Book Review: Advances in Research, Theory and Practice in Work Integrated learning – Enhancing Employability for a Sustainable Future

59 Experts Spill on WIL Advances in Research, Theory and Practice

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This scholarly and peer-reviewed book has been compiled by 59 experts, researchers and practitioners in Work Integrated Learning (WIL). The Editors have brought together Australia's important and prominent WIL researchers. The text covers the essential pillars for successful work-integrated learning based on a comprehensive body of knowledge and expertise. This text is intended for all WIL stakeholders and has relevance to academics, university leaders, WIL practitioners, community and industry partners and researchers. The table of contents and the breadth of topics demonstrates the accumulated advances and maturation in theory, practice and research relating to WIL. Drawing on the rich experience and research expertise of the contributors the text summarises the important themes for WIL as a strategy that can enable and build sustainable workforces with graduates capable and ready to contribute to work environments and contexts that will require them to be resilient, agile, self-managing, open-minded, life-long learning professionals.

The Australian Collaborative Education Network Limited (ACEN) in developing the text set out to reflect on the work achieved to date, discuss and critique existing research through expert views on WIL and to guide and make recommendations to influence future practice and research. Published in late 2021 ACEN has written and published this text during a time of volatility in society, the workplace, and the University sector due to COVID-19. This feat of itself reflects the dedication, resilience, and endeavours of those attracted to working in WIL roles.

The book is organised into sections with clear and informative diagrams and tables included in each chapter to aid readability and highlight key learning points. The sections are logically organised commencing with contemporary insights through to future directions and vision for WIL. Each section is discussed in turn with my impressions of the highlights that in no way does justice to the depth and breadth of work presented in this book.

Section 1 sets the scenes, describing the foundations for *teaching and learning within WIL programs* and shares insights for designing authentic WIL assessment, principles for designing a WIL curriculum and where employability policy and WIL sit in terms of government policy, workforce needs and the higher education curriculum.

Engagement with stakeholders, who are willing to work with the higher education sector to host authentic learning opportunities for students, is covered in two chapters. One chapter focusses on co-creation of curriculum with industry and the intertwined nature of the relationships between industry partners, students, university academic and other staff in WIL.

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Ferns et al. in their chapter describe the value of professional accreditation for WIL. Among many of the key strengths of this chapter is the inclusion of a diagram for a WIL partnership model. Ferns et al. (2019) cited in the chapter critically note that "partnerships are key to promoting a borderless education and reinventing the learning economy".

The section on *maximising learning outcomes through WIL* is a must read for all academics working in WIL. Academics know the challenge of ensuring quality supervision of students on WIL and when managing both small and large cohorts of students there can be variation in supervision and experience. The authors of this chapter (Winchester-Seeto, Rowe and Mackaway) recognise that assuring quality supervision is "neither simple, nor straightforward" and that at its core WIL supervision is a relationship around learning between two or more people. The chapter provides practical suggestions outlining the elements that can support supervision, effective strategies for teaching and provide a positive learning environment for students. The authors include diagrams that synthesise these elements for the reader, demonstrating that constructive relationships are built upon trust, support, respect, honesty, open-mindedness and being approachable. A useful framework is provided in chapter 10 for developing and assuring high-quality curricula with advice and actions for the education provider, industry partner and students – before, during and after WIL. The chapter ends with sage advice related to the important curriculum factors including authenticity, consequentiality of the work, students leading and managing self, appropriate resourcing for WIL, alignment of the learning and experience with intended outcomes and ensuring and monitoring the full participation of all to the WIL learning experience (institution, student, and industry partner).

In the section on *exploring diverse forms of WIL practice* a chapter is dedicated to innovation in WIL. The timing of the release of this text means that the rapid changes and disruption accompanying the COVID pandemic and impacting WIL placements were able to be incorporated. The chapter describes features of innovative WIL models and examples of micro-placements, online projects or placements, hackathons, events, incubators and start-ups and consultancies. This chapter too is peppered with practical and useful tips such as the enablers of innovative learning, breadth of partnerships, leadership support, preparation of stakeholders, engaged and proactive students and clarity around scope of activities. Significantly, this section includes a chapter on overcoming the challenges, equity issues and need for quality WIL placements for international students. Jackson and Pham present the compelling strategies needed to improve the international student WIL experience at the macro, meso and micro levels.

The book includes a section on *support and infrastructure to develop good WIL practice*. This section articulates the underpinning requirements for higher education providers when embracing successful WIL. Chapters in this section cover leadership to support an institutional approach to WIL, governance and risk management, equity and access to WIL and technology platforms for WIL.

As with all inspiring works the final chapter concludes with the editors and their insights into future directions and vision. This chapter recommends nine approaches to inspire and inform. So, no spoilers here.

My only criticism of this comprehensive text is that the section on engaging with stakeholders may have been short-changed with just two chapters. Multiple stakeholders with a common vision, purpose and strong foundations are at the heart of successful WIL. The scope of these chapters covers part of the requirements and as such further chapters on what we know is important to engage stakeholders could have been included.

This text includes the accumulation of research and evidence on WIL in one place and is a must have for all those working in WIL within the higher education sector. While the text is focussed on Australia, WIL is of global interest and the frameworks and learnings useful to a broader audience. The review covers the highlights and suffice to say, there is something in this text for all disciplines and interests be that quality of learning experiences, WIL curriculum, authenticity and innovation in WIL, and for those tasked with developing strategy and plans for the future of WIL within the higher education sector. This text is a must read for those currently working in WIL. I would also recommend this text to those embarking on WIL roles as the collation of the advances in research, theory and practice in one place provides an excellent springboard for those new to this exciting learning approach.

References

Ferns, S. J., Rowe, A. D. & Zegwaard, K. E. (Eds.) (2022). *Advances in Research, Theory and Practice in Work-Integrated Learning: Enhancing Employability for a Sustainable Future*. Routledge.

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