

When theory meets practice: An embodied approach to supporting work-integrated learning students' wellbeing

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This article offers a critical examination of the co-authors' experience developing and delivering a work-integrated learning (WIL) preparation course for communication and media studies undergraduate students in a large, research-intensive Canadian university. As a WIL pre-requisite, this praxis-oriented course was designed to proactively support WIL students' mental health and wellbeing. Uniquely, the course pairs a tenured faculty member with a WIL practitioner on staff within the faculty's advising office to provide a combination of foundational theory and practical implementation. The article presents four key components of the course that intentionally support students' wellbeing: 1) career exploration and portfolio development, 2) wellbeing literature and reflective practice, 3) guest facilitators with expertise in wellbeing, and 4) embodied agonistic pluralism. While acknowledging scalability and logistical challenges, recommendations from this case study offer insight for institutions interested in infusing a more intentional focus on student wellbeing into their WIL curriculum.

Keywords: Wellbeing, mental health, career development, work-integrated learning

Participating in work-integrated learning (WIL) offers students' opportunities to strengthen their personal and professional confidence, hone skill sets, gain valuable insight into the lives and livelihoods they have reason to value, and develop a deeper understanding of their disciplinary curriculum. However, WIL can also be challenging for a range of intersectional reasons and at different points before, during, and after a student's hands-on experience. Students may enter a workplace feeling significant stress and anxiety or worried about their ability to perform well in their new role (Linden & Stuart, 2020). They may also have concern that their authentic selves will not be accepted or feel overwhelmed by the size or scale of the issues they face (Mackaway et al., 2024; Stowe et al., 2022). These concerns can be compounded if students participate in a community-oriented form of WIL and if they experience up-close the distressing social inequities and 'wicked' problems of contemporary society (Finley & Reason, 2016; Grain & Lund, 2018; Khan et al., 2024; Reis et al., 2023; Smeltzer & Sperduti, 2023; Stowe et al., 2022).

Informed by a range of scholarly literature, combined with the authors' first-hand experience, this article examines an undergraduate course geared explicitly to support students as whole beings. The co-authors developed and co-teach the WIL pre-requisite WIL preparation course, titled Theory Meets Practice: Careers & Community Engagement, which integrates scholarly and practical approaches to WIL (the course includes 39 in-class, for-credit learning hours). Students enroll in this second-year course in Western University's Media and Communications Studies program, housed in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS), prior to completing a 120-hour minimum 12-to-16 week for-credit internship. Unlike other non-credit-bearing offerings that typically focus on professional skills and work preparation, this course incorporates multiple theoretical components. These include, but are not limited to: ethical considerations regarding the coordination and facilitation of WIL activities (e.g., labor concerns for faculty, staff, students, and community partners), accessibility and inclusion in WIL programming, the role external host partners play in various WIL activities, pressures exerted by

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university administrations and regional governments to expand the breadth and depth of WIL undertakings, theory on reflection, and a range of mental health issues that intersect with WIL. This section of the course is facilitated primarily by a tenured faculty member with both WIL expertise and relevant disciplinary-specific training. The practice-oriented sections of the course incorporate more typical WIL preparation elements including mock interviews, résumé and cover letter development, guidance with respect to online identities and social networking, reflection exercises, and an overview of pertinent workplace laws and regulations. These activities, which are coordinated largely by a full-time staff member in the faculty's career advising office, aim to foster students' career-oriented readiness and confidence. Through a scaffolded approach, students work together as peers and with the co-instructors, to develop a cumulative toolkit designed to support their upcoming WIL experiences, as well as their lives and livelihoods post-graduation (Carpendale & Mitchell, 2023; Kivunja, 2014; Nardo, 2021; Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976).

The overarching objective of this integrated preparation course is to provide students with opportunities to engage with some of the more challenging aspects of WIL, which universities tend not to publicize, and to develop relevant practical skills. By integrating critical analyses of WIL practices alongside practical, career-ready training, students are provided with a nuanced, constructive understanding of the work world (Billett, 2015; Dumitru & Halpern, 2023). In so doing, students are better equipped to see first-hand that these two 'sides' of WIL – the critique and the application – are not mutually exclusive. This course is thus particularly unique to the field of communication and media studies, which usually separates the theory and practice of WIL rather than combining them in a curricular, credit-bearing course that students complete early in their academic careers.

Further, and of relevance to this special issue, the Theory Meets Practice course is distinctive in its design to proactively support students' mental health and wellbeing in four ways. First, through a series of experiential workshops students gain practical experience engaging in job searches and application processes with industry-relevant feedback in a supportive, collegial environment. Second, students engage with gray and scholarly readings that explore the relationship between WIL and wellbeing. Third, the class welcomes several campus and community-based guest speakers, including an institutional staff member with mental health expertise and knowledge of WIL, a Strengths facilitator to forefront students' capabilities, and an Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization (EDID) advocate to walk students through the potential experiences they may encounter before, during, and after a placement. Fourth, on a more meta-level, the course nurtures students' wellbeing by modeling the praxis-oriented approach to WIL described above. The co-instructors intentionally embody the different roles academic and non-academic staff members play in the WIL process. By embodying varied expertise and exigencies, the co-instructors demonstrate for students how to debate, discuss, disagree, and critique with respect and vulnerability. Marrying theory and practice in this kind of public and transparent manner helps students feel more prepared for their academic lives, as well as for the realities of the workforce. Further, by modeling respect and collegiality in a higher education classroom that openly allows for heterogeneous perspectives (Clouston, 2018; Kluth & Straut, 2003; Peterson, 2019) the co-instructors manifest inclusive behaviors (Green et al., 2021).

In the sections that follow, the co-authors begin with an overview of the Canadian terrain regarding WIL, mental health and wellbeing before turning to discuss the Theory Meets Practice course as a case study for supporting and preparing students as whole beings in their engagement with WIL. The article provides a synopsis of the course design and structure, as well as tangible examples of class exercises, activities, and guest speakers. The discussion then considers some of the challenges and opportunities afforded by co-teaching the course and offers recommendations for colleagues interested in engaging

in similar curricular undertakings. In the concluding segments of the article, the authors propose pathways for future research on this increasingly important area of study.

CANADIAN CONTEXT AND CASE STUDY

Over the last several years, WIL has grown in both size and scope throughout the Canadian network of higher education institutions. This expansion can be attributed to a gamut of reasons, including students wanting additional 'real life' experiences, the honing of skill sets, résumé building, and an opportunity to engage in community-focused pursuits in the public interest (Aujla & Hamm, 2018; Kostell et al., 2021; Smeltzer et al., 2022; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). University administrations are also competing for student enrollments, responding to calls to justify public funding, and managing pressures exerted by various levels of government to ostensibly prepare students for the labor force. As universities feel the brunt of being tasked with supplying work-ready graduates (Brabazon et al., 2019; LaCroix, 2024; Peters & Pizarro Milian, 2024), campuses are also experiencing a rise in mental health crises, often centering on students' chronic and cumulative stress (Monaghan et al., 2021; Reis et al., 2023). In 2021, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), a Canadian mental health hospital, conducted a survey that found almost half of Ontario high school students have experienced "moderate to severe levels of psychological distress" (para 4) and one in five reported thoughts of suicide (2022). The students from this study are now reflective of the students on Canadian higher education campuses, many of whom are preparing to participate in a WIL placement. While some stressors remain constant throughout many students' academic career, such as financial concerns, course workload, and personal relationships, other sources of stress ebb and flow as they progress through their degree program. For example, at two ends of the temporal spectrum, first-year students often experience significant anxiety as they transition into university life, while graduating students feel the pressure of preparing for post-university employment or further study (Elsden et al., 2023; Lisnyj, 2021; Smeltzer & Sperduti, 2023; Smeltzer et al., 2022).

During their degrees, growing numbers of students also engage in WIL activities that can positively and negatively impact their mental health and wellbeing to varying intensities along their journey. Although institutions usually provide fairly robust mental health resources for students traveling to other countries for a WIL-oriented experience, support is often limited for students engaging in domestic forms WIL, such as internships, co-ops, community engaged learning (CEL), and practicums taking place in a local setting. During these placements, student may, however, experience very similar challenges, emotions, and stressors as their peers who have gone abroad (Mackaway et al., 2024; Reis et al., 2023; Smeltzer & Sperduti, 2023; Veine et al., 2020; Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2023).

This case study focuses on a WIL preparation course developed within FIMS at Western University, a large, research-intensive university in London, Ontario. In 2024, the Western University student population grew to just over 36,000 students (Western University, 2024) and the university employed upwards of 12,000 people at its busiest periods with 4,200 of those representing staff, faculty, and librarians in full-time positions (Western University, 2023a, 2023b). At the time of writing, approximately 900 full-time undergraduate students were enrolled at FIMS (Western University, 2023a). Importantly, Western University's current Strategic Plan (2022-2028) makes specific commitments regarding career development services and experiential learning, including setting a goal to "increase student utilization of and satisfaction with career development services" and to provide "a community-engaged experiential learning opportunity, an international learning opportunity, or a research learning opportunity for all undergraduates who wish to pursue one as part of their degree" (Western University, 2021, p. 24). The institution's delivery of career education can best be described

as a 'partial' centralization model, meaning there is a mix of career services offerings that are delivered centrally and others that are embedded at the faculty level (Usher, 2021). For example, the university operates a centralized Careers & Experience office that provides students with access to career coaching, job fairs, and employer relations support (Western University Careers & Experience, n.d.). Concomitantly, several academic units have their own positions or teams dedicated to career services, including experiential learning components such as co-op, CEL, and internship delivery. FIMS, for instance, has career services capacity embedded within its undergraduate student services office to provide discipline-specific support. It is within this context that the co-authors developed the second-year undergraduate course, *Theory Meets Practice: Careers and Community Engagement*, as a WIL prerequisite.

THEORY MEETS PRACTICE: CAREERS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In a marketized higher education model, students often question their degree's return on investment (Lawrence & Rezai-Rashti, 2022), expecting that an outlay of time, labor, and finances will translate into gainful employment upon graduation (Bunce et al., 2023; Saunders, 2015). For incoming Canadian undergraduate students surveyed in 2022, the top three motivating factors to attend university were all career-oriented (Canadian University Survey Consortium, 2022). At the same time, university instructors from across the disciplines increasingly describe students as being more disengaged than in earlier, pre-COVID-19 years (Mintz, 2022; Perlmutter, 2024). The combination of disengagement on campus and mounting expectations of universities to 'deliver' on employability outcomes puts institutions in a challenging position of trying to preserve integrity and academic rigor while also providing hands-on, high-impact learning that is arguably more utilitarian in nature (Brown, 2022; Gismondi, 2021).

Two aspects of the *Theory Meets Practice* course address these expectations and make the offering particularly unique within the co-authors' institution. First, most pre-WIL opportunities available on Western University's campus include co-curricular or not-for-credit preparatory activities. Requiring students to attend workshops or complete pre-experience materials on their own time can create additional barriers for many individuals and may decrease students' readiness to embark on a WIL placement (Rowe et al., 2023). For these reasons, the co-authors designed this mandatory, credit-bearing WIL preparation course to address a recurrent gap in students' preparedness and to attract a wider range of students to consider a WIL experience. Second, the *Theory Meets Practice* course offers a co-teaching model that combines the expertise of a faculty member with a research dossier on experiential learning, CEL, and wellbeing, and a staff perspective from the faculty's career services office with ten years of experience working in the field. The former offers theoretical foundations linked to the faculty's curriculum, whereas the latter provides expertise on the faculty's WIL program requirements and relevant, discipline-specific insights into career exploration and job search skills tied to communication and media studies pathways and outcomes.

Developed as a discussion-focused seminar, enrollment for the *Theory Meets Practice* course is set to a maximum of 25 students and is delivered in-person. For many participants, this course will be the smallest class they have encountered at the university (outside of study tutorials led by teaching assistants), which affords considerable time and space to engage deeply with the praxis-oriented materials. Additionally, introducing the course in the second year of a four-year degree offers students an early opportunity to consider their career goals and the types of curricular and extracurricular activities that reflect these aspirations (Bradley et al., 2022).

In developing learning outcomes for this early exposure course, the co-instructors envisioned students gaining a clear understanding of the balance between theory and practice. To this end, upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Assess various perspectives regarding the labor market and their potential role in it
- Examine benefits and challenges associated with experiential learning activities, including relationships between the university and local / national / international communities and impacts on student wellness
- Reflect on their strengths, experiences, and goals to refine how they communicate and present themselves in their personal, academic, and professional lives
- Prepare for their lives and livelihoods post-graduation, with a thoughtfully curated career toolkit

In the discussion below, we highlight four components of the course that, through these learning outcomes, intentionally aim to foster students' wellbeing.

Career Exploration and Portfolio Development

Preparing students to take part in a WIL experience is a key outcome of this curricular, 13-week course. The preparatory process includes career assessments, research activities designed for students to consider potential career pathways, and informational interview exercises to explore a world of work that aligns with their strengths, values, and anticipated future employment. These kinds of assignments are expressly intended for students to investigate possibilities within and beyond their preconceived notions of employment-related options.

In their UK-based research examining the efficacy of incorporating career planning into undergraduate curricula, Bradley et al. (2022) found that students who received career education embedded within a second-year course reported an increased sense of confidence and capacity to explore possible employment options and to apply for WIL positions. Their research highlights the positive effects of this kind of curricular, early exposure approach that does not necessarily rely upon placements. Similarly, students in the Theory Meets Practice course have opportunities to explore what genuinely interests them, as opposed to what they *think* they should pursue career-wise, in a relatively low-pressure environment. To this end, the WIL staff member co-instructor guides students through hands-on, in-class workshops, paired with self-directed research assignments and exploratory career assessments. The goal is for students to curate a portfolio of their experiences, achievements, and abilities to aid in their search for a WIL placement and post-graduation employment. In the application materials workshop, for example, students prepare a résumé relevant to their field of study, compose a cover letter to a position of interest, and write an updated LinkedIn profile. In the classroom, they are presented with relevant case studies, wise practices (e.g., types of information to include and exclude on prospective social media profiles), and common mistakes made in preparing such materials (e.g., using a passive rather than an active voice on their résumé). Students submit their modified portfolio materials for detailed feedback from both instructors. With an eye to fostering students' wellbeing as they navigate this oft-times intimidating process, all career toolkit assignments are assessed as a pass or fail to encourage engagement with the process rather than having students focus on a specific grade (Blum, 2020; Ferns et al., 2021).

Prior to the launch of the Theory Meets Practice course, the kinds of career mentorship described above were offered to students at FIMS via free workshops, personalized email correspondence, and in-person appointments delivered by the WIL staff member. However, optional workshops have not been

well-attended, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic (McMurtrie, 2022), and the individualized consultations were resource intensive. By integrating workshops into the course, providing students with personalized feedback on their assignments, and preserving access to a faculty-specific career services officer for added support, the aim is to make career education more robust and meet students where they are at in their academic journeys (Taylor & Hooley, 2014). Importantly, these kinds of accessible, low-stakes options are designed to relieve some of the stress students may feel both about their career readiness and the types of employment they may wish to pursue post-graduation, which, in turn, can positively impact their mental health.

Wellbeing Literature and Reflective Practice

Reflection serves as the cornerstone for every type of WIL undertaking and plays a critical role in helping students manage a range of emotional and cognitive experiences (Ash et al., 2005; Sanders et al., 2016). However, WIL students may not be guided through the often-challenging process of engaging in authentic and in-depth reflection. They might be asked to read websites with reflection tips and suggestions; learn the seminal theories of John Dewey, David Kolb, and Paulo Freire; and be provided with instructions on how to write reflective journals. These activities certainly serve as valuable first steps. Yet, students may experience a “disconnect between prescription and actual implementation” of their reflective practices, thus diminishing the impact of their personal, academic, and professional learning (Perry & Martin, 2016, p. 55). With this in mind, the Theory Meets Practice course purposefully guides students through myriad types of reflection, along with open conversations about the challenges and limitations of different approaches. As examples, students engage in one-minute stories and longer forms of reflective journaling, small group discussions with prompt questions, and various theater-based activities to role-play potential scenarios. In the co-authors' experience, most students have not previously engaged in deep, curricular-based reflection. By inviting students to undertake robust forms of one-on-one and collective reflection that are intentionally ungraded but with detailed instructor feedback, they can experiment with a range of practices to build their capacity for engaging in authentic reflective exercises during a WIL experience.

This pre-placement process is especially important as engaging in critical reflection during a WIL experience can be emotionally fraught for a range of reasons that students may not anticipate (Morris, 2020; Thompson & Thompson, 2023). Some students bring trauma from past experiences or encounter challenging situations during their placements that make engaging in demanding introspection particularly arduous. Although academic and non-academic staff members who facilitate WIL activities are usually quite familiar with reflection processes, they often have relatively little training in how to proactively support students' mental health throughout the process, how to recognize signs of students' distress, or how to guide students in seeking professional care (Sanderson, 2021; Smeltzer et al., 2024; Smeltzer & Sperduti, 2023). As discussed in the following section, by bringing a mental health staff member into the classroom for added support, students and instructors alike can gain greater insight into how to more effectively promote and protect their own mental health.

Guest Facilitators

One of the most rewarding but challenging aspects of delivering the Theory Meets Practice course is organizing the roster of guest speakers who share their insights and expertise specifically on mental health and wellbeing. Examples of speakers from on-campus units and external partners include a mental health practitioner, EDID advocate, strengths expert and a student panel.

Students on many Canadian campuses express frustration that mental health supports are difficult to access, and the wait times are long (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2022; Universities Canada, 2023). By introducing students to a campus-based mental health practitioner who also understands WIL's multifaceted considerations, the co-instructors' goal in this course is to ensure that there is a clear pathway for individuals wanting or needing additional resources at any point in their WIL journeys (Mick & Frabutt, 2017; Seppälä et al., 2020). In the classroom, the mental health professional guides students through a series of mock scenarios that could take place in various types of work environments. Students have an opportunity to 'test out' how they might respond to various situations, reflect on their feelings, and then consider if and how they would react differently in a 'real life' placement.

Additionally, the co-instructors work alongside the mental health professional in delivering the message to students that WIL experiences need not be wholly positive or transformational. Understandably, universities project a friction-free and life-changing depiction of WIL to attract incoming cohorts of students. Promotional campaigns highlight how WIL opportunities serve as high-impact educational practices that lead to improved graduate employability outcomes (Di Meglio et al., 2022; Jackson & Dean, 2023; Kuh, 2008). However, these campaigns do not capture or publicize some of the potentially challenging aspects of WIL, including the unexpected dissonance students may experience if their expectations do not match the reality of the workforce (Schutter, 2018). Relying only on 'success stories' of WIL can negatively impact students' wellbeing as they do not provide a full picture of the range of possible experiences and encounters students may have during their placements (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018; Maples et al., 2022; Schutter, 2018; Smeltzer & Sperduti, 2023). Instead, students should be aware that parts of their WIL experience may be challenging for any number of reasons but if they are armed with resources to productively manage these experiences, they can fortify their mental health and wellbeing.

Over two lectures, students learn about their legal rights leading up to and during a WIL placement. Specifically, an EDID specialist employed at the university provides students with an overview of the provincial Human Rights Code as it relates to interviewing and job seeking practices, as well as to their rights in the workplace and in academic environments. This individual also introduces students to the collection of on-campus EDID resources available to them. Though the course content is designed with an EDID lens, the co-instructors acknowledge their own positionality as white, cis-gender, able-bodied, settler women. It is, therefore, critical that students are exposed to experts with various lived experiences. To this end, the facilitator shares with the class their own perspectives on various EDID issues and their experiences navigating the world of work as an individual with several intersectional considerations. This individual then invites conversation with students in the class, answers questions, and talks through possible workplace scenarios that might subvert an inclusive environment. These open discussions are powerful; students see that they are not alone and that others are working to foment equitable academic and workplace environments.

Although students may encounter systemic barriers during their education and career development, infusing positivity and hope into the curriculum is crucial to bolstering students' wellbeing. The course thus integrates a strengths-based approach via the CliftonStrengths assessment instrument, which has been linked to improved engagement, teamwork, and self-efficacy (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2011; Bono et al., 2023). In the first four weeks of the semester, students take the assessment and participate in a Strengths workshop facilitated by a university staff member certified in administering the instrument. The exercise encourages students to identify and frame their strengths, and then practice sharing positive attributes and accomplishments with classroom peers. Originating in positive psychology,

strengths-based approaches offer an alternative to deficit-thinking by challenging individuals to focus on their positive qualities and capacities (Anandavalli et al., 2023; Bono et al., 2023; Rashid, 2014; Schreiner & Anderson, 2005; Soria et al., 2017). The students' personalized CliftonStrengths report offers phrases, language, and keywords they can use when speaking about themselves to others. As students move through the development of a career toolkit, the Strengths activity anchors them in a positive framework as they generate various job application materials (e.g., cover letters and résumés). Given that CliftonStrengths is the assessment of choice at the co-authors' institution, including this workshop into the course allows the Strengths facilitator to offer students access to complimentary, extracurricular resources if they are interested in expanding their self-exploration using this tool.

In the final weeks of the course, the co-instructors invite to the class a panel of upper-year students who have completed disparate types of WIL placements (i.e., remote, hybrid, or in-person with a mix of paid and unpaid experiences). Although most of the students' WIL placements have been predominantly positive, some identify problematic encounters and situations. Panelists are, therefore, encouraged to be open and honest with the class about their experiences and the co-instructors facilitate a question-and-answer session to encourage further discussion. These peer perspectives are vital at the conclusion of the course, as students have mostly read scholarly and gray literature, listened to lectures, interacted with guest speakers and facilitators, and are, at this juncture, preparing to put their learning into practice.

Embodied Agonistic Pluralism

As noted above, the design of the Theory Meets Practice course is reliant on the expertise and experience of two instructors who hold distinct positions in a politically structured neoliberal university. To ensure that the course is productive and a positive learning environment for students, the teaching approach embraces Chantal Mouffe's (1999) paradigmatic model of agonistic pluralism. In the classroom, the co-instructors intentionally engage in collegial disagreement and argue viewpoints vis-à-vis WIL from the position of their respective roles as a faculty member and a non-academic staff member. For Mouffe, agonistic pluralism embraces divergent perspectives and approaches, which is especially important given the power dynamics often at play in WIL programming.

To provide students with an opportunity to embody a similar approach, in the penultimate class, they are required to actively participate in a debate about an ethical issue pertaining to WIL. Students are given the debate questions two weeks prior to the class, allowing time for preparation. On debate day, they are randomly assigned one of the questions and the position they must defend along with three of their classmates. Many students initially find this class quite intimidating, especially if they are tasked with taking a position that might be antithetical to their own beliefs. However, they are asked to embrace agonistic pluralism and then to reflect on their experience of engaging in this collegial approach for the debate. The intention here is to help prepare students to productively enter workplace conversations and situations that might challenge their perspectives and positionalities.

In sum, the objectives of the course components discussed above are two-fold: to prepare students for a future WIL experience and to foster a sense of "critical hope" (Grain & Lund, 2018, p. 3). By integrating critical analyses of WIL practices alongside practical, career-ready training, students are provided with a nuanced, constructive understanding of the work world. Students are thereby encouraged to hold space for optimism, hope, pessimism, and critique because, as Paulo Freire's (1997) words remind us, "it is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may

suggest the opposite" (p. 106). As students often struggle with the complex and overwhelming problems facing contemporary society, a critical hope approach encourages them to nurture their agency to make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others without downplaying the labor and emotional outlay required to affect change. Similarly, students often feel significant angst about their future financial security while also wanting to pursue a livelihood they consider personally fulfilling. Again, a critical hope perspective highlights the importance of developing the capabilities needed to pursue a life one has reason to value despite the uncertainty of a future that may be marked by socio-economic instability. Fostering the capacity to balance criticality and hope in these ways can serve as an invaluable tool in supporting students' wellbeing during and after their academic studies.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The capacity to deliver successful iterations of a WIL preparation course similar to the Theory Meets Practice model described in this article is impacted by two notable challenges. The first is scalability. A one-semester course with an enrollment of 25 students would not typically be assigned a teaching assistant. Incorporating a non-academic staff member into approximately half of the lectures thus constitutes a substantial commitment of hours that would normally be earmarked for other purposes. Although components of this course are inherently part of a WIL staff member's job (e.g., résumé writing tips, information about laws and regulations), it may be difficult to persuade a faculty or centralized administration the value of hours being dedicated to a class-based, out-of-office version of similar labor. The second challenge is employee turnover in staff positions. Units considering a similar curricular model should ensure that multiple members of an academic advising or career services team are equipped to step in and complete the course in the event of an employee's departure. While information is limited regarding the Canadian context, industry publications out of the United States estimate that roughly one in three student affairs professionals are looking to leave or change roles (Alonso, 2022; Bichsel et al., 2023; Ferraino, n.d.). Staff turnover in this area is a significant issue for a range of reasons related to insufficient resources, the emotional impacts of the job, and inadequate financial remuneration (Brantley & Shomaker, 2021; Maller & McGill, 2021). Although academic staff in secure employment positions (e.g., a tenured faculty member) provide continuity for this type of course with relatively less turnover, they may be unavailable during sabbaticals or assigned alternate teaching workloads. Further, the dual-instructor model, combined with the integration of numerous guest speakers, can lead to scheduling conflicts and difficulties in reproducing comparable resources.

More problematically, WIL-oriented courses and in situ experiences are increasingly being coordinated and facilitated by precarious labor (Smeltzer et al., 2022). In addition to concerns about potential labor exploitation, given that WIL programming is remarkably time-intensive and often includes significant emotional care work (Altan-Olcay & Bergeron, 2022; Gaudet et al., 2022), inconsistency in how and by whom course material is delivered can negatively affect students' wellbeing. Having known and consistent points of contact throughout their critical, reflective, and logistical preparatory processes, some of which can be quite stressful for a range of intersectional reasons, helps to reassure students that their interests are being prioritized by their home faculty.

AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This article illustrates how the co-authors developed and launched a unique approach to teaching theory and practice in WIL geared towards proactively supporting students' mental health and wellbeing. To continuously improve the course, at the conclusion of every semester, the co-instructors have collected feedback from students via in-class discussion and an anonymous exit survey. However,

to gain even deeper insight into the effectiveness of this approach, primary research with student participants to formally evaluate the course's efficacy would be a valuable addition to the WIL literature.

In past iterations of the course, the co-authors have also hosted a guest lecturer on how Indigenous ways of knowing and learning can inform WIL theory and practice, and the critical importance of addressing WIL accessibility for Indigenous students. As settlers, the co-authors have a responsibility to continue our work in decolonizing WIL curriculum and to rethink ways of pedagogical practice and community relationships that are truly grounded in reciprocity (Livingstone, 2022; Santiago-Ortiz, 2019). These endeavors are intimately intertwined with the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and community partners and thus necessitate additional research without overburdening our Indigenous colleagues.

CONCLUSION

The transition from school into the workforce can be a challenging and overwhelming time for students, as well as an exciting start to the next stage of their lives. WIL opportunities have been celebrated as providing hands-on professional opportunities to help ease students' entrance into the working world. However, university promotional campaigns tend not to include some of the potentially challenging aspects of WIL that can impact students' mental health and wellbeing. In this article, the co-authors have thus argued for a more intentional approach to cultivating wellbeing throughout WIL experiences, focusing attention on the case study of a prerequisite preparation course as part of a module aimed at helping students to thrive in their future placements. This Theory Meets Practice course incorporates four components into the curriculum that are designed to enhance students' wellbeing: career exploration and portfolio development, wellbeing literature and reflective practice, guest speakers and facilitators with wellbeing expertise, and embodied agonistic pluralism. Through these praxis-oriented undertakings, students can more proactively nurture their mental health before, during, and after a WIL experience.

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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 related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students' discipline of study and/or professional development (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38").

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, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ; www.wilnz.nz), and the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily in 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 good 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.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or it 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.

Reference

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