

Pre-work-integrated learning as the catalyst for authentic pedagogy: A Vietnam-based case study

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This article contributes to the growing literature on pre-work-integrated learning through an evaluation of its application in two concurrently taught courses at RMIT University (Vietnam) in collaboration with Investing in Women, an initiative of the Australian government to promote women's economic empowerment in Southeast Asia. An impact evaluation survey featuring qualitative and quantitative questions was completed by 99 of the courses' students to evaluate whether they obtained an authentic learning experience. The findings demonstrate how client assessment briefs can facilitate student motivation throughout course activities, assessment tasks, and learning outcomes and provide the students with social and cultural context. The findings also offer critical insights into key themes associated with work integrated learning, such as employability, the relationship between authentic assessment and student identity, and stakeholder responsibility, particularly in a Southeast Asian context.

Keywords: Gender equality research, communication students, qualitative research, authentic learning, industry-university collaborations

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a response to the need to raise the level of students' employability as a focus for curriculum development widely adopted in universities (Jackson & Dean, 2022; Rowe et al., 2018). According to Zegwaard et al. (2021), "work integrated learning encompasses various forms of experiential and practice-based learning, including internships, cooperative education, work placements, clinical practice, and industry-based and community-based projects" (p. 2). Given these varied forms, in addition to the transformative role of higher education and range of skills needed for contemporary workplaces, it is critical to conduct research to address the pedagogical, curricular, and practical opportunities and challenges associated with this approach. Ferns et al. (2025) argue that a coherent definition of WIL and WIL frameworks are needed to optimize outcomes for students. This includes understanding the differences between pre-WIL, WIL, and post-WIL. Whereas WIL requires students to directly participate in a workplace setting, pre-WIL activities, through the support of an industry partner, engage the students in work-like activities and require them to "observe, explore, analyze, and reflect on theory in practice" (Dean et al., 2020, p. 8). Thus, pre-WIL supports the achievement of learning outcomes by developing skills and agency so students can autonomously progress their careers; unlike WIL, it is not considered as authentic (Ferns et al., 2025). We, however, contend that pre-WIL interventions, if carefully crafted in collaboration with industry partners, can establish an authentic learning experience for students. According to Newmann et al. (1996) authentic courses and assessment are more frequently seen by students as intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile and meaningful. Unlike exams, authentic activities and assessments invite students to consistently reflect upon and assess their own outputs and recognize what constitutes meaningful and engaging work. The students are challenged to think critically, creatively, and independently, as well

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as perform higher order reasoning, which collectively results in improved motivation (Jones et al., 2010). Further, Koçyiğit and Zembat argue that “the aim of authentic learning is not to learn the subject directly but to produce solutions to real-world problems” (2013, p. 292). Thus, part of authentic learning can be about bringing in social and cultural context that is relevant to students. Kreber et al. (2007) argue that much of the of literature on authentic learning comes from the Western pedagogical tradition and is situated within a Western teaching environment. Thus, there is a need to look at other cultures to understand the different interpretations of authentic learning and add to its value.

The intervention highlighted in this article is a collaboration between the Professional Communication degree program at RMIT University in Vietnam and Investing in Women (IW). IW is an initiative of the Australian government that supports inclusive economic growth through women’s economic empowerment in Southeast Asia. IW facilitates this growth through supporting business coalitions to shift work place cultures, practices, and policy barriers to achieve workplace gender equality (WGE). They partner with investors and ecosystem builders to expand market opportunities for women, with a view to incentivizing and catalyzing access to capital for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Finally, they collaborate with partners to positively influence gender norms (attitudes and practices) to support women in the world of work (Investinginwomen.asia, 2023).

The pre-WIL collaboration involved applying assessment briefs collectively created by IW and course coordinators for a communications research course and an Asian media and culture course. In accordance with the customary approaches to assessment briefs at RMIT Vietnam, the IW briefs included:

- a real-world contextual scenario based around the client and their aims;
- a set of instructions; and
- tasks to be completed

Each brief required the students to analyze social media campaigns by IW and their Vietnam-based community partners, ascertain whether they positively influenced gender norms, and produce outcomes in accordance with each course’s learning outcomes.

For the Asian media and culture course, the brief was incorporated as a formative assessment during the weekly topic of social media and digital activism. During this week, the students were introduced to IW, their mission, the different partner organizations, and their campaigns. Using the brief, the students were instructed to roleplay as professionals working within one of these organizations. After reviewing the campaigns of IW and their partners, they were tasked with considering: 1) what might be the specific competencies of these professions and professionals? 2) What skills might you need to enter this industry? 3) What might be some of their daily work tasks? Subsequently, they were requested to prepare alternative campaign ideas/concepts to launch on social media related to gender equality and tasked with presenting their campaign through the following points:

1. What is the campaign you have designed?
2. Who is it targeting?
3. What is the mission of the campaign?
4. How will you use digital media to launch and run the campaign?

In the communications research course, the brief was used as the course’s summative assessment, administered in two parts. For the first, each class group was assigned to a partner campaign and tasked with undertaking a situational analysis to develop evidence based on using social media and

secondary quantitative data, for how gender norms are perpetuated by traditional portrayals of women and men in Vietnam, targeting urban millennials on the role of women and men in the economy, in society and in the home. The student groups were evaluated on their expertise in conducting social listening analysis, social network analysis, and quantitative analysis on secondary data (both descriptive and inferential). Each group needed to provide recommendations based on their findings. The second part required each group to deliver their report in an assessed presentation format.

The collaboration is aligned with a course-based community service-learning model, as identified by McRae and Johnston's (2016) proposed global work integrated learning framework. This approach to WIL allows for students to address social problems through participation with communities and/or community organizations, to deepen their understanding of complex social phenomena, to learn in a structured setting that permits reflection, and to enhance what is taught in the school setting beyond the classroom and, consequently, foster a sense of caring (Wade, 2000). Applying assessment briefs featuring a scenario, instructions and tasks with explicit local relevance that caters to student interests helps, as argued by Kreber (2013), "students understand themselves as members of a wider social community towards which they feel a responsibility" (p. 9).

The Professional Communication degree program housing the two courses chosen for this pre-WIL intervention is offered across both RMIT Vietnam campuses (located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, respectively) and differs from its Melbourne counterpart. Although the program learning outcomes and course learning outcomes are aligned across all three campuses, the learning materials and assessments in the Vietnam-based courses are informed by local contexts and address local needs, as guided by staff expertise and the program's industry advisory committee. This group of representatives ensures that the program courses are aligned with contemporary industry demands and its graduates positioned to meet the needs of their professional discipline. One additional difference is the design of the degree program; in Vietnam, the program is split across two advertising and public relations vocational-oriented streams. These streams are complimented with an Asian Media and Culture minor, comprising four courses which train the students to identify, evaluate, and critically analyze cultural, historical, and theoretical practices that contextualize their professional practice and further study. Although the program's organization is consistently praised by its students, as evidenced by the course experience surveys and the student-staff consultative committee, areas for improvement have been identified. For instance, students have demonstrated difficulty making and sustaining connections between the program's two vocational streams and its media and culture minor. This perceived disconnect stems from a lack of understanding about how the minor stream complements the students' advertising and public relations courses and, consequently, their future career path.

The university's partnership with IW for the pre-WIL intervention was envisioned as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the two vocational streams and the media and culture minor by using similar assessment briefs across two courses, each with respective approaches to address it. The chosen courses are scheduled concurrently in the program map and no other course preceding either utilizes WIL or pre-WIL approaches; therefore, the work with IW would be the student cohort's first formal exposure to an external partner's direct contribution to the classroom. Additionally, IW's material could be incorporated at similar times in the teaching term, albeit in different ways in the respective courses, such as through formative activities and summative assessment, the latter which, as noted by Harlen and James (1997), is critical for a student's acquisition of knowledge and development.

This research aims to provide critical insight into how the pre-WIL interventions discussed above, which replicate community development processes and a range of employability requirements pertinent to the contemporary communications industry, provided the students with an authentic learning experience. To evidence the aim, we draw from selections from Herrington and Herrington's (2006) criteria for authentic learning, showing how the intervention: 1) provided social and cultural context for the course activities, assessments, and learning outcomes, 2) nurtured and sustained motivation throughout the duration of the brief's tasks, and 3) enabled the students to draw clear links between the two courses.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The evaluation is informed by quantitative and qualitative data, the former derived from a Likert scale and the latter from reflective short answer responses, both intended reveal the students' perspective of their experience with the instructions and tasks contained within the two briefs. Utilizing qualitative and quantitative components is useful, as each offers distinct advantages in capturing different aspects of the learning process. As an outcome evaluation study focusing on the impact of a program or intervention (Rowe et al., 2018), which in this case is about providing an authentic learning experience, the quantitative answers provide standardized and measurable indicators that reflect whether specific objectives were achieved (Roni et al., 2020). Further, a Likert scale is useful for obtaining responses more precisely than binary questions (Koo & Yang, 2025). The reflective short answers provided valuable insights into the students' motivations, attitudes, and perceived benefits of their WIL experience, such as its impact on their personal and professional development. Moreover, through qualitative data, the research team was better able to uncover patterns, challenges, and success factors that may not be so easily quantifiable, thus providing a more holistic understanding of the learning process (Atkins & Wallace, 2012).

Data Collection

Following the finalizing and releasing of the course marks, all students enrolled in the courses were invited to participate in an anonymous Qualtrics survey. The students were asked to identify whether they were enrolled in both courses or only one. Identifying which courses the students were enrolled in throughout the pre-WIL implementation was necessary to address one of the project's research aims, to know whether the assessment tasks from the briefs improved the students' ability to make connections across the two courses. Next, via the Likert scale, the students were asked a range of questions regarding their general perceptions of how the briefs were implemented in the classroom. The questions asked whether they agreed that the instructions and tasks from the IW briefs: 1) allowed them to apply their theoretical knowledge in a work-oriented setting; 2) increased their confidence in their professional knowledge and skills; 3) increased their competence in applying professional knowledge and skills; 4) and was overall beneficial for their learning experience. Students confirming enrollment in both courses were asked whether the instructions and tasks from the IW briefs allowed them to draw clear connections between the two courses and their learning outcomes. For the second part of the survey, the students were asked to provide constructive answers to the following questions:

- What were the main things you learnt from using the IW brief?
- What aspects of the activities and assessments, informed by the IW brief, were particularly beneficial to your learning experience? Why?
- What were the main challenges of using the IW brief? Why?

- In what ways has using material tied to real-world outcomes and informed by industry partners contributed to your development as a professional?
- Please suggest ways your experience in work-integrated learning could be improved.

The short answer questions were included in the research design to allow students a space to speak openly about their learning experiences, both to complement the study's quantitative aspect and to potentially receive information beyond the research's scope, while still being relevant to the contexts of pre-WIL. For instance, in addition to supporting the research questions, the answers received invited broader considerations about employability as a developing concept in higher education (Römgers et al., 2019), assessment and scaffolding as approaches to shape and develop employability skills and student identity (Ajjawi et al., 2020), and stakeholder responsibility and maximizing stakeholder benefits (Fleming et al., 2018).

The anonymous responses to the quantitative and qualitative questions were organized in accordance with the answer provided for the question about course enrollment. Qualitative responses were coded by way of participant number and course affiliation (P1=participant number, AM&C=Asian Media & Culture, CR=Communications Research, B=both courses). Content analysis, "a systematic, quantitative approach to analyzing the content of meaning of communicative messages" (Maier, 2017, p. 242), was applied to analyze the qualitative data. All responses were manually organized into themes in accordance with the research aims. Responses considered inadequate for analysis (i.e., "it was good") were excluded. The quantitative questions were analyzed and visualized using Microsoft Excel. The project received ethical approval (Project ID: 24891/review reference 2022-24891-17435).

Participants

Of the 310 students enrolled across both courses, 99 completed the quantitative questions, with 17 of these students also completing the qualitative questions. The total breakdown of the students enrolled in each course is as follows: 221 students were enrolled in the communications course, 112 students were enrolled in the Asian Media and Culture course, and 23 students were enrolled in both, concurrently. Of the participating students ($n=99$), only 13 were simultaneously enrolled in both courses. Sixty six of the participating students were only enrolled in the communications research course while 20 students were enrolled only in the Asian Media and Culture course. Although students are advised to follow the program map, many choose not to due to obligations external to university, a heavy workload, and a lack of familiar study/assessment partners.

FINDINGS

Table 1 provides the quantitative results of the participating students that were enrolled in both courses simultaneously ($n=13$). Mean and Standard Deviation are calculated based on the Likert Scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree ($n=13$).

TABLE 1: Responses to survey questions for students enrolled in both courses ($n=13$).

	Mean	SD
Q1: The brief allowed me to apply my theoretical knowledge in a work-oriented setting	3.92	0.50
Q2: The brief increased my confidence in my professional skills and knowledge	3.46	0.66
Q3: The brief increased in competence in applying my professional knowledge and skills	3.69	0.75
Q4: The brief was overall beneficial for my learning experience	3.85	0.80
Q5: The brief allowed me to draw clear connections between the two courses and their learning outcomes	3.54	0.88

Table 2 shows the quantitative results for the students enrolled in either the communications research course or the Asian media and culture course, but not both simultaneously ($n=86$). As these students were not enrolled in both courses simultaneously, the question concerning fostering connections across each course was not posed to them in the survey. Mean and Standard Deviation are calculated based on the Likert Scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree ($n=86$).

TABLE 2: Responses for students enrolled in only one of the two courses ($n=86$).

	Mean	SD
Q1: The brief allowed me to apply my theoretical knowledge in a work-oriented setting	3.81	1.01
Q2: The brief increased my confidence in my professional skills and knowledge	3.70	1.03
Q3: The brief increased in competence in applying my professional knowledge and skills	3.66	1.04
Q4: The brief was overall beneficial for my learning experience	3.88	1.03

One key finding worth emphasizing is students enrolled in only one of the two courses offered more definitive answers (strongly agree/strongly disagree) than those who participated in both courses. Regardless of whether enrolled in only one or both courses simultaneously, the participating students largely offered thematically consistent answers to the qualitative questions. The findings below are organized by the questions in the survey.

For the question: “What were the main things you learned from the IW brief” the students provided a variety of answers. Some students (P2-B, P5-AM&C P6-CR), P13-CR, P16-CR, P17-CR) responded with holistic information about the learning process, with others (P3-B, P10-CR, P11-CR, P12-CR) specifically referencing the application of critical thinking skills, using discipline specific tools, and allowing the

brief's contextual scenario to guide their research process, from applying theory to collecting and analyzing data. Other students (P1-B, P7-CR, P8-CR, P14-CR) focused on gender norms as the specific subject of the brief, while another (P15-CR) suggested that the brief's instructions and tasks revealed possible career options, such as working in the non-profit sector to address social phenomena. In the student's own words, "the brief from IW really helped to guide my career path of being a communicator in a non-profit organization and made me realize that I can partly make a positive impact to the community." Another student (P4-AM&C) suggested that the main takeaway from using the IW brief was how it elucidated the difference in theoretical knowledge and practical application.

For the question: "What aspects of the activities and assessments, informed by the IW brief, were particularly beneficial for your learning experience" the students again provided a range of consistent answers. One student (P3-B) suggested that working in the computer labs with guided instruction by their lecturer to complete the tasks was beneficial, highlighting the importance of classroom design and capacity to encourage discipline specific learning. Other students (P6-CR, P11-CR, P13-CR) highlighted working in a group/teamwork, with specific emphasis on the requirement to simulate the pitch as a collective unit. Other students (P2-B, P7-CR, P10-CR). proposed that the use of social media listening tools to understand real life conversations about a topical issue was useful. Building on this suggestion, one student (P15-CR) stated that the use of social media listening tools to explore gender roles and women's position in society challenged their preconceptions; in the student's own words:

I found that the brief triggered my curiosity in gender roles and encouraged me to do more research to dig deeper into the issue. At first, when reading the brief, I had some opinions about the gender equality around the world and the roles of men and women in household and in the economy. However, after a lot of research, I was surprised that all my previous perceptions about gender status quo were not actually true. The raw data from every country around the world made me realize why gender equality is the pressing issue around the world and developed countries do not mean that gender inequality does not exist there.

Other responses included an appreciation for time management (P8-CR), outside-the-box thinking (P14-CR), and a deeper understanding for how important social media can be to shape how an institution is perceived by audiences (P17-CR).

For the question: "What were the main challenges of using the IW brief", some students (P1-B, P2-B, P16-CR) responded with connecting raw data to story narratives, as well as composing those narratives. Others (P7-CR, P13-CR) suggested that they found unsatisfactory or insufficient data, and some (P6-CR; P5-AM&C) stated that applying theory was challenging. One student (P3-B) commented on being overloaded with the assessment task, stating that "the final assignment; it's difficult to handle the time of researching and writing reports while preparing for the presentation." The main issue, at least for those enrolled only in the communications research course, was the instructions. For several students (P8-CR, P9-CR, P10-CR, P12-CR, P14-CR), the brief's instructions required careful attention, and often they wanted additional information, specifically clarification about the brief's requirements. Others (P11-CR, P17-CR) desired assistance with how to use the tools, with one (P15-CR) seeking clarity for abstract terms associated with gender roles. One student (P4-AM&C) from the Asian Media and Culture course responded positively to the question, suggesting that no challenges were experienced: "overall, the brief gave me great space to explore the theories that I had never heard of, which I was very satisfied with, thus no improvement point was needed for me."

For the question: “In what ways has using material tied to real-world outcomes and informed by industry partners contributed to your development as a professional” some students (P1-B, P2-B, P4-AM&C, P13-CR) stated the importance of understanding research and theory and how to apply them in communication contexts. One student (P7-CR) stated “I think [the tasks] help us a lot in familiarizing ourselves with working environments and informing us of what we would probably confront in future careers,” with others (P3-B, P12-CR) stating that the tasks allowed them to gain insights about what they would be doing in their future working life, thus allowing them to consider themselves in a professional context. As an example, P14-CR stated “[the tasks] helped me understand what real-world industry wanted or expected from the individual. Furthermore, by accomplishing the material given, one could feel that they could also accomplish real-world tasks professionally.” Some participating students spoke of the social context articulated in the brief. Of these, one (P8-CR) suggested that the experience would help them map out their career better. Two students (P10-CR, P15-CR) expressed motivations to pursue work in the non-profit sector.

Finally, for the question: “Please suggest ways your experience in work-integrated learning could be improved” many of the responses were not completed. Of those that were, they closely compared with the question about challenges. One student (P14-CR) stated that their experience with the IW brief would be improved if they could “have real-world professionals check the assignments, give tips, or give small talks,” and another (P7-CR) stated that: “it would be helpful if we have a chance to talk to the industry partners or the practitioners to have a clearer picture of what they have done or proceed to do in order to suggest better recommendations resulting from our work outcome and personal perspectives.” One student (P9-CR) who did not reference the industry partner, stated that they wished for further instructions and more materials for support in assessments. Another (P12-CR) expressed dissatisfaction with the brief’s instructions, suggesting that their experience could be improved with “a more detailed brief with parts being classified clearly.” These varied answers, irrespective of the question posed, are indicative of the unique ways students interpreted what was important for their learning experience.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings is organized by the project’s research aims, evaluated in accordance with Herrington and Herrington’s 2006 criteria for authentic learning; further context has been provided through the thematic concerns of WIL, as identified in the opening section.

Did the IW Brief Provide the Students with Social and Cultural Context for the Course’s Activities and Assessments?

Two criteria of authentic learning classrooms, per Herrington and Herrington (2006), are: 1) the inclusion of activities/assessments that have real relevance and 2) providing authentic context that reflects the way that knowledge will be used in real life. As argued by Brooks and Youngson (2016), universities are traditionally associated with increasing student employability. Hillage and Pollard (1998) define this concept as

the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess, the way they use these assets and present them to employers and the context (personal circumstances and labor market environment) within which they seek work. (p. 83).

Based on their qualitative answers, from the perspective of the participating students, the assessment briefs positively impacted their employability.

For instance, the data shows how the contextual scenario, instructions, and tasks included in the briefs offered the students opportunities to apply theory to practice and acquire insights into local and international sustainability contexts, which concurrently enabled them to understand work culture and the specific competencies required by potential employers. These references, combined with the positive responses to the question about the brief's overall impact on their learning experience, are indicative of the students' ability to connect the instructions and tasks to social and cultural contexts.

Further, although the students did not explicitly refer to the United Nations Sustainability Goals in their comments, they did demonstrate an understanding towards how the use of industry-standard communication tools and approaches could be used to make a meaningful difference in society, by way of addressing gender equality, specifically in a Vietnamese context. As shown by Bessant et al. (2015), a university's commitment to sustainability provides opportunities to educate students on how to critically engage with globally acknowledged issues. In the case of this pre-WIL intervention, opinions were offered about how the brief's tasks invited reflection on myriad issues regarding gender equality in the workplace in the local context, as well as how numerous organizations across the country were using industry relevant social media listening tools like Netlytic and NodeXL to analyze real-life conversations from popular social media platforms to obtain insights for how to best address it.

Did the IW Brief Enable the Students to Remain Motivated Throughout the Activities, Assessment Tasks, and Learning Outcomes?

The findings indicate that the participating students interpreted the tasks in the brief not just as exercises to be completed in the classroom, but rather through perspectives informed by the world of work (Laur, 2013). Several students suggested that the assessment briefs prepared them for their future career and, with many expressing an interest in pursuing the non-profit sector, thus demonstrating how authentic assessment can be a shaper of not only employability, but also student identity. Numerous responses repeatedly emphasized the diverse options for which they could apply their skillsets, particularly in the non-profit sector, the desire to address social needs, and knowledge gained on their learning journey. Furthermore, some students referred to specific job responsibilities, like conducting research, and how those duties fit within the contemporary communications industry's expectations and practices. As per the authentic learning paradigm articulated by Herrington and Herrington (2006), students are motivated when activities and assessment tasks provide space for reflection, the articulation of ideas, and when students can adopt multiple roles and perspectives, which in this case involves those belonging to a communications researcher. Additionally, learning outcomes are improved when the students are afforded chances to be autonomous and active with their learning, by being a creator of knowledge rather than a consumer of knowledge (Swaffield, 2011). Traditional assessment, or those that are neither considered student-centric nor authentic, are based around what the student can recognize or recall, typically out of context, and inhibit motivation and enthusiasm for the learning process. By employing authentic assessment, educators can better communicate how scaffolded activities and their corresponding assessments constructively align with the learning outcomes, other courses in the program map, and the students' future careers and graduate attributes. As evidenced by the students' responses, they were enthusiastic about how working with the IW briefs allowed them to feel like professionals. This is further supported by the quantitative questions, through which the participating students, irrespective of whether enrolled in both courses or only one of the two, broadly agreed that the brief's tasks, informed by the contextual scenario and instructions, were

beneficial for improving their confidence in their professional skillsets, as well as their competence in applying them (64% and 63%, respectively).

Did the IW Brief Enable the Students to Make Connections Across the Different Courses and Their Respective Learning Outcomes?

Another key criterion for authentic learning is that activities can be integrated across different subject areas and lead beyond domain-specific outcomes (Oliver et al., 2002). Forty-six percent of the students enrolled in both courses were neutral about whether the IW briefs allowed them to draw connections, with 8% of those students somewhat disagreeing. Although the students widely agreed that the classroom replicated a real-working environment and that they could link public relations research to social issues, further efforts are needed by the coordinators and other stakeholders to foster clearer connections. One prominent theme of WIL is stakeholder responsibility (Fleming et al., 2018). Although the students were appreciative of their lecturer's efforts throughout the learning process, the students identified that the increased presence of the stakeholder (or client) could help address concerns, particularly around the use of language in the briefs. Such statements are indicative of the pre-WIL's limitations, as the approach tends to operate without the significant presence of an industry partner (Ferns et al., 2025).

One additional solution is to implement a student as partners approach, a pedagogical initiative that has gained significant traction in recent years (Matthews, 2017, 2018). Cook-Sather et al. (2014) define partnership as "a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis" (pp. 6-7). Drawing on this approach, coordinators can collaborate to have material created in one class be utilized as research materials for another. In the context of this partnership, the material created by the formative class (Asian Media and Culture) could be used as materials to apply in the summative assessment in the other (Communications Research). By positioning and communicating the students as partners in the learning process, whose contributions will have ramifications for other stakeholders, the students can more clearly envision themselves as active participants with pedagogical roles critical to the development and progression of a knowledge community. The inclusion of students as partners would address another criterion of authentic learning, being the collaborative construction of knowledge (Herrington & Herrington, 2006).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Of the students enrolled in both courses, 8% 'somewhat disagreed' that the IW brief was beneficial for their learning experience. When accounting for all participants, although 63% and 64% of them 'agreed' that the use of the brief increased their competence and confidence, many did not have a firm opinion, regardless of whether enrolled in one course or both (27% and 25%, respectively). These answers could be attributed to the IW brief containing language that resulted in confusion with the tasks and the desire for more involvement from IW and/or their partner organizations. Of the students who enrolled in only one of the two courses, the number of students stating that they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' with the statements regarding the competence and confidence questions was far lower than those who took both courses. This disparity could relate to the perceived disconnect as expressed by the students participating in both courses. Further research is needed to identify the impact of this disconnect, as well as how to adequately address it.

CONCLUSION

The collaboration shows the importance of using authentic activities and assessments in the local context, particularly as it concerns providing a beneficial learning experience, increasing confidence and competence in skills, and allowing the students to apply their knowledge and skills in a work-oriented setting. In fact, the primary reason often given for integrating WIL pedagogy is to ensure that students obtain an authentic learning experience (Bosco & Ferns, 2014). Pre-WIL enables this by enabling students to apply their skills in a safe learning environment in preparation for work placements like internships and cooperatives (Dean et al., 2023). The collaboration also provided insights into how the program's students interpret their employability, the roles stakeholders can (and should) play in the learning process, and supported career path exploration, which is particularly useful to encourage students to accept positions wherein they can feel motivated and inspired by socially responsible work.

Moving forward, within the Vietnamese context, specifically there has been a growing acknowledgment from government, universities, and employers regarding the crucial role WIL pedagogies can provide in boosting graduate employability and aligning with the demands of a rapidly expanding economy. Tran (2014) highlights numerous challenges concerning WIL and the employability of graduates in Vietnam. Among these challenges include, but are not limited to issues with university structures, the extent of employer involvement, and negotiating cultural norms. Given these challenges, in addition to the worldwide pressure on universities to emphasize employability and produce industry-ready graduates, an initiative which may result in placing market and employers' needs above knowledge creation (Cheng et al., 2021), the research team hopes that the example of integrating sustainability goals like gender equality into program curricula through collaborations with local based social enterprises, can stand as a referential model to be adopted by other universities across Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and beyond.

This approach, often regarded as service learning, blends academic study with community-oriented service, forming a direct link between traditional classroom instruction and practical application (Patrick et al., 2021). Internationally, universities implementing pre-WIL interventions ought to consider service learning as a fruitful direction, as it emphasizes experiential learning, critical reflection, and active engagement with authentic community challenges. By fostering personal and professional development, cultivating civic responsibility, and addressing societal needs, students are able to gain the practical skills associated with WIL pedagogies, whilst simultaneously developing empathy and nurturing a sense of ethical responsibility, graduate attributes widely desired in the 21st century (Ipperciel & ElAtia, 2014). Authentic learning and activities in class, which build to authentic assessment and link to relevant issues informed by social enterprises, empower students to be a part of their own country's own nonprofit sector and to work towards addressing societal issues, like gender equality (see also Valencia-Forrester et al., 2019).

The emphasis on building student employability and capacity whilst addressing local needs is demonstrated in this article as well received by the participating students, albeit with some suggestions for improvement. The lessons learned, such as the need to have more interaction with the client for clarifying language and ways to approach the assessment briefs, are also important for consideration outside of the Vietnamese context. The partnership team acknowledges, however, that the university's experience with pedagogical philosophies and methods like social constructivism and peer learning, respectively, efficiently facilitate the application of WIL in a way that may not be feasible in other educational contexts.

LIMITATIONS

The study only includes an evaluation of cohorts enrolled in two courses from an Australian administered university based in Vietnam, and within a specific disciplinary context. Therefore, the findings may not be transferable to other disciplines, institutions, or countries without further research. Finally, additional insights are needed to identify why only 17 of the 99 participating students chose to complete the survey's qualitative questions.

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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), WACE (www.waceinc.org), WIL Australia (www.acen.edu.au), and the University of Waikato (www.waikato.ac.nz).

Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL are primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of WIL 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 including recommendations.

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 into how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

Good practice and program description papers. On occasions, IJWIL seeks manuscripts describing 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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