

Exploring the sociomaterial assemblages of students' wellbeing during work-integrated learning

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an expanding international strategy aimed at bolstering the employability of higher education students. With WIL participation on the rise, there is a growing focus on fostering wellbeing during WIL. Drawing on the sociomaterial theoretical framework actor-network theory (ANT) and the WIL Wellbeing Framework, this paper examines data from semi-structured interviews with 15 university students to explore wellbeing practices. The findings illustrate the relational nature of wellbeing, where social, textual and material relations come together to enact practices as students prepare for, encounter and acquiesce to wellbeing stressors. Students draw upon a diverse range of tools to create their own assemblages of support. Importantly, the findings highlight that students' use of university services for wellbeing are limited, with preference shown instead for peer support and personal coping strategies. This study reveals wellbeing to be constantly emerging in practice, and often enacted with little input from university support services and actors.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, wellbeing, higher education, placement.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an established strategy that provides authentic work experiences for higher education students. Central to WIL approaches is the integration of theory with work practices within an intentional university curriculum, often in the form of placements, practicums or internships (Patrick et al., 2009). The contribution of WIL for developing students' professional identity (Trede, 2010; Zegwaard et al., 2017) and employability (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017; Smith et al., 2014) has driven demand to integrate and scaffold WIL experiences throughout students' university studies (Dean et al., 2020). Universities are responding to this demand by experimenting with new forms of WIL that require less resourcing and greater scalability, enabling access and opportunity for more students to participate in WIL (Dean & Campbell, 2020; Dean et al., 2020; Kay et al., 2019).

Despite the benefits that WIL affords students, transition into a new workspace can be challenging and potentially impact negatively on student wellbeing (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). Psychological distress and mental disorders are prevalent among higher education students generally (Auerbach et al., 2016; Larcombe et al., 2016; Sheldon et al., 2021). WIL can be a demanding activity where students encounter additional academic and personal stressors (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). Students participating in placements, where they are engaged in a workplace for a sustained period as part of the formal curriculum (Patrick et al., 2009), may encounter additional financial stress, transport and accommodation challenges, difficulty maintaining work-life balance and isolation (Bradley et al., 2020; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2024; Usher et al., 2022). Supporting students' wellbeing during WIL is thus a pressing issue for universities. In Australia, the recently released *Australian Universities Accord* calls for the introduction of financial support to tackle 'placement poverty' experienced during unpaid work placements (Department of Education, 2024). Given that more students are participating

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in WIL, there is growing concern surrounding how students will be supported by educational and external stakeholders, and how students can employ strategies to support themselves.

This paper builds upon existing literature exploring the impact of WIL participation on university students' wellbeing (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018; Grant-Smith et al., 2017). Drawing on the sociomaterial theoretical framework actor-network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005; Law, 2009), this paper examines the sociomaterial assemblages of wellbeing to better understand how wellbeing is enacted on placement through social, textual, and material relations (Fenwick et al., 2011; Mulcahy, 2013). Specifically, the research question under investigation is: How is wellbeing in WIL enacted through sociomaterial assemblages? By answering this question, this paper aims to offer a clearer understanding of how wellbeing is enacted and who (or what) plays a role in these assemblages which, in turn, may enable WIL practitioners to more effectively support student wellbeing during WIL.

The paper first unpacks relevant literature on student wellbeing in higher education and WIL. Following this, the study's theoretical framework and methodology are outlined. The study's findings and discussion are presented together and structured as two distinct episodes of activities where students prepare for and encounter wellbeing stressors. The interconnected nature of wellbeing practices and the relations that they are enacted within is highlighted, as well as the fortifying and constraining roles of different university and community actors, services and materials. The paper then closes with implications for practice and future research.

STUDENT WELLBEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The prevalence of psychological distress and mental disorders amongst higher education students is evident internationally, demonstrated by studies in, for example, Australia (Browne et al., 2017; Larcombe et al., 2022), the United States of America (USA) (Lipson et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2018; Roche et al., 2024), the United Kingdom (UK) (Brown, 2016; Office for National Statistics, 2022; Thorley, 2017), Turkey (Yüksel & Bahadır-Yilmaz, 2019) and Hong Kong (Shek et al., 2022). This illustrates both the frequency of mental disorders in student populations and the increased risk of psychological distress for higher education students when compared to the general population. Risk for psychological distress is especially heightened for students who are young women, identify as a sexual minority, participate in paid work of more than 20 hours a week or have caring responsibilities (Larcombe et al., 2016, 2022; Liu et al., 2018).

The high occurrence and impact of psychological distress in student populations is a pressing issue for universities. Psychological distress can negatively affect academic participation and achievement (Brown, 2016; Jehi et al., 2024). Mental health difficulties can impact an individual's capacity to learn and participate in their studies (Oldfield et al., 2018), lead to lower self-efficacy, motivation, and satisfaction (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018), and negatively affect student retention (Arria et al., 2013; Leow et al., 2024). University services that support students' wellbeing, such as counseling and disability support, may also experience higher demand (Prince, 2015; Thorley, 2017).

Many universities around the world are taking proactive steps to facilitate student wellbeing. A whole-of-university approach to health enabled by systemic and campus-wide action, proposed in the Okanagan Charter (International Conference on Health Promoting Universities & Colleges, 2015), has been mobilized through wellbeing-focused networks internationally, including the UK (United Kingdom Healthy Universities Network, n.d.), Australia (University of Sydney, 2016) and New Zealand (Tertiary Wellbeing Aotearoa New Zealand [TWANZ], n.d.). Developing strong social networks, fostering a sense of belonging, supporting students' transition into university, and improved access to

counseling, learning and careers services may positively influence student wellbeing (Baik et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2022). Although specific strategies to facilitate wellbeing vary between universities, many include institutional action plans, counseling and wellbeing support services and embedding activities to improve students' wellbeing literacy in classes and course material (Crawford et al., 2016).

STUDENT WELLBEING IN WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Students can encounter a range of stressors that impact their physical and psychological health when participating in WIL (Drewery et al., 2016; Grant-Smith et al., 2017). Often, these stressors are multiple, interconnected and develop in response to a number of factors (Grant-Smith et al., 2017). These stressors may include pressure surrounding academic performance and study load, workplace-related stress and trauma, financial stress, feelings of isolation, challenges obtaining transport and accommodation and managing childcare responsibilities (Bradley et al., 2020; Drysdale et al., 2016; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Gardner, 2010; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2024; Johnstone et al., 2016; Usher et al., 2022; Warren-James et al., 2021). Unpaid placements and their link to increased financial stress have become a lightning rod for discussions surrounding student wellbeing during WIL (Grant-Smith & de Zwaan, 2019; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2024; Usher et al., 2022). The gendered nature of unpaid placement has also been highlighted, given that this type of WIL is often used in disciplines like social work, nursing or teaching where the majority of students may typically identify as female (Hodge et al., 2024).

Strategies to foster and protect student wellbeing during WIL is an emerging area of research. Specific interventions vary on WIL type or mode and the stressor the intervention aims to minimize. For example, in remote WIL, peer support, sense of belonging and wellbeing literacy have been shown as protective factors (An et al., 2023; McBeath et al., 2018), while positive psychology exercises have been shown to improve the emotional wellbeing of students' who were unsuccessful sourcing a placement opportunity (Drewery et al., 2019). Establishing targeted financial support mechanisms, including government funding and scholarships may also alleviate financial stress (Department of Education, 2024; Gair & Baglow, 2018). It is evident that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to facilitating student wellbeing during WIL. Instead, the strategies applied must be appropriate to both the model of WIL and the stressor(s) it seeks to alleviate.

Understanding of wellbeing in WIL was significantly advanced by Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) *WIL Wellbeing Framework*. In this report, the authors put forth the concept of WIL wellbeing, defined as "an individual's capacity to manage the social, economic, personal and physical factors that impact on the work-integrated learning experience and how the work-integrated learning experience impacts on an individual's social, economic, personal and physical wellbeing domains" (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018, p. 133). WIL wellbeing is dynamic and fluid, formed through interrelated and intricate patterns that are shaped over time. When an acute threat to an individual's wellbeing emerges (for example, a particularly stressful WIL placement), an individual's sense of wellbeing is held together by the protective effects of previous actions, inputs and experiences (for example, how they coped with a stressful event previously).

The *WIL Wellbeing Framework* proposes that WIL wellbeing is facilitated through institutional and community support, in combination with individual's personal coping strategies (Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018). Personal coping strategies are proactive actions or buffers that students implement to minimize the impact challenges and may include activities like budgeting, forward planning and self-care. The effectiveness of these strategies can be limited, however, if institutional and community

support is lacking. Institutional support captures the various university services (for example, financial support) and assistance (for example, advice on navigating new relationships, clarifying academic expectations) that support learners during WIL. Community support is defined more broadly to include the support and affordances facilitated by peers, family, employers and new colleagues encountered while completing WIL. This study used Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) WIL Wellbeing Framework to guide an exploration of students' wellbeing practices during their placement.

ACTOR NETWORK THEORY: UNCOVERING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THINGS

This study examines students' wellbeing practices through the theoretical and analytical lens of ANT. ANT is neither wholly a method nor wholly theory, but instead a collection of tools, sensibilities and methods that pay attention to the relations surrounding the social and natural world (Law, 2009). ANT falls under the umbrella of sociomateriality, a collection of theories and approaches that focus on relations and connections (Fenwick et al., 2011). The aim of these approaches is to unearth how things – humans, objects, animals, technologies – come together to form and hold assemblages that enact knowledge, behavior, identity and other effects (Fenwick et al., 2011). Tracing the sociomaterial (that is, both social and material actors) sheds light on how practices are formed and unformed, thus revealing their weaknesses and strengths (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick et al., 2011). Sociomateriality is applied widely across disciplines, particularly in education (Brooks & Waters, 2017; Fenwick & Edwards, 2012) and organizational studies (Cooren, 2020; Orlikowski, 2007).

What separates ANT from other sociomaterial approaches is its positioning of non-human things as not only as important, but also equivalent to humans (Fenwick et al., 2011). This concept is referred to as symmetry (Latour, 1987). Some argue that in education there is a tendency to prioritize humans and their actions and intentions over materials which risks overlooking the force that non-humans can exert to shape knowledge and behavior (Brooks & Waters, 2017). ANT was selected as the theoretical lens for this study because it offers a way to challenge assumed and foundational concepts of wellbeing, particularly those driven by the university. Specifically, ANT allows for an exploration of whether university actors – such as services and policies – play a central role in student wellbeing practices. By incorporating an analysis of people, materials, processes, and the connections among them (Fenwick & Edwards, 2012), ANT broadens the scope of investigation to include more elements than just those within the university. The agency of materials, such as policy documents, tests, and devices, to influence and change knowledge and practices has been shown in studies examining educational standards (Fenwick, 2010), student engagement (Gourlay, 2015), learning spaces and pedagogic change (Mulcahy et al., 2015) and academic association and practice (Shan et al., 2022; Tummons, 2023). This study builds upon a small, but growing body of research that examines WIL through ANT and sociomaterial sensibilities (Chue et al., 2022; Dean & Sykes, 2022; Gupta et al., 2023; Steensen, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach. While ANT studies draw upon a range of methods, qualitative approaches are most typical as they allow space to explore how things come together (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Participants

Fifteen university students in their second year of study participated in the study. The students were enrolled in an undergraduate teaching degree at the same mid-sized Australian university and had recently completed their first teaching placement. In the state of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia,

the pre-service teacher is defined as a student enrolled in a teacher education or preparation program. These students must successfully complete degree requirements including course work and 60-80 days of practical experiences (also known as Professional WIL) in schools before becoming a qualified teacher. This may include teaching practice, supervised practical teaching experience, and final placement internship. The students in this study had been placed at a primary school for three weeks of supervised WIL. The placement was supported by a complementary subject focused on professional development, pedagogy and curriculum.

Students were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews via a post on the University's Learning Management System (LMS). All recruitment invites and communications were accompanied by the study's Participant Information Sheet which explained the purpose of the study and outlined potential burdens and risks for participants.

Data Collection

Data in this study was collected and analyzed using two methods: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were employed to explore students' wellbeing practices before and during their placement. The interviews were conducted virtually using videoconferencing software. The interview questions were structured around the WIL Wellbeing Framework proposed by Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2018) and explored the interrelationships between institutional and community supports and students' personal coping strategies. In keeping with ANT sensibilities, the questions focused on what the humans (students and those around them) and materials do, rather than what they mean (Latour, 1999).

Relying solely on interview data is considered atypical in ANT studies as it risks privileging the activities and viewpoints of human actors - the interviewer and interviewee (Demant & Ravn, 2020; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Ethnographic observations, in combination with other methods, are more frequently used (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Observations, however, can be more onerous and disruptive for participants, and may require more time and financial resourcing than interviews (Kervin et al., 2016). For this reason, this study joins several others in engaging interview data as the backbone for the analysis (Beck, 2023; Mulcahy, 2013; Mulcahy et al., 2015; Oosterhoff et al., 2023). It does so with consideration that interview data alone would limit the extent that we could describe the peculiarities of the networks we seek to explore. To address this challenge, the study also collected documents and other materials that emerged as actors during the interviews including placement handbooks, websites and webpages, and policy documents. Analysis of relevant documents enabled the researchers to embrace Latour's (2004) suggestion to 'look down' to explore the complexity and heterogeneity of wellbeing assemblages (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010).

Participants were invited to member-check their interview transcripts to strengthen the validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At this stage, they were also invited to supply any materials or documents that played a role in their wellbeing practices during placement. Supplying additional materials and documents was voluntary and only some participants chose to provide them. Examples of additional materials included lesson plans, photographs taken during placement, and planning and scheduling templates. Participants were assigned a pseudonym when the interviews were transcribed to maintain their confidentiality and privacy. These pseudonyms are used to identify the quotes below. The study received approval from the researchers' University's Human Research Ethics Committee (2022/089).

Data Analysis

Analysis in this study adopts Mulcahy's (2013) relational materialist approach. Materialities (physical matter), socialities (social interactions and institutions) and textualities (discourse and other meaning-making activities) were conceived as indiscrete microsites of wellbeing (Mulcahy, 2013; Mulcahy et al., 2015). Each microsite was traced using relational content analysis to establish patterns and identify interrelationships. The data surfaced a number of social, material and technological actors in the assemblage as students enacted practices of wellbeing.

WELLBEING PRACTICES: PREPARING AND ENCOUNTERING

The practices reported on below are split into two episodes of student activity – preparing for and encountering placement-related stressors – to give some structure to the sociomaterial networks that emerged during analysis (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). The practices featured in this section were chosen based on how prominently they featured amongst the data. The description of these episodes and their link back to theory and literature are interwoven in this article to reflect the complexity and heterogeneity of sociomaterial assemblages.

Preparing

Students often enacted a set of practices to pre-emptively mitigate placement-related impacts on their wellbeing. As one student, Fatima, expressed: "I had to put a lot of things in place prior to my placement for it to even work." These practices form the first episode of student activity unpacked in this article – preparing.

This practice of 'putting things in place' was typically enacted through textual relations where students engaged in sense-making to identify the challenges they might face. Students have been shown to engage in sense-making to prepare for placement, a process where they identify what might be disrupted by placement and what might be needed to overcome the disruption (Vu et al., 2024). In this study, students leveraged materials (placement handbooks and policy documents) and discourse with actors (conversations with previous students or their lecturer) to identify what the placement might require of them. They then analyzed how this disruption might affect their wellbeing, and what they needed to do to manage this disruption. In the excerpts from Nikolai and Lila below, they consider how transitioning to full time work will impact their wellbeing and go on to identify which aspects of their routine (physical exercise, social interactions) they will maintain to manage this impact:

I knew that... Like, adjusting to full time was gonna be a bit of a hiccup if I wasn't fully prepared for it. So, I decided "Alright, this is gonna be the routine. Don't skip out on things like gym and, you know, time with my friends or girlfriend. (Nikolai)

Even if I had a million things to do, I would want to [spend time with family]. Because I felt like it was a bit of normal... a bit of normal Lila time for me. So, I just tried to keep to my normal social schedule as much as possible, cause I didn't... I didn't just wanna work from 9:30 – 4:30 and then go to sleep and then wake up and do it again. I feel like if I had done that, my wellbeing would have been definitely... terrible. (Lila)

Students also recounted collecting and organizing practices. Social and material relations take the lead at this stage: social catchups to maintain relationships were booked and busy family schedules were cleared to provide space for rest. At times, 'putting things in place' were smaller acts of collecting and

organizing materials, for example selecting an appropriate outfit or buying pens and stickers. Cultivating a professional identity during a placement can lead to additional stress for pre-service teachers (Oliver, 2024). Certain materials, and their preparation and organization, proved important to pre-service teachers' depiction of their identity (Beltman et al., 2015). Here, as students enact their professional identities, the presence of these materials held agency (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). An outfit, hung up behind a door ready for the next day, gave a sense of control. Pens and stickers, ready to scribble and mark student work gave WIL participants confidence in navigating their emerging identity as a teacher. When these materials were not present or were unorganized, students' stress and feelings of insecurity were heightened.

Overlapping with the finding of practices where students are 'putting things in place' was also the notion of 'moving things around,' a practice of adjusting 'normal' life patterns around the 'abnormal' patterns of placement. Here, social relations are prominent. Alex, for example, pre-emptively mitigated financial stress by re-organizing his shifts at work to sustain his income:

So, that was a big thing for me, but I got on top of that early. I reorganized with work to change from my usual job to another one I could do after hours. So that was... I had that sorted out very early. I guess, being on top of it was key. (Alex)

Although Alex drove the re-adjustment of his work hours, his employer played a role in enacting this strategy by providing permission and accommodating the request. Financial stress is a well-documented challenge for students participating in WIL (Grant-Smith & de Zwaan, 2019; Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Hodge et al., 2024; Usher et al., 2022). Employers play an important role in relieving this stress, where they wield power through approving leave requests and scheduling changes. They can also further exacerbate this stress declining students' work hours during placement and threatening future employment opportunities (Usher et al., 2022).

In Alex's scenario, it becomes apparent that employing strategies to manage wellbeing during placement relies on the cooperation of other people. Adjusting and 'moving things around' is a practice that can ripple out from the individual, where it is not just the routines of students that change but also those of the people around them. The excerpt below describes Priya's strategy to manage childcare responsibilities during placement:

So, my husband picked up a lot of the slack... He took a few days off work through that time, just to make sure that they were looked after. And I have my parents. They also had to step in. I only have my child in day care a few days a week, so they had to come and look after them for the other days. (Priya)

Childcare and full time placement hours were immovable forces in Priya's network. To adjust to the abnormal force (placement hours), Priya leveraged her social relations, and her children, husband and parents adjusted their routines to work around it. This example demonstrates that it is not just students who bend to accommodate placement, but also the network of people who surround them. This notion of WIL wellbeing involving others in addition to the student is reflected in Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) framework, where community support is highlighted as a key enabler of wellbeing. However, our understanding of this support is somewhat 'black-boxed' (Latour, 1987). The actors, both human and non-human are bundled up into a single entity. This conceptualization risks taking a wider array of actors for granted (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). The analysis here digs deeper to illustrate the chain reaction that occurs within community to support students' wellbeing, illuminating the 'black-box' and providing greater clarity on how one's community mobilizes to

support student wellbeing during WIL. It often takes a village of people– family, friends, employers, colleagues – to support students' wellbeing while on placement.

There is also a collection of practices our learners enact that attempt to change placement to adjust to their needs. The goal of these practices is to prevent wellbeing challenges from occurring at all. Bound up in these practices were a number of textual, material and social relations, where students interpret the policies provided to them by their university and leverage the policies' agency to change their situation. Ji-Hyun, for example, discusses her attempt to reduce her financial stress by minimizing her commute (and thus the cost of petrol):

Because there was a 45-minute drive, I did have a look at public transport. Cause I think, it is over an hour [by public transport] then you can contest it and on public transport I think it was 58 minutes. So, I did consider that, and asking to maybe go to a different school when I got allocated, but I just kind of thought I'll stick it out. Just, you know, if I've been allocated to the school for a reason, then I should probably go and do it and just try to make the most of the opportunity. (Ji-Hyun)

The policy referred in Ji-Hyun's example can be described as an 'immutable mobile' – an object which appears insusceptible to change and is capable of travelling across time and space to influence activity (Law, 2003). The stable and mobile nature of these objects is thought to give them more power, enabling them to dictate and shape knowledge and action (Fenwick, 2010). For Ji-Hyun, the policy shaped her action. She perceived the information presented within the document as fixed, and thus went down a path of 'making the most of it' rather than challenging it.

Another student, Anya, also attempted to leverage the agency afforded by policy materials to influence where she was placed to better accommodate her disability:

So, I was kind like "Guys, I have an access plan. Please don't make me go all the way to [location]." And they kind of were like, "Well... There's nothing in there that says you can't go" ... I was more saying since mine says I have appointments that I can ... They're very important. It's not just me saying that. It's different. (Anya)

In her statement "It's not just me saying that. It's different", Anya expresses her perception of the immense agency held within the access plan. There is also reference to another actor in this assemblage – the placement coordination unit that determines where each student is placed. The process Anya lays out is that her access plan, through virtue of its power afforded to it by policy, should influence the placement coordinators who can then change her situation. The placement coordinators, however, were not influenced by the access plan. Anya's situation illuminates that materials are fluid, enacted by the relations that surround them at that given moment (Fenwick, 2010).

Preparing for placement is represented in this dataset as organizing and adjusting social and material relations. Students, as central actors in their wellbeing networks, interpret placement requirements and proactively leverage social and material relations to accommodate or prevent stressors that they think may occur.

Encountering

In addition to their pre-emptive practices prior to placement, students also described a collection of practices that enabled them to cope when they encountered acute wellbeing challenges. Data

highlighted that these practices included those that affected change and minimized a stressor but also practices that demonstrated acquiescence, wherein the student accepts or complies passively without protest. They were about acquiescing or 'going with the flow' when encountering stressors. Practices to acquiesce have been uncovered elsewhere in WIL literature, with students shown to adapt and conform to workplace practices (Dean & Sykes, 2022). This article unpacks three practices that enabled students to acquiesce – 'taking time', 'enacting joy' and 'talking about it'.

When feeling stress, anxiety, or a sense of being overwhelmed by their placement, students would 'take time' to decompress and create hard stops between placement activities and their personal lives. This practice enabled them to acquiesce with stressors they were otherwise unable to change. In the excerpt below, Luca describes their process of decompressing after a busy day at placement:

There were a few days where I would... I'd sit in the car before leaving to go back home for about 30 minutes. There would be days where... It wasn't an awful day. It was just "Oh that was... That was a lot." And I was sort of just decompressing and processing how everything happened. Because it went by so quickly that I found myself just trying to catch up and reboot my brain. (Luca)

Social and material relations were often at play during this practice. For Luca, their car provides a space for them, in between school and home, to reflect and process at the end of the day: "just mentally preparing myself for... that this will one day be my life. My life will revolve around 5 days of school". The car is taking part in this process. Although outwardly passive in nature, it is entangled with Luca and performing with them to enact this practice (Acton, 2017; Fenwick et al., 2011; Mulcahy et al., 2015). Materials involved in the process of 'taking time' were often associated with privacy and solitude. For example, a bed played this role for Ji-Hyun:

Yeah. So, at the end of another 45 minute drive home, I would just lie down for an hour. I just needed... I needed a minute. Just to lie down. A minute to myself. (Ji-Hyun)

'Taking time' often led to seeking or encountering joy. Joy, for most students interviewed in this study, had a positive effect on their wellbeing and was enacted through material and social relations. For Priya, her car was against entangled in her practice, as it provided space to enact joy at the start of the day. She would listen to podcasts as she drove: "something funny so I could have a bit of a laugh". Luca also found joy in social-material relations, playing video games with friends at the end of the day. For Ingrid, the practice of finding joy was sparked by her planner:

It [the planner] has sections, you know, anecdotal notes like what's something that the kids said that was funny? What's something the teacher said was funny? What have you gotten out of today? How are you feeling today? Have you drunk enough water today? All that kind of thing. (Ingrid)

This planner came into Ingrid's path via social media managed by a pre-service teacher turned illustrator. It is bright and bold, with smiling bees and rainbows framing its pages. Amongst its many pages, it includes the self-care tool that Ingrid alludes to above. This journal, much like the policy document encountered by Ji-Hyun and the access plan wielded by Anya, is stable and fixed (Fenwick, 2010). It shaped Ingrid's actions in a positive way. Water and exercise could be ticked off each day, and a list of feelings were presented (proud, overwhelmed, stressed and excited, amongst others), ready to be color coded and recorded. The enactment of joy at this moment for Ingrid is one of solely material

relations – the act of coloring or writing into a journal in a manner conducive to positive wellbeing practices.

The practices that enabled students to acquiesce to wellbeing stressors appeared as both passive and active in their form. At times, material relations unceremoniously provided spaces for passive practices like decompressing and reflection to be enacted, and at others, they played a more active role in shaping proactive wellbeing actions. Another prominent practice that enabled students to acquiesce was 'talking about it', a socially oriented practice in which students debriefed or vented to their family, friends or peers. As Priya shares:

Really, I feel like the life-saving thing was chatting with my friends. And I think because we're all in the same boat – my friend is also a Mum – so we could share how that was a bit hectic. And I think just hearing each person's... We all had slightly different experiences, so I don't know ... That was the biggest helper for me, I think. It's having good friends to share things with. (Priya)

Social activity and social conversations are frequently used by university students to cope with psychological distress (Stallman et al., 2020). As seen in Priya's response, this practice was particularly potent when it was reciprocal – both an act of sharing to and with their peers. Debriefing amongst peers was sometimes done in person, but more commonly it was facilitated through social media. This group of students had access to a social media group inhabited by the entire cohort, and some of them had created smaller group chats for each year level. In WIL literature, sense of belonging and peer connection have been highlighted as protective factors for student wellbeing (An et al., 2023; McBeath et al., 2018). In both spaces, students would share their frustrations, recount funny stories and check-in with each other. The nature of this space meant that students did not always have to talk about it themselves to receive its benefits, they could also read others' stories and gain a sense of joy and comradery.

'Talking about it' also led to seeking or receiving support. Students reached out to a variety of people, from mental health professionals to teachers they considered mentors to help them cope with wellbeing stressors. Few students spoke about university services or staff (for example, counselling services or the placement unit and coordinators) as beneficial actors in their wellbeing networks. Luca describes his reluctance below:

There are only certain people that I feel comfortable turning to for help. And that's a very short list. So, the University was never ... Like maybe I should go to the university to help out and I certainly wouldn't have felt comfortable doing that. (Luca)

These sentiments echo studies across higher education that highlights that many students do not seek help when suffering from psychological distress (Eisenberg et al., 2012; Grøtan et al., 2019). Barriers to seeking help include the stigma of mental illness, distrust and inability to access university counseling services, and low mental health literacy (Bennett et al., 2024; Ning et al., 2022; Vidourek et al., 2014). In this dataset, receiving support was not always a practice driven by students themselves. Even though students did not often engage in help-seeking behaviors by explicitly asking for support, it was provided nonetheless. For example, their parents providing shelter and financial support or an unassuming update from their lecturer on the social media group page. In the excerpt below, Sofia shares an example of this in action:

The teacher picked it up pretty fast ... I do have anxiety. So, she knows that I'm... I stress quite a lot. And I guess she could just pick it up through my facial expressions. And I don't know. It

wasn't great that she picked it up because I was like "Oh, that's not good." But I was kind of stressed and not sure what to expect. But then it was also kind of good because she knew that I would probably be stressed about it so she was able to, like, reassure me that I would be alright. (Sofia)

Sofia raises concerns with her anxieties and how these were tacitly identified and supported by the actions of her placement supervisor. This study presents only three practices – taking time, enacting joy and talking about it – of many that students' employ when they encounter and acquiesce wellbeing stressors. These practices were chosen as they featured prominently amongst the dataset and showcased that strategies to cope with wellbeing strategies can be both passive and proactive. This article also presents them in a way that might suggest they are discrete and fixed. In reality, many more practices are enacted, often overlapping and connecting to one another to form wellbeing assemblages. This diversity is evident in the following excerpt from Ingrid:

Well, I guess keeping with a regular routine. Like usually I would walk my dogs in the afternoon after I finish uni. I'd come home and I'd walk my dogs. Take them for a walk through the bush. But that wasn't happening because I didn't have time off uni or work because I was working until late at night. So, I'd walk them in the morning. I'd wake up early and I'd take them for a walk or take my sister for a walk with me too, or something like that. (Ingrid)

Ingrid talks about both maintaining a regular routine and engaging in exercise, and notes several actors – her dogs, her sister, her workplace – that either played a positive or detrimental role in enacting these practices. This is just one translation of wellbeing in the conversation with Ingrid. She also spoke about challenges arranging transport and negotiating full time work around her placement. The data explored in this study illustrates that wellbeing assemblages are complex and changing. They involve a constellation of 'things' that come together to enact protective practices and strategies, echoing Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) proposition that WIL wellbeing is dynamic and fluid.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Wellbeing in WIL is enacted through relations. This study sought to 'look down' using ANT sensibilities to explore the social, textual and material relations that enact wellbeing practices (Latour, 2004; Mulcahy, 2013). By doing so, it illuminated a set of practices that enable students to prepare for and encounter wellbeing stressors that are enacted through relational assemblages. ANT studies do not seek to homogenize their findings, as the heterogeneity of networks is central to its relational view (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010). Drawing on sociometrical theoretical frameworks, this study makes several novel contributions to the domains of WIL and student wellbeing: (a) Enacting wellbeing during WIL is dynamic and fluid, supporting Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith's (2018) assertions; (b) Students both prepare for and acquiesce to wellbeing stressors; (c) Participating in a placement impacts not just the individuals taking part, but also those that surround them; and (d) University services and actors play a limited role in the wellbeing assemblages explored in this data set.

The observation that a university's capacity to support student wellbeing is limited may be a surprising or controversial contribution to the discourse on student wellbeing in WIL. The understanding of wellbeing in this article is guided by the question – what can the university do to facilitate student wellbeing? Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith (2018) propose university support as a key enabler of WIL wellbeing, alongside community support and personal coping strategies. In the assemblages we explored in this study, university services and actors were either ignored or overlooked by students. When university actors were present, they constrained students' wellbeing practices by performing as

'immutable mobiles' (Law, 2003). Many students responded to the immovable force of university policies and requirement by enacting practices to acquiesce or by seeking support external to the university. These findings signal the importance of sociomaterial actors that fall outside of a university's locus of control. When seeking to support students, university stakeholders may need to be cognizant of how external people, resources, programs or providers can assist students during placement and complement these rather than replicating or working against them. To employ a simple example, a university may promote a community-based counselling service in addition to their own on-campus service.

This study uncovers the many actors and 'things' that come together to enact wellbeing during WIL. By doing so, it illuminates opportunities for universities and WIL practitioners to intervene and better support student wellbeing in WIL (Fenwick et al., 2011). Future research may explore how universities can leverage or promote community supports to foster student wellbeing. There is also opportunity to apply ANT sensibilities to other practices within WIL, for example learning while on placement and enacting professional identity to uncover the social, textual, and material relations that may shape these practices.

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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

Zegwaard, K. E., Pretti, T. J., Rowe, A. D., & Ferns, S. J. (2023). Defining work-integrated learning. In K. E. Zegwaard & T. J. Pretti (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of work-integrated learning* (3rd ed., pp. 29-48). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003156420-4>



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