

Partnerships in Publishing: A Thematic Analysis of Editorial Board Reflections on a WIL Journal's Development

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This paper reports on a thematic analysis of editorial board members' reflections on the establishment of a new open access work-integrated learning (WIL) journal, WIL in Practice, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on reflections from four higher education staff, it examines how shared purpose, collaboration and partnership-oriented practices during a period of crisis contributed to the journal's development. The analysis identifies two overarching themes: (1) developing and working within a cross-institutional project, and (2) challenging dominant discourses surrounding academic publishing. These themes are further elaborated through three sub-themes—1) purpose and connection, 2) collegiate ways of working, and 3) grit and entrepreneurial spirit—which illuminate the collaborative practices and resilience underpinning the journal's foundation. The study provides insights into the journal's 18-month developmental process, demonstrating how partnership practices, including reciprocity, shared vision, and distributed leadership, shaped the journal. The paper critically engages with the systemic challenges in academic publishing, including the inequities and pressures associated with a 'publish or perish' culture. The study positions the journal as an alternative developmental publishing model that seeks to advance publishing equity, particularly for underrepresented researchers.

Keywords: work-integrated learning, partnerships, editorial collaboration, open access publishing, equity

Introduction

Established during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the open access journal, WIL in Practice, was founded to amplify marginalised voices and promote equitable publishing within the

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work-integrated learning (WIL) field. Grounded in an emerging WIL partnership, the journal was developed through cross-institutional collaboration characterised by shared purpose, reciprocity, and distributed leadership across academic and professional staff. This paper reports on a thematic analysis of survey responses from four editorial board members, examining their motivations, expectations, and reflections on the journal's development. The findings illustrate how shared purpose and collaborative partnerships fostered innovation and inclusivity in academic publishing, particularly through cross-institutional, multi-disciplinary and interprofessional efforts. The editorial board comprised individuals from multiple universities and disciplines, including both early-career and established researchers, working in academic and professional roles.

Two overarching themes emerged from the analysis: (1) developing and working within a cross-institutional project, and (2) challenging dominant discourses surrounding academic publishing. These were further elaborated through three interrelated sub-themes—1) purpose and connection, 2) collegiate ways of working, and 3) grit and entrepreneurial spirit—which reveal the relational, strategic, and resilient dimensions of the journal's formation. Collectively, these themes illuminate how partnerships were enacted in practice through collaborative decision-making, mutual support, and a shared commitment to equity-focused publishing.

In addition to documenting the journal's origin story, the paper critically examines broader challenges in academic publishing, including the inequities and pressures associated with a 'publish or perish' culture. It positions WIL in Practice as an emergent and developmental publishing model designed to support researchers, particularly early career researchers and emerging authors, in building their scholarly profiles that are often overlooked within traditional funding and recognition frameworks.

Inequities in Academic Publishing

Publishing has long been viewed as an objective measure of academic contribution, independent of their status or patronage (Wellmon & Piper, 2017), yet systemic disparities persist. Wellmon and Piper (2017) argue that the shift from medieval patronage to modern universities has not levelled the playing field but has perpetuated significant disparities within the academic publishing landscape. Traditional publishing models, dominated by legacy publishers such as Elsevier, Wiley, and Taylor and Francis, continue to shape academic publishing, supported by evaluative metrics that equate prestige with exclusivity. Subscription-based journals also dominate and are commonly associated with rigorous peer-review processes and high rejection rates, reinforcing perceptions of scholarly prestige. Wellmon and Piper (2017) found that there was a bias towards the top 20% of PhD-granting institutions. This suggests a systemic bias in publishing, where institutional affiliation, particularly where a scholar earned their degree, has a bearing on the success of a publication. For researchers from smaller institutions and emerging scholarly communities, access to recognised publishing spaces can remain uneven.

The internet's rise in the 1990s enabled the growth of open access publishing, positioning it as a more equitable alternative through the removal of cost and copyright barriers (Björk, 2004; Laakso et al., 2011; Suber, 2003). Publishers like MDPI have disrupted traditional norms with rapid publication and broad scope, attracting early-career researchers. However, concerns around quality control, self-citation, and aggressive solicitation persist (Oviedo-García, 2021). Barriers facing emerging publishers have likewise remained, with new journals encountering ongoing structural and operational challenges. Crawford (2002) characterised the early proliferation of open access journals as an "arc of enthusiasm," noting that many became inactive or published infrequently after their initial momentum waned.

While open access aims to democratise publishing, not all journals uphold equitable principles (Ayeni, 2023). Many structural inequalities of traditional publishing, particularly those related to costs and copyright, have persisted within digital open access models. The introduction of author-pays models, such as BioMedCentral's in the early 2000s, reintroduced financial barriers (Laakso et al., 2011). Article processing charges can restrict participation to researchers with access to financial resources, thereby perpetuating inequities in scholarly dissemination. These publishing structures create barriers for emerging researchers, practice-based disciplines, and smaller scholarly communities such as WIL.

Longstanding structural inequities continue to shape who is able to participate and succeed within academic publishing. Gender inequities remain deeply entrenched within academic publishing practices. Between 1978 and 1997, women authored only 20% of publications (Krebsbach, 2022), a figure that rose modestly to 29.8% by 2016 (Bendels et al., 2018). Although female representation has increased in some disciplines, women remain significantly less likely to hold prestigious authorship positions (Krebsbach, 2022, Wellmon & Piper, 2017).

These inequities extend beyond authorship to editorial influence and publishing leadership. Greater gender parity is more evident in female-dominated disciplines such as social work, and when editorial leadership includes females (Krebsbach, 2022). Diversifying editorial teams has been associated with a broader range of published scholarship (Loui & Fiala, 2024), while evidence regarding the effectiveness of blind peer review in addressing gender inequities remains inconclusive (Krebsbach, 2022).

Editorial leadership has seen measurable progress, with female representation on editorial boards increasing from 11% in 1978 to 71% by 2019 (Krebsbach, 2022; McSweeney & Parks, 2002). Although the proportion of editor-in-chief roles held by women has increased in recent years, gender parity has yet to be achieved. (Krebsbach, 2022). Persistent inequities in senior editorial leadership continue to marginalise particular voices within scholarly publishing. The evidence suggests that contemporary academic publishing has not dismantled historical inequalities but continues to reproduce them through institutional bias, gendered authorship patterns, and publication processes that shape who is able to contribute and succeed.

Other more democratic dissemination avenues, such as institutional repositories and academic social networks (e.g., ResearchGate, Mendeley), have gained limited legitimacy within academia due to publisher-imposed embargoes and their exclusion from formal research evaluation frameworks established by governments and higher education institutions, which strongly influence researchers' publishing decisions (Björk, 2016; Van Noorden, 2014). These frameworks create a structural bias toward recognised journal lists, incentivising researchers to prioritise metric-aligned publication venues over dissemination strategies that may be more effective for reaching relevant scholarly, professional, or practice-based audiences.

Despite the promise of open access, many researchers remain hesitant to engage due to perceptions of lower prestige, limited funding, and systemic biases. Studies highlight disciplinary differences, gender disparities, and financial constraints as key barriers for many researchers (Ayeni, 2023; Laakso & Björk, 2021; Niles et al., 2020). True equity in publishing will only be realised when access is no longer determined by cost, language, or identity. This is particularly relevant within WIL scholarship, where interdisciplinary and practice-informed research can struggle to find publishing spaces that value applied and developmental forms of knowledge production.

Legitimacy Challenges for Emerging Open Access Journals

The existence of predatory journals has undermined trust in open access publishing and introduced significant legitimacy challenges for newly established journals. Predatory journals appropriate the open access model by charging publication fees without providing adequate peer review or editorial oversight, thereby blurring the line between credible and illegitimate publishing practices (Ojala et al., 2020). As a result, legitimate emerging open access journals are often subject to heightened caution and scrutiny, despite adhering to rigorous editorial and ethical standards.

Within this context, the consequences of predatory publishing extend beyond individual authors to shape risks for both early-career researchers and legitimate emerging journals alike. Early-career researchers may unknowingly submit to predatory journals under pressure to publish, potentially harming their reputations and career trajectories. At the same time, legitimate emerging journals may face difficulties establishing trust and recognition despite maintaining rigorous editorial processes. As Cuschieri (2022) notes, emerging journals must work harder to demonstrate transparency, ethical standards, and editorial integrity to avoid misclassification.

Trusted directories like DOAJ and OASPA can help identify legitimate journals, though their inclusion criteria, such as publishing a minimum number of articles, can be a barrier for new credible journals. For newly established journals, meeting these expectations can require significant collaborative and editorial effort during the early stages of development.

Publish or Perish in Academic Publishing

For early-career researchers and emerging authors, these structural inequities are compounded by increasing pressure to publish within performance-driven academic systems. In Australia, the pressure to publish in top-tier journals has intensified over the past decade, which Elbanna and Child (2023) describe as a ‘publish or perish’ culture. Universities have also established lists of selected journals for researchers to choose from, some of which may have no bearing on smaller disciplines such as WIL. This environment reinforces the need for equitable, developmental journals that support emerging voices and challenge entrenched hierarchies. It also highlights the importance of partnership-based publishing models, such as the one highlighted in this paper, that prioritise collaboration, mentorship, and accessibility alongside traditional measures of academic ‘quality’.

Concerning rejection rates, lengthy review processes, and harsh feedback have prompted calls for ‘safe spaces’ where emerging scholars can build confidence. Cash (2023) documents a PhD student’s emotional journey through publishing, highlighting the toll of repeated rejections, lengthy review processes and academic compromises made to meet elite journal standards. These experiences illustrate how publishing cultures can shape confidence and academic identity formation for emerging researchers. Fien et al. (2022) similarly question whether early career researchers (ECRs) will burn out before they publish. These experiences highlight the importance of publishing environments that support the development of scholarly confidence and identity through mentorship and constructive engagement.

Methodology

In light of the structural inequities and legitimacy challenges outlined in the preceding sections, this study sought to understand the successes and challenges encountered during the 18-month process of designing and establishing a new open access WIL journal. Accordingly, reflections from four editorial board members were drawn upon in this small-scale qualitative exploratory study. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to examine the participants’ experiences and reflections on the journal’s development. This methodological approach enabled an exploration of how participants made meaning of the collaborative, relational, and organisational dimensions of the work. It was also well suited to examining how partnership practices were enacted and experienced within a cross-institutional editorial team.

Data were collected via a de-identified survey comprising five open-ended questions distributed to all editorial board members at the time of data collection. Open-ended questions were designed to elicit detailed accounts of participants’ motivations, expectations, collaborative experiences, and aspirations for the journal. The survey included the following questions:

1. What motivated you to consider joining the Editorial Board and the journey of creating the WIL journal?
2. Share your initial expectations about how the developmental stages and setup would go?
3. Reflecting back over the process, is it how you thought it would be?
4. On reflection, would there be anything that you would do differently or change?
5. What are your future aspirations for the journal?

Four editorial board members completed the survey. Following data collection, Author 2 and Author 3 independently conducted an initial round of inductive coding of the survey data. An inductive approach was adopted to allow patterns of meaning to emerge from participants' accounts, rather than being shaped by predetermined analytical categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each author developed their own codebooks and 11 initial codes were generated across the dataset. These initial codes captured a range of nuanced ideas and values, including 'supporting early career researchers', 'creating a safe publishing space', 'gratifying collaboration', 'vision and drive', 'equity in publishing', and 'debriefing during lockdowns'. Reflexive thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and meanings across participants' accounts while remaining attentive to the contextual and interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Through a second, collaborative phase of analysis, overlapping codes were reviewed, refined, and consolidated into six broader summary codes, ensuring coherence between initial codes and the final themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For example, codes such as 'mentoring junior staff', 'capacity-building' and 'opportunities for novice writers' were grouped under the summary code 'supporting emerging authors.' Similarly, codes relating to 'regular meetings', 'emotional check-ins', and 'connection across universities' were consolidated under the summary code 'collegial connection and wellbeing' (see Table 1).

Table 1

Thematic Analysis Summary Table

Initial Codes	Key Themes
1. Supporting early career researchers	1. Developing and working within a cross-institutional project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose and connection • Collegiate ways of working • Grit and the entrepreneurial spirit 2. Challenging current conversations around academic publishing
2. Creating a safe publishing space	
3. Gratifying collaboration	
4. Vision and drive	
5. Equity in publishing	
6. Debriefing during lockdowns	
7. Mentoring junior staff	
8. Capacity-building	
Opportunities for novice writers	
9. Regular meetings	
10. Emotional check-ins	
11. Connection across universities	

Two overarching themes were identified through the analysis. The first theme, developing and working within a cross-institutional project, comprised three interrelated sub-themes: 1) Purpose and connection, 2) collegiate ways of working, 3) grit and entrepreneurial spirit. The second theme, challenging current conversations around academic publishing, addressed the affordances and constraints of academic publishing within higher education.

Findings

Analysis of the editorial board reflections highlighted how cross-institutional, multi-disciplinary collaborations and partnership-oriented practices shaped participants' experiences of establishing the journal. The findings are organised around two overarching themes identified through reflexive thematic analysis, with the first theme further elaborated through three interrelated sub-themes.

Key Theme 1: Developing and Working within a Cross-Institutional Project

Purpose and Connection.

Participants' purposes for joining the editorial board and contributing to the journal development varied. For many of the participants, their motivations aligned closely with the key initiatives of the National Association of Field Experience Administrators (NAFEA), which emphasises equity, access and participation in WIL. Participants expressed a strong commitment to expanding publishing opportunities for both professional staff and academics in higher education, and emphasised the importance of contribution, guidance, and collaboration, particularly in supporting early career researchers and emerging authors. These accounts suggest that participants understood the journal not merely as a publishing outlet, but as a collaborative and developmental partnership within the WIL community. A key motivation was to offer a platform for reflecting on WIL practices and amplifying voices that often have limited access to publishing opportunities. This sense of purpose and alignment was articulated clearly by one participant, who noted:

There is not to my knowledge another forum that has this built into the structure. NAFEA is an inclusive organisation that looks to authentically 'bridge the [equity] gap'. The journal is a natural extension of that. (Editorial board member #2).

Participants articulated a commitment to contributing to WIL literature while creating publishing opportunities for emerging authors. This commitment was evident in one participant's reflection:

I wanted to contribute to the literature around WIL and provide opportunities for novice writers to be encouraged to publish and be supported by their peers, to provide guidance and collaboration (Editorial board member #2).

This account illustrates a broader goal of supporting peers and the cultivation of a collaborative, developmental publishing environment.

Participants articulated a shared vision for the journal to evolve into both a capacity-building platform for authors and a safe publishing space. This vision was captured in one participant's reflection that they hoped to "see WIL in Practice continue to grow and develop both as a capacity-building enterprise and a safe space for people to publish in an environment that can be a little brutal" (Survey respondent #1). This articulation foregrounded tensions between dominant, competitive publishing cultures and the more supportive, partnership-oriented approaches enacted during the journal's development.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, regular virtual meetings fostered connection and shared purpose among the editorial team despite physical separation. These meetings functioned as both operational and relational forums, enabling mutual support, information sharing, and continuity during a period of disruption. The accounts highlight how relational connections sustained collaborative practices in challenging circumstances.

Collegiate Ways of Working.

The theme of collegiality reveals how collaborative, partnership-based ways of working fostered professional connection, motivation, and mutual support during the journal's development. Collegiality was further reinforced through regular virtual meetings. These interactions highlight how the editorial partnership operated as both a professional and relational support structure, with participants describing how the team "stayed connected" and used meetings to "debrief" about shared challenges and work pressures (Editorial board member #2). Participants' accounts suggest that collegiality extended beyond task completion to encompass broader forms of professional connection and shared purpose. Working within the editorial team was described as both motivating and professionally generative, with participants linking collaborative engagement to increased confidence, writing productivity, and support for colleagues including motivation to "write more and provide support to more junior staff" (Editorial Board Member #3). This illustrates how collaborative editorial practices facilitated ambitions for mentoring and reciprocal professional development opportunities.

Teamwork and an egalitarian approach to idea exchange emerged as central features of collegial practice. Participants described a collaborative environment in which "no idea was left unturned" and the team remained receptive to all contributions (Editorial board member #4). This emphasis on inclusivity illustrates how partnership practices were enacted through shared dialogue

and collaborative decision-making, fostering an environment in which members felt valued and able to contribute openly. Participants also emphasised the importance of extending collaboration beyond their immediate institutional contexts, actively seeking opportunities to engage with broader WIL networks including identifying opportunities to “network between and beyond [their] immediate higher education context” (Editorial board member #2).

Grit and Entrepreneurial Spirit.

The theme of grit highlights how the editorial team sustained progress towards a shared strategic vision in the face of significant challenges. Participants’ accounts indicate that establishing the journal required navigating uncertainty, increased workloads, and unfamiliar publishing processes. These accounts emphasise the role of sustained vision and drive in maintaining progress throughout the development process. Despite these pressures, participants described a sustained commitment to advancing the journal, with one participant noting that the team became a “tight-knit” group that remained “determined that this journal would come to fruition” (Survey respondent #4). This illustrates how sustained collaboration under conditions of uncertainty reinforced both relational cohesion and a shared commitment to the journal’s development.

The editorial team’s approach involved actively navigating challenges through a clearly articulated vision. Participants described a sustained commitment to providing a more equitable publishing platform, particularly for early-career researchers and emerging authors, emphasising the role of “vision and drive” in sustaining the project (Editorial board member #1). This reflects an entrepreneurial orientation that supported ongoing problem-solving and adaptability. Participants also acknowledged the uncertainty of the process, describing it as a “innovative and entrepreneurial” journey (Editorial board member #3). This highlights the exploratory nature of establishing a new journal, where unfamiliar processes required collaborative decision-making and the development of new ways of working.

Key Theme 2: Challenging Current Conversations around Publishing in Academic Publishing

This theme highlights how the editorial team sought to challenge dominant assumptions about academic publishing through a deliberate and strategic re-imagining of journal development. Participants articulated a commitment to developing a publishing model that prioritised accessibility, inclusivity, and collaboration within the WIL community. This approach emphasised lateral growth in the journal’s early stages, focussing on building a broad and inclusive foundation rather than prioritising rankings or prestige, with one participant noting a desire for the journal to “eventually climb up rankings... [but] not in a rush” (Editorial board member #1). This illustrates a prioritisation of gradual, sustainable development over immediate recognition and contrasts with traditional, vertically oriented publishing models that privilege rankings and prestige. Participants also expressed a desire to challenge metric-driven publishing cultures, emphasising the importance

of “publish[ing] where the readership is” rather than prioritising “points-driven” outputs (Editorial board member #3). This illustrates an intention to reorient publishing practices towards readership, community engagement, and the dissemination of practice-informed knowledge within the WIL field.

Participants also articulated a commitment to challenging entrenched publishing norms that perpetuate competition and inequity. This was reflected in accounts that identified how existing journal “parameters... increased... competitiveness and inequity” while emphasising the need for “a new platform... for people in the WIL space” (Editorial board member #3). This illustrates participants’ awareness of structural inequities in academic publishing and their intention to develop more supportive and accessible alternatives. In alignment with the values of NAFEA, participants prioritised strategies to promote inclusivity and broaden participation in publishing, including incorporating perspectives from a diverse range of WIL participants. These efforts reflect a commitment to challenging established publishing norms and fostering more inclusive and accessible scholarly environments.

Discussion

This study highlights the role of collaboration, shared purpose, and resilience in the development of a new open access journal. More specifically, it demonstrates how partnership practices, including reciprocity, shared decision-making, and relational support, shaped the journal’s development during a period of significant disruption and uncertainty. Within a higher education context characterised by rapid change and ongoing sectoral pressures, collaboration between academic and professional staff is increasingly important in addressing shared challenges. Such collaborations are often facilitated through research projects or shared institutional initiatives. The development of the journal provided an opportunity for board members to collaborate across disciplines, institutions, professional roles, and career stages, forming a cross-institutional partnership centred on equity and developmental publishing practices.

Bozeman et al. (2012) argue that successful collaboration is driven not only by financial resources but also by the exchange of knowledge and expertise. These findings support this argument, demonstrating how the editorial board prioritised mentoring, capacity-building, and inclusive publishing practices as key mechanisms of collaboration. The findings further indicate that these partnership practices extended beyond operational collaboration, functioning as mechanisms for collective problem-solving. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, collaboration also took on an important relational dimension. Editorial meetings functioned as spaces for reflective dialogue, professional connection, and information exchange across institutions, while also operating as relational spaces that supported wellbeing and collegial connection during periods of disruption and institutional uncertainty.

Baldwin and Chang (2007) identify trust, communication, shared goals, and clear expectations as foundational conditions for effective partnerships. These elements were evident in the findings, particularly within the sub-themes of collegiality and purpose. Practices such as regular meetings, emotional check-ins, and egalitarian decision-making exemplify the relational dynamics Baldwin and Chang (2007) describe as essential to sustaining collaborative momentum. Further, the findings indicate that maintaining these partnership practices required sustained emotional and professional labour, particularly while balancing existing academic workloads and navigating geographically dispersed collaboration.

Effective collaboration in academia requires moving beyond siloed institutional practices towards more coordinated and collective forms of engagement. However, such collaboration is often constrained by time pressures, geographic dispersion, and institutional hierarchies. The present findings indicate that, rather than eliminating these tensions, the editorial board actively negotiated them through shared vision, flexibility, and a sustained commitment to the journal's developmental aims. In doing so, this study supports and extends prior work by Baldwin and Chang's (2007), demonstrating how trust, communication, and shared goals are enacted in practice, while also reinforcing Bozeman et al.'s (2012) emphasis on the relational and knowledge-exchange dimensions of academic collaboration.

The theme of grit and entrepreneurial spirit further reflects the challenges identified in the literature on publishing inequities. The editorial team's strategic vision to create a more inclusive and developmental publishing environment responds directly to the systemic barriers discussed by Wellmon and Piper (2017), Ayeni (2023), and related scholarship. These efforts to challenge 'publish or perish' norms and provide alternatives to prestige-driven publishing models represent a deliberate attempt to reconfigure prevailing assumptions about academic publishing.

Beyond motivations for collaboration, participants articulated a commitment to challenging dominant publishing cultures that privilege rankings, prestige, and performance metrics. Participants highlighted the pressures associated with 'publish or perish' expectations, as well as the increasing emphasis placed on publishing within high-ranking journals within Australian higher education contexts. These pressures were identified as particularly challenging for early career researchers and emerging authors seeking to establish themselves within the WIL field. Participants identified lengthy review timelines, high rejection rates, and limited opportunities for developmental feedback as key barriers within traditional publishing pathways. In response, WIL in Practice is positioned as a developmental and partnership-oriented publishing space designed to support mentorship, constructive feedback, and broader participation within the WIL community. Rather than prioritising rapid progression through ranking systems, the editorial board emphasised gradual growth, readership, and community engagement.

The findings further emphasise the centrality of relational and collaborative publishing practices in the journal's development. Through cross-institutional partnership, shared leadership,

and a commitment to accessibility, the editorial board enacted a supportive publishing environment for both established and emerging contributors. This was operationalised through the removal of publication fees, the expansion of submission formats, and the inclusion of a diverse range of WIL participants. The collaborative ethos reflects a developmental approach to publishing grounded in mentorship, equity, and shared purpose. As an emergent example within the WIL field, the journal offers insight into how partnership-oriented publishing practices can support broader participation and foster community-building within academic publishing.

Future Considerations

The findings of this study point to several implications for the ongoing development of partnership-oriented and developmental publishing models within the WIL field and broader higher education contexts.

Institutional Support for Developmental Publishing Partnerships

The findings demonstrate that establishing a new journal requires substantial collaborative and administrative labour. Universities, professional associations, and related interest groups play a critical role in supporting emerging publishing initiatives through access to funding, administrative assistance, and professional recognition. Recognising editorial and partnership work as legitimate scholarly contributions within workload allocation and promotion processes can support the sustainability of developmental publishing initiatives.

Supporting Broader Participation in Academic Publishing

The findings highlight the importance of developing supportive publishing environments for early career researchers and emerging authors. Future publishing initiatives should prioritise mentorship and accessible publishing pathways. This can include broadening submission formats, encouraging interdisciplinary contributions, and fostering collaborative editorial practices that facilitate participation from a wider range of voices within the WIL community.

Developing Equitable and Partnership-Oriented Publishing Practices

The findings further emphasise the importance of accessibility and equity within developmental publishing models. Approaches such as the removal of publication fees, diversification of editorial representation, and promotion of wider readership and engagement can support the development of sustainable scholarly communities. The emphasis on gradual growth, relational collaboration, and shared purpose suggests that sustainability is strengthened through partnership-based approaches that prioritise community-building alongside traditional publishing outcomes.

The editorial board's emphasis on lateral growth and equity aligns with broader discussions of accessibility and developmental publishing practices within higher education. By prioritising community engagement, shared leadership, and accessibility, the journal is positioned as a collaborative and developmental publishing space within the WIL field. The relational and partnership-oriented practices demonstrated in its establishment provide insight into how cross-institutional collaboration can support sustainable and inclusive scholarly communities.

Conclusion

The establishment of WIL in Practice during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the central role of partnership, shared purpose, and collaborative practice in developing a new publishing initiative within the WIL space. The study shows how cross-institutional collaboration and shared decision-making shaped the journal's development during a period of rapid change and uncertainty in higher education. While open access publishing offers opportunities for broader participation and accessibility, establishing new journals remains challenging within a system based on rankings, perceived measures of 'quality', and performance-driven expectations. This study also identifies tensions between these institutional pressures and commitments to accessibility, mentorship, and community-building. In response, WIL in Practice is positioned as a developmental, partnership-oriented publishing space that prioritises inclusivity, collegiality, and support for emerging authors within the WIL community.

This study does not position WIL in Practice as a solution to broader publishing inequities, but rather as a practice-informed example of how partnership-oriented publishing approaches can be enacted within higher education contexts. Through collaborative editorial practices and a commitment to accessibility, the journal creates opportunities for professional connection and broader participation within the WIL field. As an emergent publishing initiative, WIL in Practice provides insight into how cross-institutional partnerships and developmental publishing practices can support more equitable and connected scholarly communities. More broadly, this study offers a practice-informed lens on how relational collaboration and developmental approaches can contribute to more equitable and sustainable models of academic publishing.

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Work Integrated Learning

in Practice

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WIL in Practice exists to disseminate good practice and learnings in work integrated learning (WIL), forming a valuable resource for NAFEA members and the broader WIL community. Publishing research and other suitable publications from academics, administrators and others whose interests align with the practice and administration of WIL, the journal will add to, and enhance, the existing body of knowledge that currently exists about WIL in all its various forms.

Early-career and emerging researchers and writers are also encouraged to submit their work. WIL in Practice provides an outlet for professionals to publish in a variety of formats.

WIL in Practice is supported by the National Association of Field Experience Administrators Inc. (NAFEA). WIL in Practice aims to be a high-quality and internationally recognised journal, publishing research and other suitable manuscripts from academics, administrators and the broader community whose interests align with the practice and administration of WIL. The journal will:

- Provide a welcoming, supportive and educative environment for authors at all levels to publish quality work
- Meaningfully contribute to the distribution of knowledge and professional development of WIL practitioners and researchers
- Publish at least once annually
- Take no action or inaction that is contrary to the values or directions of the NAFEA Executive Management Committee
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