienced greater relevance than those who were bored or overwhelmed. Flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) suggests that optimally challenging tasks are psychologically engaging. They create moments of deep attention and concentration. Such mental states are conducive to learning (Bakker et al., 2012; Shernoff & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). When learning takes place, the experience becomes more relevant to the student (Drewery, Nevison, et al., 2016).

Third, relevance was enhanced when students thought that they were working in a field in which they aimed to work in the future. The career counselling literature has long suggested that congruence between person and work context impacts the quality of work experiences. For instance, the more that one’s job and organization match their goals and values, the more satisfied that individual is with their work (Perdue et al., 2007). Consistent with this, working in a job and/or organization that is congruent with one’s career goals may be satisfying because it is personally relevant to the student.

Fourth, knowledge and skill acquisition strengthened perceptions of relevance. When participants reported that they had learned an important skill or developed a new perspective, they also reported that the experience was relevant to them. This makes sense given that WIL students understand that the core purpose of WIL programs is one of learning and development. Acquiring new knowledge and skills is relevant to the reason students participate in such programs. This is also consistent with the



WIL literature that describes learning and relevance as interwoven components of a superior work experience (Drewery, Nevison, et al., 2016; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2016).

### *Placing the Building Blocks Together*

Creating superior WIL work experiences is a matter of collaboration. Students, educators, and employers all play important parts in creating great experiences, including those that are relevant to students. The suggestions below are directed at WIL program administrators, educators, and/or staff (referred to simply as educators) but clearly extend to students and employers, too.

There are several things that educators can do to promote greater student socialization into an organization. They can highlight to the importance of social integration to students and employers. They can articulate to students that proactive socialization behaviours (e.g., asking questions, getting to know team members) help students situate themselves as organizational insiders (Pennaforte, 2016) and that becoming an important part of the organization reveals opportunities for a more relevant experience. Training could be provided to students so that their proactivity is well-received.

Educators can also create a greater understanding of the onboarding process for employers. Many employers struggle to onboard WIL students and seek guidance on how best to accomplish this feat. Educators could provide practical advice to employers based on the WIL literature. For instance, asking that employers assign a workplace mentor to students can improve newcomer experiences (Smith-Ruig, 2014). Educators can also reiterate that onboarding students helps to create a more relevant experience, which has desirable implications for student performance (Drewery, Pretti & Barclay, 2016; Pennaforte, 2016).

Educators can also work with students and employers to ensure that students are optimally challenged. The job crafting literature (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) reminds us that employees can negotiate the balance between their skills and challenges. They can ask for help when situations are too challenging, and they can seek out new challenges when desirable. Educators could remind students of this in an effort to ensure students create the right conditions for a relevant experience.

Also, educators might support employers in creating optimally challenging roles. Perhaps most critical is their guidance during the recruitment process. Of course, most employers have processes in place to match students with appropriate roles. Still, educators can assist in making the process as seamless as possible. For example, they could provide interview guides that help employers elicit the key information from students to support them in making informed hiring decisions. Ultimately, the goal should be to ensure students are matched with roles that complement their skills.

Educators could influence congruence with field of work by acting as guides for students and employers during the recruitment stage. During that stage, students may be searching for a role that is relevant to their academic training and career interests. The challenge is that students' insights into most roles are limited. They have only the recruitment materials (e.g., job advertisements), work-of-mouth, and company reputation on which to base their job application decisions.

Alternatively, educators could make available the types of experiences that past students in the same academic program have found relevant to their career paths. For example, educators could organize conversations between junior job seekers and senior students who may have insights to share. Students should then pay attention to the academic backgrounds of those they are working with to see examples potential connections between academic programs and career paths.

Educators have an important influence on students' knowledge and skill acquisition, too. They can directly affect such outcomes through reflective activities. Such activities are central to student learning in WIL programs. They help students understand and articulate what they've learned from their experience. In most cases, reflection activities are designed and reviewed by educators. The building blocks from this paper identify areas for reflective prompts that may help students examine the relevance of their WIL experiences.

Also, educators could aid student learning through interactions with employers. They could inform employers about the importance of student learning, including as a building block of relevant experiences. They could suggest several ways in which employers can create relevant learning opportunities. For example, lunch-and-learn sessions with WIL students, perhaps even on topics the organization specializes in, can be interesting to students and can impart new knowledge to them. Alternatively, perhaps for more advanced students, individual projects could be assigned. As was mentioned, companies such as Google have famously benefitted from 'side projects' which are both learning opportunities for employees and opportunities for employees to generate value for employers.

#### *Limitations and Future Research*

The objective of this study was to develop a richer understanding of relevant experiences and how to create them. The thematic analysis used here was conducive to this aim. Additional research should seek to determine the generalizability of these findings to other forms of WIL and other cultural contexts. For instance, is relevance more varied in co-op programs where a centralized job board enables students to apply and compete for a wide range of roles, as compared to WIL programs offered within specific academic departments where the where roles available are targeted to students in that academic discipline? Addressing such a question would help us better understand foundational building blocks of WIL work experiences.

The research presented here also provides clear opportunities for researchers to explore how the building blocks are used together. Interview data suggest that congruence with one's field of work may be the earliest antecedent in this process. Once it was established, students socialized into a context that they feel is right for them, and they were challenged and learned in that context. But what if the student is not in the right field of work? If you remove that building block, will social integration, optimal challenge, and knowledge and skill acquisition still amount to a relevant experience?

Finally, future research should develop measures that correspond to the building blocks described in this study. Such measures could be used to develop and test hypotheses about the antecedents and consequences of relevant WIL work experiences. For instance, using flow theory, researchers could hypothesize that relevance is greater when challenge is optimal compared to suboptimal, and that greater knowledge/skill acquisition is a mechanism for this relationship. The development of appropriate measures is a critical first step toward testing such relationships. As such relationships are tested, we will understand more about when and why relevant experiences emerge and why they are so important in WIL programs.

#### REFERENCES

- Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E., & ten Brummelhuis, L. L. (2012). Work engagement, performance, and active learning: The role of conscientiousness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 80(2), 555-564.
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. General Learning Press.
- Biggs, J. B. (2001). Enhancing learning: A matter of style or approach? In R. J. Sternberg, & L. Zhang (Eds.), *Perspectives on thinking, learning, and cognitive styles* (pp. 73-102). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage.

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. Harper & Row.
- Drewery, D., Nevison, C., Pretti, T. J., Cormier, L., Barclay, S., & Pennaforte, A. (2016). Examining the influence of selected factors on perceived co-op work term quality from a student perspective. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(3), 265-277.
- Drewery, D., Pretti, T. J., & Barclay S. (2016). Examining the effects of perceived relevance and work-related subjective well-being on individual performance for co-op students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(2), 119-134.
- Ferns, S., Campbell, M., & Zegwaard, K. (2014). Work integrated learning. In S. Ferns (Ed.), *Work integrated learning in the curriculum HERDSA Guide* (pp. 1-6). Higher Education and Development Society of Australasia.
- Ferns, S., Russell, L., & Kay, J. (2016). Enhancing industry engagement with work-integrated learning: Capacity building for industry partners. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(4), 363-375.
- Flanagan, J. C. (1954). The critical incident technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51(4), 327-358.
- Ghitulescu, B. E. (2013). Making change happen: The impact of work context on adaptive and proactive behaviors. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 49(2), 206-245.
- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, 31, 386 – 408.
- Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (2003). Demonstrating the value of an organization's learning culture: The dimensions of the learning organization questionnaire. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 5(2), 132-151.
- Mau, W. C. J., Ellsworth, R., & Hawley, D. (2008). Job satisfaction and career persistence of beginning teachers. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 22(1), 48-61.
- Maxwell, J. A. (1996). *Qualitative research design*. Sage.
- Nevison, C., Drewery, D., Pretti, J., & Cormier, L. (2017). Using learning environments to create meaningful work for co-op students. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 36(4), 807-822.
- Pennaforte, A. (2016). The influence of proactive socialization behaviors and team socialization on individual performance in the team. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(4), 413-421.
- Perdue, S. V., Reardon, R. C., & Peterson, G. W. (2007). Person—environment congruence, self-efficacy, and environmental identity in relation to job satisfaction: A career decision theory perspective. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 44(1), 29-39.
- Rayner, G., & Papakonstantinou, T. (2015). Student perceptions of their workplace preparedness: Making work-integrated learning more effective. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 16(1), 13-24.
- Saks, A. M., & Gruman, J. A. (2011). Organizational socialization and positive organizational behaviour: Implications for theory, research, and practice. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration*, 28(1), 14-26.
- Sharma, L. A., Mannell, R. C., & Rowe, P. M. (1995). The relation between education-related work experiences and career expectations. *Journal of Cooperative Education*, 30(3), 39-47.
- Shernoff, D. J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2009). Cultivating engaged learners and optimal learning environments. In R. Gilman, E. S. Huebner, & M. J. Furlong (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology in Schools* (pp. 131-145). Routledge.
- Smith, C. (2012). Evaluating the quality of work-integrated learning curricula: A comprehensive framework. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(2), 247-262.
- Smith, C., Ferns, S., & Russell, L. (2016). Designing work-integrated learning placements that improve student employability: Six facets of the curriculum that matter. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 17(2), 197-211.
- Smith, C., & Worsfold, K. (2014). WIL curriculum design and student learning: A structural model of their effects on student satisfaction. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(6), 1070-1084.
- Smith-Ruig, T. (2014). Exploring the links between mentoring and work-integrated learning. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(4), 769-782.
- Wright, B. E. (2004). The role of work context in work motivation: A public sector application of goal and social cognitive theories. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 14(1), 59-78.
- Wrzesniewski, A., & Dutton, J. E. (2001). Crafting a job: Revisioning employees as active crafters of their work. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 179-201.





## 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, entrepreneurship, 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 ongoing financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ), [www.nzace.ac.nz](http://www.nzace.ac.nz) and the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and received periodic sponsorship from the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE).

## 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.



## EDITORIAL BOARD

### *Editor-in-Chief*

Dr. Karsten Zegwaard

University of Waikato, New Zealand

### *Associate Editors*

Dr. Judene Pretti

University of Waterloo, Canada

Dr. Anna Rowe

University of New South Wales, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Sonia Ferns

Curtin University, Australia

### *Senior Editorial Board Members*

Dr. Bonnie Dean

University of Wollongong, Australia

Dr. Phil Gardner

Michigan State University, United States

Prof. Denise Jackson

Edith Cowan University, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Ashly Stirling

University of Toronto, Canada

Emeritus Prof. Janice Orrell

Flinders University, Australia

Emeritus Prof. Neil I. Ward

University of Surrey, United Kingdom

### *Copy Editors*

Yvonne Milbank

International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning

Diana Bushell

International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning

### *Editorial Board Members*

Assoc. Prof. Erik Alanson

University of Cincinnati, United States

Prof. Dawn Bennett

Curtin University, Australia

Mr. Matthew Campbell

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Dr. Craig Cameron

Griffith University, Australia

Dr. Sarojni Choy

Griffith University, Australia

Prof. Leigh Deves

Charles Darwin University, Australia

Mr. David Drewery

University of Waterloo, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Michelle Eady

University of Wollongong, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Chris Eames

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Dr. Jenny Fleming

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Assoc. Prof. Wendy Fox-Turnbull

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Dr. Nigel Gribble

Curtin University, Australia

Dr. Thomas Groenewald

University of South Africa, South Africa

Assoc. Prof. Kathryn Hay

Massey University, New Zealand

Ms. Katharine Hoskyn

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Dr. Sharleen Howison

Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand

Dr. Nancy Johnston

Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr. Patricia Lucas

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Dr. Jaqueline Mackaway

Macquarie University, Australia

Dr. Kath McLachlan

Macquarie University, Australia

Prof. Andy Martin

Massey University, New Zealand

Dr. Norah McRae

University of Waterloo, Canada

Dr. Laura Rook

University of Wollongong, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Philip Rose

Hannam University, South Korea

Dr. Leoni Russell

RMIT, Australia

Dr. Jen Ruskin

Macquarie University, Australia

Dr. Andrea Sator

Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr. David Skelton

Eastern Institute of Technology, New Zealand

Assoc. Prof. Calvin Smith

University of Queensland, Australia

Assoc. Prof. Judith Smith

Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Dr. Raymond Smith

Griffith University, Australia

Prof. Sally Smith

Edinburgh Napier University, United Kingdom

Prof. Roger Strasser

University of Waikato, New Zealand

Prof. Yasushi Tanaka

Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan

Prof. Neil Taylor

University of New England, Australia

Ms. Genevieve Watson

Elysium Associates Pty, Australia

Dr. Nick Wempe

Primary Industry Training Organization, New Zealand

Dr. Theresa Winchester-Seeto

University of New South Wales, Australia

Dr. Karen Young

Deakin University, Australia

Publisher: Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ)

[www.wilnz.nz](http://www.wilnz.nz)