How the pedagogy of work-integrated learning [WIL] projects develops graduate employability.

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Abstract

There are increasing pressures on higher education institutions from industry, employers and from the community to provide students with opportunities and learning experiences that develop graduate employability. Graduate employability is now regarded as critical for the success of degree programs offered by universities and is regarded as a critical success factor by students and employers. In response, higher education institutions have been focusing on how to develop graduate employability in an effort to integrate this into academic programs of study. In responding to the need for practice-based experiences, universities provide a range of work-integrated learning [WIL] opportunities, often in the form of practicum placement or internships that are designed to apply theoretical and practical learning within a workplace context. Australian and international universities are expanding their WIL programs in response to this growth and promoting graduate employability.

WIL is not compulsory in the business discipline; however, professional bodies have long acknowledged the benefits. As a result, there is no consistent approach to WIL across the business discipline with many programs lacking structure and limiting WIL to a single capstone unit in a program. WIL placements make up the majority of practice-based WIL opportunities for business graduates and the related research literature. A growing and under-research area of WIL is the use of WIL projects through university and employer collaboration. WIL projects are introducing novel ways of collaborating with employers and developing graduate employability through project-based learning. This research aims to investigate how the pedagogy of WIL projects contributes to graduate employability. Using a qualitative case-study approach, this research critically examines our current understanding of graduate employability and how the pedagogical practice of WIL projects contribute to graduate employability. Based on interviews and observations, this research

considers the perspectives of students, academics and employers involved in WIL projects.

The research findings confirm and extend our understanding that through authentic practice-based WIL, and more specifically WIL projects, students develop the skills to be competent for autonomous, responsible and ethical practice. The pedagogical approach used by WIL projects through curriculum factors such as authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration are shown to be effective at contributing to graduate employability. The research also highlights a new approach to WIL that allows for the increased participation of smaller non-profit organisations through novel approaches to university and employer collaboration.

The development of collaborative partnerships with smaller non-traditional WIL employers highlighted by this research also extends our understanding of the pressure faced by universities to meet the expectations of industry, employers and students and the related pedagogical and resourcing implications.

To further understand the implications of this research, future studies could focus on the growing share of the responsibility taken on by universities in providing WIL projects with smaller non-traditional WIL employers and addressing the evolving role of universities in meeting the demands of providing WIL opportunities for students.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Table of Contents

List of figures

List of tables

Introduction

The changing expectation on universities

Originally funded by a mixture of public funding and private endowments, Australian universities were created by state governments as secular public institutions with a traditional focus on liberal education and the pursuit of knowledge (Pietsch, 2013). As priorities began to change in response to international conflict, this focus began to shift in the early 1940s as the Commonwealth government increased university funding in response to universities' contribution to the war effort (Pietsch, 2013; Forsyth, 2014). After the Second World War universities were increasingly being recognised as having an important role in economic reconstruction, which included providing education to returning service personnel to support integration back into the workforce and society. National defence and technological development would go on to become areas of focus during the proceeding Cold War (Forsyth, 2014). These changing priorities due to national agendas throughout the 20th century contributed to an ongoing conversation over the purpose of higher education. The increasing focus on the economic contribution of education highlighted a growing tension between a traditional liberal education and the emerging focus on professional education.

This tension developed into a debate that was initially addressed in the 1957 Murray Report, the first of a number of reports that addressed this issue. The idea of Australian universities being seen as outposts of British/European civilisation was being challenged by more pragmatic arguments about the university's role in training graduates for the professions (Pietsch, 2013; Forsyth, 2014). The Martin Report (1964) further contributed to this debate by formally stating that the aim of universities was to promote economic

growth and in developing a free, democratic and cultured society. It is in this report that the construction of education as an "investment of human capital" first emerges (Martin Report, 1964, p. 4). Furthermore, this report described the need for graduates to become a 'flexible workforce', able to respond to a dynamic world where skills may quickly date (Murray Report, 1957).

The Martin Report (1964) also introduced a focus on "new forms of social and economic organisation and new systems of government" (p. 3). With this came an emphasis on specialised training for management and administration, improved methods of management, new ways of collecting capital for invention, new systems of controlling currency and banking, new marketing organisations, free trading, new legal codes and systems of arbitration enabling trade and administrative responsibilities (Manathunga, 2016). This further highlighted the need for and inclusion of professional-focused education.

The report also placed a new focus on education as an investment. First, as an investment in the individual, through the social, cultural and financial benefits; particularly the financial rewards and greater earning capacity associated with higher education (Martin Report, 1964). Second, as an investment in the community, including through improved economic production, higher GNP and a skilled and efficient workforce. This was a precursor of the proceeding Karmel Report (1974) into open tertiary education which was even more explicit in articulating this shifting emphasis to the economic impact of education, stating that one of the university's central roles was "in the training of young people for entry into important and exacting professions (p. 7). This was further reinforced by the West Review (1998), which positions the university as a service industry and provider of products that must respond to student choices and employers.

With the employer voice now firmly established in the debate, professional societies, accrediting bodies and graduate employers made clear their expectation that universities should produce graduates that are ready for professional employment (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & The Business Council of Australia, 2002; ACNielsen Research Services, 2000; Department of Education, Science and Training, 2004; Mayer, 1992; Precision Consulting, 2007). As a result, the traditional focus of the university curriculum on the disciplinary body-of-knowledge and understandings was being challenged. This existing focus was seen as no longer sufficient to meet the various stakeholder needs for graduates with contemporary workplace professional attributes, understandings and skills (Litchfield, Nettleton, & Taylor, 2008).

This added to the ongoing debate on the purpose of higher education, particularly the relationship between a university education and the world of work. Given the growing link of this relationship to the quality agenda facing higher education, a challenge emerged as to how a fragmented academic community unable to communicate across the epistemological gulfs between disciplines could respond to the monitoring and assurance of these needs as outcomes of university education (Barrie, Ginns & Prosser, 2005). The related policy development led to the identification of shared generic attributes, including soft skills such as team work and communication skills, that were explicitly stated as important outcomes of a higher education (Barrie, Ginns & Prosser, 2005). The development of generic attributes, or graduate attributes, to prepare students for the workplace would go on to become an expected outcome of contemporary higher education.

The rise of the business degree

The Progressive Era, that spanned the 1890s to the 1920s, was a period of widespread social activism and political reform. There was a growing belief from the progressive movement that 'professionals' in scientifically ordered bureaucratic organisations would help address the corruption and excesses of the Gilded Age with their 'scientific' approach (Lockwood, 1938). This move to professionalism was based on training and expertise and would impact many fields, including the field of business where education typically consisted of training on the job.

Joseph Wharton, an American industrialist who wrote extensively on financial and economic issues, recognised this shift and in 1881 donated $100 000 to the University of Pennsylvania to establish the first School of Business to foster business expertise (Van Wyhe, 2007). This led to the establishment of an accounting course called the "Theory of Accounting" and was followed by similar offerings from other universities by the early 1900s. This focus on accounting would go on to form the basis of the business degree.

Traditional liberal arts faculties, who largely despised practical disciplines such as business, accepted this progress with great reluctance (Lockwood, 1938). The development of a theoretical approach to legitimise the emerging discipline to the faculties was also challenging for early professors. Elementary accounting education at that time was taught with a focus on practice; securing proficiency in practical tasks, such as opening and closing books, journalising and rendering statements (Lockwood, 1938). Accounting educators preferred this practical approach to teaching accounting. This growing unease highlighted that from the very inception of the discipline there was tension emerging between a theoretical approach and practical approach to learning.

During this period, the American association of Public Accountants (AAPA) was formed to further the profession and showed an interest in higher education because it was expected that accounting professionals would have higher education (Lockwood, 1938). The title of Certified Public Accountant (CPA) was established a decade later in 1896, requiring prospective accountants to pass a qualifying exam before receiving certification and in the process formalising the required body of knowledge to be considered a professional accountant.

Over the decades that followed, CPA licensing laws were established across all states of the US. Initially, only a high-school education was required to become a CPA with only career-minded students considering a college education. This would change in 1938 when the law required everyone taking the CPA exam to hold a college degree, in part motivated by the prospect of raising the esteem of the profession to the levels of other more established professions, such as medicine (Van Wyhe, 2007).

The educational debate between academics and practitioners regarding the role of theory versus practice in accounting curricula continued. Practitioners continued to argue the value of direct experience for learning practice over the limitations of schooling based on a theory theoretical approach. However, their concerns were overshadowed by the continuing success of business schools and the proliferation of courses, both in accounting and business. Through professionalisation, the discipline had established itself in higher education so successfully that even during the Great Depression student enrolments dropped off by no more than 10 percent (Lockwood, 1938). By this stage the business degree had risen to prominence in higher education both in the US and internationally.

Graduate employability

The tension between providing a theoretical or practical approach to education and how prepared students were for the workplace continued throughout the 20th century. Employers were concerned by the workplace preparedness of graduates entering the workforce. Graduate were said to be weak with business arithmetic, have poor communication skills, and unable to problem solve or think clearly as far back as in the 1920s (Van Wyhe, 2007). Employers would make similar claims nearly a century later, however these skills would initially be referred to as non-technical skills and then go on to be more commonly referred to as employability skills (Cotton, 2001). This would become a key element of the ongoing discussion concerning graduate employability.

The focus on graduate attributes and enhancing the employability of graduating students had become a significant challenge in the strategic agenda of higher education providers (Jackson, 2014). Although this has been an ongoing issue, "graduate capability and employability are now regarded as critical success factors for degree programs by universities, industry and the students" (Henderson & Trede, 2017, p. 73). Additionally, to address this challenge, discipline-based professional bodies, such as the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA), CPA Australia (CPA) and Financial Planning Associate of Australia (FPA) in the area of finance, established accreditation criteria which required universities to include related skill development across their programs (Freudenberg, Brimble & Cameron, 2011). This has added to the pressure universities are under to meet these expectations.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) and the business degree

As higher education becomes more occupationally specific and is increasingly seen as a provider of 'higher vocational education', there is an increasing expectation that students are provided with access to and engagement in authentic instances of practice (Billett, 2009). Periods of work-based learning as part of university education are a common requirement for professions such as teaching, health science professionals and engineering. There is consensus in these fields that this is a necessary element of preparing graduates for the workplace through learning in an authentic environment (Billett, 2014). Other fields, such as business, are part of the growing trend to also provide students with experiences in practice settings to assist them in developing the knowledge required for effective professional practice (Billett, 2011). In accounting and business-related degree programs, there is a growing belief that students should personally develop an understanding of the principles and concepts which underpin accounting and business practices rather than concentrating just on the transmission of large amounts of technical knowledge (Flood & Wilson, 2008). It is increasingly argued that this cannot exclusively be accomplished in the traditional classroom setting and that a practice-based learning experience, such as an internship or placement, must be provided for students to provide learning situations that integrate theory and practice (Billett, 2014).

Work-integrated learning is often used as an umbrella term to describe a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work (Patrick et al., 2008). In relation to these various approaches and strategies, there is also recognition that the learning process is complex and involves "an integration of learning and knowledge derived from academic sources, workplace experience and reflection", not simply a one-way process of university knowledge being applied to the workplace (Orrell,

2011, p. 14). Therefore, when considering work-integrated learning and how it contributes to graduate employability consideration needs to be given to the type and the pedagogy of each work-integrated learning approach.

With no prescribed requirements outlining specific expectations around work-integrated learning used across business-related degrees, a range of approaches are currently used in higher education. This usually includes work placements, work experience/vacation work, internships, co-operative education, industry projects and mentoring (Smith et al., 2009). Based on limited literature, two-thirds of Australian accounting schools offer students work-integrated earning opportunities, with work placements and internships being the most common form of work-integrated learning used (Stanley & Xu, 2019). The literature establishes that with guidance, placements and internships provide opportunities for accessing and constructing robust and transferable vocational knowledge (Billett, 1995). Being based in the workplace, this type of work-integrated learning is also supported by sociocultural learning theory and the concept of situated learning (Lave, 1991). Support for other forms of work-integrate learning, such as industry projects, is less established.

Work-Integrated Learning and the growth of industry projects

Although not as wide spread as traditional placements, increasingly, industry projects are being introduced as a form of work-integrated learning available to students. Typically, an industrial project is:

- unpaid,
- short-term,

- based on achieving outcomes for a specific project

- may be individual student or student team

- may be done at an organisation's work place, or done at university

- learning outcomes: Well defined

- assessment: Formally assessed

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 43)

Industry projects are developed through the relationship between the university and employers and incorporate project-based learning and collaborative learning between students. Although some features of industry projects share features with traditional WIL placements, there is little literature that focuses specifically on industry projects, particularly how the experience helps students develop graduate employability and related skills and attributes. Additionally, industry projects are not always based at a host organisation. This may have an impact on the potential benefits of situated learning often referred to in other forms of WIL that is based at a host organisation (Lave, 1991). Given the increasing focus on WIL and the potential use of WIL projects this is an area of interest for universities as they meet the demands of employers seeking employable graduates and student demanding graduate employability (Smith & Worsford, 2015).

Research context and researcher motivation

Monash University is a large Australian university in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Established in 1958, the University has nearly 80 000 enrolled students and 9445 FTE staff (Monash University, 2018). As a member of the Group of Eight (Go8) Monash University is recognised as one of Australia's leading research-intensive universities and receives a significant proportion of Australian Competitive Grant (Category

1) funding (Group of eight, 2019). In addition to key priorities around research excellence, the University also places a priority on educational excellence, describing itself as a university with a focus on student outcomes that include 'career success and the enhancement of graduates' skills' (Monash University, 2019, p. 15). Consequently, key performance indicators include 'producing improved career success for graduates, and more specifically, generating a 10 per cent year on year increase in student participation in industry-based experiences (Monash University, 2019).

The Faculty of Business and Economics makes up a large part of Monash University. The faculty has more than 20 000 students and describes itself as being world-renowned, placed in the top one percent of business schools based on accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (Monash Business School, 2019). The Faculty states work-readiness as a key reason for students to select one of their courses, claiming that-

> Employers prefer Monash graduates for a reason – our degrees get you out of the classroom and into the workplace, giving you the practical skills sought by employers. Corporate projects and industry placements (internships) with leading companies mean you'll graduate better prepared and suitably skilled (Monash University, 2019, p. 2).

The Faculty provides WIL opportunities, forming part of the Faculty's Industry-Based Learning program (IBL), through WIL projects and industry placements (BEX3xxx coded units). A group of students complete a work-based project with an employer or for an employer from university for the WIL project, while industry placements give students an opportunity to gain work experience by working under guidance at a relevant organisation

for a period of time. Industry placement (internships) are a common feature of many business schools. What is less common however, are WIL projects, which are a growing area of the Faculty's WIL offerings. Although WIL projects are not unique to Monash University or the sector, the Faculty introduces an industry fellow role that offers a unique approach to employer engagement and the development and support of WIL projects.

It is through my role as a learning skills adviser for the Faculty of Business and Economics over the last 10 years that I became involved in the Faculty's WIL projects and developed an interest in the program. As a learning skills adviser, my role involves working with academic staff to help students develop the academic and research skills required to be academically successful. This involves developing embedded skill development programs focused on areas such as report writing and group work. The role also contributes at a curriculum development level by assisting with the development of unit guides, assessment tasks and assessment rubrics that make skill development more explicit for students. It was through my work with the Faculty's WIL team that I contributed to the development of assessment rubrics for the units' reflective tasks. During this work, I recognised the potential significance of WIL projects to contribute to the development of graduate employability.

The growing interest in employability skills has increasingly impacted my role as a learning skills adviser. In line with the broader trend across the sector, annual plans and areas of focus that guide my role have increasingly emphasised the development of graduate employability. A significant marker of this has been the adoption of the Work Skills Development Framework [WSD] to guide our practice (Bandaranaike & Willison, 2014). The purpose of this framework is to "integrate key employability skills into WIL and devise a measure of qualitative assessment in the workplace" (Bandaranaike & Willison, 2014).

The framework is made up of work skill 'facets' such as planning and management, problem-solving and critical thinking; and goes on to outline five levels of student autonomy for each facet. This framework has informed the practice of my role for a number of years.

The Faculty's WIL projects are offered as undergraduate or postgraduate elective units. WIL project units range from one to two semesters in duration and are usually two to three days per week during semester. Projects are developed by the University and partner organisations and based on addressing authentic problems and challenges within the organisation. Projects are facilitated by an 'industry fellow' who maintains and grows a network of organisations willing to be involved in the program. Projects focus on areas in management, leadership, HR, governance, board processes/recruitment/formation, risk management, compliance, financial reporting, accounting and marketing. Organisations are given the opportunity to forward suggestions and work with the Faculty's industry fellow to define projects which are then made available to students. Projects may focus on a particular discipline area, such as management, or involve a range of disciplines. The composition of the student project group will usually reflect the project focus, but not always.

The Faculty's industry fellow maintains a growing network of over 120 organisations associated with the program. These organisations vary widely, taking in large corporate ASX-listed companies to small non-profit organisation and non-government organisations [NGOs]. The small non-profit organisations and NGOs are a significant and growing proportion of these oganisations. The network takes in the industry fellow's personal network, organisations with a long-standing relationship with the university, organisations connected via alumni, business sector associations and in some cases organisations

associated with students through student initiated projects. This diverse range of organisations results in a diverse range of projects offered to students at a local, national and international level (Monash University, 2019).

Students must fulfil a number of requirements to be involved in the program. These include:

- An industry placement unit(s) counts as an elective unit(s) in your degree
- You would normally be expected to have a minimum weighted average mark (WAM) of 60
- You must have completed 96 credit points (16 units) of study prior to internship commencement
- You must have an appropriate number of open elective units left in your course.

 (Monash Business School, 2019)

International students also need to check their work rights on their individual student visa to ensure they remain compliant with visa conditions at all times (Monash University, 2019).

Once eligibility is established, students must make a formal application to undertake a WIL project unit. All students need to submit the following:

- Written confirmation from Student Services that the student has completed at least 72 credit points of their business degree (to be eligible to apply on-line), and

expect to have completed 96 credit points of their business degree prior to beginning their project

- Contribution expected to be made to the organisation by the student

- What the student expects to learn from undertaking the project

- How the project relates to the student's business degree and major discipline area(s)

(Monash Business School, 2019)

Further, students with a proposal for a project also need to submit the following for assessment and approval by the WIL Placement team:

- The project brief (what the project is expected to cover)

- Company details (name, location etc.)

- Supervisor details (name, contact information). If overseas, this needs to an English-speaker

- Starting and finishing dates of project

(Monash Business School, 2019)

Student learning is facilitated by faculty staff and an employee at the organisation where the project is based. After initial university-based seminars students are provided with in introduction to the project from the Faculty's industry fellow and an induction by a nominated employee at the associated organisation. Ongoing support is provided to the group by the industry fellow and nominated employee throughout the WIL project experience.

Assessment is made up of tasks assessed by WIL academics and tasks assessed by employer supervisors. Students are required to maintain a portfolio made up of their experiences and reflections throughout their WIL project experience that is submitted at the end of the project. An end of project presentation to their academic supervisor and other IBL students is also part of the assessment. During the WIL project experience students are also expected to provide their employer supervisor with weekly progress reports. Supervisors are also expected to provide students with a mid and end of project performance evaluation. The criteria for assessment include:

1. Interest and energy

2. Dependability and work output

3. Organisation and planning

4. Oral communication skills

5. Written communication skills

6. Listening skills

7. Presentation skills

8. Team work

9. Critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving

10. Personal development in response to mid placement evaluation

11. Optional – supervisor's choice (adds relevant criteria not covered in listing above)

University and Faculty Objectives (Optional)

12. Being critical and creative

13. Demonstrate global and ethical awareness

14. Demonstrate discipline knowledge

15.   Able to integrate discipline knowledge with other disciplines

Industry supervisors (if they wish) may nominate additional areas for assessment.

(Monash Business School, 2019)

Before supervisors evaluate performance, students are first required to self-evaluate their own performance providing evidence to support their claims.

The growth of WIL projects

The WIL project units are a growing part of the Monash Business School's WIL offering. Resources allocation is the most significant factor restricting further growth. Partner organisations and interested students outnumber available places. Although most projects offered through the program are intra-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary projects are also offered through the Monash Industry Team Initiative (MITI) initiative (Monash Business School, 2019). Inter-disciplinary WIL projects are also offered by other areas of the university, such as the Graduate Research Industry Project (GRIP) and as part of the Masters of environment and sustainability (Monash University, 2019). This further highlights the growth in WIL projects across the university.

Given the significant interest in WIL across the higher education sector, and growing interest in WIL projects, it is useful to understand the impact WIL has on graduate employability. Although there is a general acceptance that WIL is considered instrumental to graduate job-readiness, attention remains predominantly outcome-focused with less attention to the process of what, how and from whom students acquire skills during placement (Jackson, 2015). Given the significant investment required to develop and

maintain WIL programs it is important to measure both the outcomes and the processes by which these outcomes are generated to fully understand the worth of WIL experiences (Smith & Worsfold, 2015).

Furthermore, the key role that WIL plays in transitioning graduates from educational institutions into the workforce underscores the need to also effectively evaluate and understand the experience of students undertaking workplace based learning (Jackson, 2015). Stanley and Xu (2019) concede that few studies address interdisciplinary WIL group projects and none address multidisciplinary WIL placements. As a result, there is an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of the pedagogy behind WIL projects that contributes to graduate employability.

Research aims

The aim of this study is to investigate how the pedagogy of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) projects contribute to graduate employability.

The following research questions scaffold the main aim and question:

1.   What is our current understanding of graduate employability?

2.   What skills, understandings and personal attributes contribute to graduate employability?

3.   What pedagogical practices, in relation to WIL projects, contribute to graduate employability?

4.   How do these pedagogical practices, in relation to WIL projects, contribute to graduate employability?

Significance of the research

WIL projects are a more recent approach to WIL offered by universities that give students a practice-based learning experience to integrate their theoretical learning in a practice-based setting (Billett, 2014). WIL projects are quite different to traditional placements, upon which much of the business discipline-related WIL literature is focused (Stanley & Xu, 2019). By using a case-study approach, this research will examine a growing business school WIL project unit to develop an understanding of how common WIL curriculum factors are applied to this context to develop graduate employability. The research will focus on the perspectives of all three key stakeholders – the student, academic staff and the employer, to contribute to our understanding of how the pedagogy of WIL projects contribute to graduate employability. The findings of this research will contribute to the literature on WIL projects and could influence WIL programs, policy and guidelines.

Structure of the research

The literature review will first establish an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to WIL. This will start by first considering graduate employability and the role of universities and then focus on WIL within the business discipline. The review will then focus on aspects of WIL relevant to WIL projects, such as project-based learning and collaborative partnerships, and will position this research in the literature, including where it will extend our understanding of WIL and WIL projects. The literature review will then inform the development of a theoretical framework that will guide the research. The theoretical framework will outline the curriculum factors that will be considered when

investigating WIL projects and outline the aspects of employability that will be considered when investigating how WIL projects contribute to graduate employability. The methodology will then outline the rationale of using a qualitative case-study approach to conduct this research, which will focus on the perspectives of students, academics and employers involved in WIL projects. The findings will then be presented, structured by each perspective. Guided by the theoretical framework, these findings will be analysed and critically examined to develop a better understanding of WIL projects and how they develop graduate employability. The conclusion will summarise these learnings and related implications for WIL and the evolving role of universities in developing graduate employability.

Literature review

This literature review will begin by identifying, evaluating and synthesising the literature related to graduate employability and the role of universities. The review will then focus on WIL and the emerging literature in the business discipline. The literature related to project-based learning and collaborative partnerships between universities and employers will then be considered in relation to WIL projects. This will be followed by a focus on studies that establish the benefits and challenges of WIL and how these relate to WIL projects and the development of graduate employability.

Graduate employability and the role of universities

There are increasing pressures on higher education institutions from industry, employers and from the community to provide students with opportunities and learning experiences that develop graduate employability. There is consensus across the literature that graduate employability is now regarded as critical for the success of degree programs offered by universities (Henderson & Trede, 2017; Jackson & Hancock, 2010; Venville, Lynch & Santhanam, 2018). Graduate employability is also increasingly being regarded a critical success factor by students and employers (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Edwards et al. (2015) highlights the sense of urgency around this by arguing that employers are now demanding graduates with relevant experience and evidence of work readiness. For some time, across many OECD countries, the employability agenda has been imposed on higher education institutions of national governments (Yorke, 2006). In response, higher education institutions have been focusing on how to develop graduate employability in an effort to integrate this into academic programs of study (Osmani, et. al., 2015; Billett,

2014). Yet this is proceeding in a higher education context, where there are no common understandings and agreements about what employability entails and means.

There is a lack of consensus around what is meant by graduate employability. For Hillage and Pollard (1998) graduate employability for business graduates simply refers to the capability of students to gain employment. Harvey (2003) extends this by adding considerations such as job suitability, timing of employment and employability skills. Other literature introduces knowledge, career management and work experience into understandings of what is meant by graduate employability (Jackson, 2013; Ishengoma & Vaaland, 2016). This highlights a trend in the literature that over time the expectations of employers are being taken into greater consideration when preparing graduates for suitable employment. This is being done through a continuum of assessing the employment rates of graduates, along with considering the curriculum and knowledge aspects of higher education courses where career management and work-related skills are being included.

The extent to which universities understand these expectations is the subject of ongoing academic debate (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011). Dewey (1916) originally proposed that education for vocations should identify what occupations individuals are suited for and the development of 'capacities' to realise their vocations. These ideas continue to resonate today however the language used to describe these ideas has shifted and plays a significant factor in the ongoing debate regarding the extent that universities understand these expectations (Hinchliffe & Jolly, 2011; Jackson, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). Tomlinson (2017) argues that the enhancement of graduates' employability 'skills' has dominated much of the discourse. This is the result of Universities' institutional approaches to graduate employability being heavily influenced by the skills-related language used by

employers (Holmes, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). Such skills related language is represented in course descriptors and content or curriculum in many contemporary university programs. This has contributed to a lack of consensus across the literature and introduces a number of challenges when attempting to understanding graduate employability in the Australian university context.

Much of this criticism centres on the definition of graduate employability skills and its relationship to employability (Tomlinson, 2017). In addition to developing skills throughout the course of their education, graduates also possess skills that have been developed outside of the university context. James et al., (2013) points out that there is quite some difference between the two, and that discussion regarding graduate employability skills often conflate the two. Holmes (2013) adds that there is a further conflation of ideas when the possession of skills is connected and confused with the possession of 'attributes'. This is problematic as there is an assumption that graduates who possess these 'skills' and 'attributes' are more employable; however, the literature challenges this assumption and argues that this isn't necessarily the case and that an analysis of the literature reveals that graduate employability is far more complex (Jackson, 2016; Tomlinson, 2012; Holmes, 2013). A focus on employability in terms of skills or the employment outcomes of graduates closes off the situations of personal and social networks playing out in a person's skills development and employment achievements.

The literature also challenges the transferability of graduate skills and the relationship with graduate employment (Mason et al, 2009). Once a graduate is in the workplace, formally acquired skills cannot simply be transferred given that the actual skills graduates employ is derived from, situated in and further generated through the actual work context in which they are utilised (Mason et al, 2009). This highlights the contextual barriers between

university learning and the workplace and calls into question the relationship between the development of graduate skills and their relevance (Holmes, 2013; Mason et al., 2009). The literature also challenges the relationship between the possession of these skills and how much of an impact these have on graduates' employment outcomes (Mason et al., 2009; Holmes, 2013). That is not to say that skills are not a part of graduate employability. This is more a reflection of the multi-dimensional and evolving nature of graduate employability. This is better captured by the generally accepted definition that graduate employability is "a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy" (Yorke, 2006, p. 8).

In meeting the expectations of students the community and employers, universities have recognised the need to incorporate practice-based learning opportunities into their programs. There is consensus in the literature that this is an important strategy for developing work-ready graduates and an effective approach to graduate employability (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Billett, 2014; Billett, 2009; Smith & Worsford, 2015, Abeysekera, 2006). As a result, promoting practice-based learning through WIL has become a focus in higher education institutions as they prepare graduates for their future professions through undergraduate and postgraduate programs (Billett & Henderson, 2011).

This research will add to the literature by exploring the development of graduate employability through Work Integrated Learning (WIL) projects. Although integrating projects are not new, these WIL projects offer a new context to explore the multidimensional and evolving nature of graduate employability. This context offers a new

approach to university-employer collaboration through the provision of expertise provided by the university and the expansion of the university's supervisory role.

Graduate employability skills

The literature recognises that defining graduate employability skills can be challenging due to the influence of politics, the influence of industry groups and the tenuous link to graduate employability (Smith et al., 2014; Tomlinson, 2017). The issue is further compounded by the broad task of identifying all the possible skills and abilities that a graduate would potentially need upon graduation (Smith et al., 2014). In addition to technical skills, employers demand graduates with non-technical skills such as self-management, written and verbal communication, initiative and enterprise, problem-solving, technological competence and planning skills (Hancock et al., 2009). Graduates also need to be able to actively manage the world of work and self-manage their careers (Bridgstock, 2009).

A literature review on the graduate employability literature identified more that 40 separate skills/abilities (Jackson, 2013). Smith, Ferns & Russell (2016) applied this research to form the basis of their model on the dimensions of employability, which is a distillation of the key skills and knowledge identified in the literature.

Employable graduates:
• are competent for autonomous, responsible and ethical practice;
• can work with other people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally;
• use information in judicious ways for specific work-related purposes;

- are willing to continue to learn to improve practice and are able to identify areas for self-development;

- integrate theory and practice;

- have confidence and self-awareness to seek and gain employment in a job market (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016, p. 201)

Based on the literature, this forms a reasonable base for understanding the skills that contribute to graduate employability. Much of this understanding has been derived from studies that focus on traditional WIL experiences, such as internships and placements. This research will make a contribution by applying these understandings to the new WIL project context to test these claims and identify any previously overlooked skills/abilities that this new context may offer.

Work-integrated learning [WIL]

WIL is a variety of educational activities designed to provide students with exposure to "real-world" work experience by deliberately integrating theory with work practice (Patrick et al, 2009). In responding to the need for practice-based experiences, universities provide a range of opportunities, often in the form of practicum placement or internships, which are designed to apply theoretical and practical learning within a workplace context (Atkinson, 2016). This is also a reflection of the growing recognition that a body of knowledge was present and learned in the workplace (Orrell, 2011). These practices of WIL involve the three-way collaboration between learners, universities and employers (Harvey, 2003). Experiences can be paid or unpaid and range in duration from short-term

placements of a few weeks to longer-term placements that last for a semester or longer (Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2018).

There is a lack of consistency regarding the description of these experiences (Conner & MacFarlaine, 2007); however, Smith et al. (2009) offer the following widely accepted categorisation of WIL models and their broad characteristics:

- Work placement - the university places a student in industry during the degree program for a short period of time and is paid or unpaid;
- Work experience/vacation work - paid or unpaid extra-curricular work that usually takes place in an industry or profession related to the student's program but may relate to student's part time work which is not related to their program;
- Internship - usually paid and one year in length and often referred to as a sandwich course;
- Co-operative education - usually paid and based on a specific project or more general work experience;
- Industry project - usually unpaid, short-term and based on achieving outcomes for a specific project; and
- Mentoring - mentoring can range in practice from a formal structured program through to an informal relationship including peer support.

(Smith et al., 2009)

WIL, in all its forms, focuses on an integration of learning between the university and the workplace (Billett, 1995; 2009; 2014). Schön (1983) recognised that universities should provide the opportunity for students to develop the practical skills needed for professional

practice and go beyond being a place to simply accumulate knowledge. Studies show how this idea has advanced through the development of WIL-related student learning experiences that offer the opportunity to integrate theory and practice in the workplace and extend knowledge of the world of work (Atchison, Pollock, Reeders & Rizzetti, 2002; Leong & Kavanagh, 2013). As a result, WIL and all its iterations has evolved into a distinct field of practice and study supported by relevant pedagogies and concepts of curriculum. As a consequence, universities are increasingly shifting their practices and in some ways changing their focus. The notion of a quality higher education now hinges upon the reputation of universities. Universities that produce employment-ready professionals and have graduates with good employment outcomes is seen to add to the reputation of the university.

There is growing evidence of the benefits of WIL integration for student learning and the development of graduate employability (Orrell, 2011). There is consensus in the literature on the positive pedagogical contribution of participation in WIL and its potential to enhance graduate employability through the development of interpersonal, social and professional skills (Patrick et al., 2008; Jackson, 2016; Eliljido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; Billett, 2014; Billett, 2009). Research has also shown that participation in WIL is related to better academic achievement (Drysdale et al. 2016). Students who participate in WIL also enjoy higher rates of employment and higher starting salaries in post-graduate employment (Walters & Zarifa, 2008). These factors are contributing to the growth of WIL in higher education.

Consequently, interest in WIL from higher education institutions as an approach to developing employability skills is growing (Smith & Worsford, 2015; Jackson, 2015). Universities across the world are forging links with employers, and building strategic links with enterprises for both research and teaching opportunities. The benefits for graduates

include improved professional knowledge, graduate capabilities, work readiness, job offers and confidence (Smith & Worsford, 2015). Employers also recognise the long-term benefits of WIL programs through the development of a work-ready talent pool of graduates for their sectors (Jackson et al., 2017). The WIL partnership between higher education institutions and employers also contributes to a curriculum that reflects community and industry needs (Smith, 2012). As a result, the literature indicates that higher education institutions will continue to show interest in WIL as an approach to developing employability skills and that WIL-based initiatives will increase across the sector.

By examining an example of WIL, this research adds to the literature by extending the knowledge and insights into WIL projects, which in this example are more commonly referred to as industry projects. WIL projects offer a unique context that differs from traditional industry projects and provides an opportunity to compare and contrast the educational worth of this approach with existing WIL experiences.

WIL in business

Australian and international universities are expanding their WIL programs in response to this growth and promoting graduate employability (Smith, Ferns, & Russell, 2014). Industry report poor graduate business acumen and a lack of real work experience as serious shortcomings (Gamble, Patrick & Peach, 2010). In addition to possessing fundamental technical skills, graduates require 'business acumen' and an understanding of the 'real world' (Gamble, Patrick & Peach, 2010). Although practice-based learning is established in disciplines such as medicine and education, WIL has been expanding to

disciplines such as business (Billett, 2009; Billett, 2014); made up of accounting, finance, management and marketing. WIL is seen as a way of improving the 'work-readiness' of business graduates (Stanley & Zu, 2019).

WIL is not compulsory in the business discipline; however, professional bodies have long acknowledged the benefits (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry & The Business Council of Australia, 2002). As a result, there is no consistent approach to WIL across the business discipline with many programs lacking structure and limiting WIL to a single capstone unit in a program (Leong & Kavanagh, 2013). Despite this, graduates report that WIL experiences in business degrees, such as accounting, were perceived as being effective and worthwhile (Stanley & Zu, 2019).

Many Australian universities are integrating a work-based year for business students to work in a related industry (Elihido-Ten & Kloot, 2014). Internships are the most common approach to WIL in business education, for example two-thirds of accounting firms such as Ernst and Young provide yearlong placements to graduates (Elihido-Ten & Kloot, 2014; Stanley & Xu, 2019).   WIL placements provide graduates the opportunity to learn in the workplace and are complex, focused activities, designed to integrate theory and work practices and opportunities for accessing and constructing robust and transferable vocational knowledge (Billett, 1995; Smith & Worsfold, 2014). However, with graduates situated in unique practice-based settings, these placement experiences vary enormously in terms of their quality, the educational value to students and the impacts that these have on them psychologically and educationally (Smith, 2012).

Although the language varies, placements make up the majority of WIL opportunities for business graduates. These opportunities may be described as internships, industry-based

learning, job shadowing, practicum or fieldwork (Billett, 2014), and share similar on the job characteristics. The limited literature also outlines Industry projects as an approach used by universities to develop business graduates' employability. Typically, an industry project is:

- unpaid,

- short-term,

- based on achieving outcomes for a specific project

- may be individual student or student team

- may be done at organisation's work place, or done at university

- learning outcomes: Well defined

- assessment: Formally assessed

(Smith et al., 2009, p. 43)

This research will depart from much of the existing business WIL literature, which predominately focuses on placements, by adding to the limited literature on industry projects. The research will make a contribution by offering new understandings of how industry projects can be developed based on the learnings from a new form of WIL projects.

Project-based learning

Although there is limited literature on business WIL projects, project-based learning, a pedagogical model organising learning around projects, is well established (Prince & Felder, 2007). The project is the focus of the experience and provides the learning

mechanism for student to construct meaning. A project must have the following attributes to provide students with a rich learning experience:

- Projects are central, not peripheral to the curriculum.

- Projects are focused on questions or problems that "drive" students to encounter (and struggle with) the central concepts and principles of a discipline.

- Projects are student driven to some extent.

- Projects are realistic, not school like.

(Stepien, Gallagher & Workman, 1993).

The literature shows that project-based learning experiences that meet these attributes help students develop their skills in critical thinking, problem solving, working in groups and effective communication (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017). This highlights the importance of considering these attributes when developing WIL projects for students, much of which depends on the collaboration between the university and the employer. The practice-based setting and unique collaborative approach that underpins WIL projects contributes to the literature by offering a novel way of developing project-based learning opportunities.

Collaborative partnerships between universities and employers

Academia-industry partnerships are a crucial factor in the development of practice-based WIL experiences for graduates. The relationship plays an important role in planning WIL experiences (Billett, 2014). Ongoing communication and coordination between the parties during a WIL experience ensure the quality of the WIL experience for all involved (Smith et al., 2009; Patrick et al., 2009). Effective collaboration also depends on effective project

management processes and feelings of mutual benefit (Barbolla and Corredera, 2009). This highlights the importance of strong collaborative relationships with industry and the potential of this research to contribute to a greater understanding of the dynamics that contribute to positive learning outcomes. The collaboration with small non-profit oraganisations who require the expertise of universities to lead their engagement with WIL offers a new way of approaching WIL and an opportunity to contribute to the literature.

Developing graduate employability through WIL

John Dewey (1916) is associated with progressive education and argued that the key to happiness was to ensure that individuals found out what they were suited to do, and that to not be given the opportunity to do so was a tragedy. Learning comes through experience and education should allow learners to engage in real-world problem solving (Dewey, 1938). While Dewey's ideas about education and experience were developed in the heady days of industrialisation, their significance is connected to the continuing insistence that the relationship between education, work and employment is important (Dewey, 1977).

The literature reveals that there is a strong case that WIL experiences can provide such opportunities for students to get to grips with the worlds of work and employment beyond the confines of the university. WIL has the potential to offer a rich, active and contexualised learning experience for students that enhances understanding of the work environment and employer expectations (Patrick et al., 2008; Wilton, 2012). As Billett (2014) further elaborates, the WIL experience can assist students to understand their

selected occupation and develop the capacities to practice effectively. More specifically, some of the key strengths of a WIL experience are:

1. Access to authentic work activities (i.e. authentic activities, novel and routine)

2. Observation and listening (cues and clues – indirect guidance)

3. Access to more experienced co-workers, and (direct guidance – development of heuristics)

4. Practice (opportunities to reinforce, refine and hone)

(Billett, 2014, p. 837)

To ensure students are able to make the most of these practice-based experiences the curriculum must be designed in a way to take advantage of these strengths. In the WIL literature, the curriculum is made up of what students should be experiencing and the sequence of the building blocks that make up their courses (Barnett & Coate, 2005). Smith (2012) extends on this by incorporating the consideration of educational ends, or what is to be learned, including what is to be planned, taught, learned, experienced, assessed and evaluated. Smith (2012) goes on to considering the many forms of WIL and to identify several key dimensions that have an impact on the quality of such experiences including experience authenticity, integrated learning supports, alignment, supervisor access and induction/preparation processes.

Derived from previous research that focused on WIL in disciplines with established practice-based learning such as medicine, Billett (2014) proposes several pedagogical and curriculum considerations that impact the integration of students' experiences. Structurally aligned with the sequence of a WIL experience, this is made up of:

Prior to the practice experience, it is helpful to:

- establish bases for experiences in practice settings, including developing or identifying capacities in practice settings (i.e. practice-based curriculum, inter-actions);

- clarify expectations about purposes, support, responsibilities, etc. (i.e. goals for learning);

- inform about purposes, roles and expectations of different parties (e.g. advance organisers);

- prepare students as agentic learners (i.e. develop their personal epistemologies), including the importance of observations, interactions and activities through which they learn;

- develop the procedural capacities required for practice; and

- prepare students for contestations (e.g. being advised to forget everything learnt at university).

During practice-based experiences it is helpful for there to be:

- direct guidance by more experienced practitioners (i.e. proximal guidance);

- sequencing and combinations of activities (i.e. 'learning curriculum', practice-based curriculum);

- active engagement in pedagogically rich work activities or interactions (e.g. handovers);

- effective peer interactions (i.e. collaborative learning); and active and purposeful engagement by learners in workplace settings.

After practice-based experiences, it is helpful to:

- facilitate the sharing and drawing out of experiences (i.e. articulating and comparing commonalities and distinctiveness – e.g. canonical and situational requirements for practice);
- explicitly make links to what is taught (learnt) in the academy and what is experienced in practice settings;
- emphasise the agentic and selective qualities of learning through practice (i.e. personal epistemologies); and generate critical perspectives on work and learning processes in students.

(Billet, 2014, p. 839)

This offers a framework to consult when considering the assurance of learning in WIL experiences. This research contributes to the literature by considering the extent that WIL projects offer comparable or new opportunities of theoretical and practical integration.

WIL and assessment

Traditional methods of assessment, such as exams and quizzes do not suit WIL (Wichester-Seeto & Rowe, 2017). Assessment strategies need to be adaptable to the unique context and situation of each student's experience, resulting in a diverse range of assessment strategies potentially being used (Yorke, 2011). This includes the use of formative assessment to allow for effective feedback during the experience (Ferns & Moore, 2012). These considerations are reflected in the literature across the most common strategies used in assessing WIL. In their review, Winchester-Seeto and Rowe (2017) identify individual reports, written reflections, supervisor reports and individual presentations as the most common assessment types.

Billett (2014) argues that for students to get the most out of their practice-based WIL experience they need to make explicit links to what is taught at university and what is expected in the workplace. This is one of the key educational goals of WIL experiences (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). In addition to the ability to integrate theory and practice and apply discipline knowledge to the workplace, educational goals also include students experiencing the world of work and developing or acquiring skills and attitudes (Smith, 2012). Individual reports, reflections and presentations that prompt students to find these links and make meaning of the experience are important parts of the WIL curriculum that help achieve this (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016).

Integrating theory and practice and making meaning from the experience requires students to reflect. This is a common approach across WIL assessment tasks and encourages a deeper learning and reflexivity that can develop a unique kind of experiential knowledge that cannot be gained from just having an experience watching others or reading about it (Billett, 2014). Dahan (2016) highlights the social significance of learning from other people and the learning that takes place around practice-based activities. This takes place both from learning from personal experience and other people, with much of the learning being informal (Billett, 2009). As a pedagogical tool, reflection greatly contributes to student learning and making sense of these experiences during WIL and is an important feature of the assessment (Billett, 2009; Dahan).

Although reflection is effective at integrating WIL experiences, its use needs to be carefully designed and has broader curriculum implications (Harvey & Coulson, 2013). Disciplines such as nursing have a tradition of incorporating the development of reflective practice throughout their courses (Billett, 2009). Students less predisposed to reflection may

require additional support (Harvey & Coulson, 2013). Also, students from more didactic learning cultures and students who are reluctant to reveal their private thoughts or construct what they think is the desired response also have difficulty with reflection (Rarieya, 2005). These studies highlight the importance of well-designed and structured reflective activities.

The responsiveness to the variability of workplace learning, including the 'situatedness', unpredictability and authenticity of each WIL context can have a significant impact on assessment (Winchester-Seeto and Rowe, 2017). As a result, assessment can present as a challenge in WIL, including its potential impact of staff workloads. Assessment is generally considered one of the most time intensive aspects of teaching in higher education (Race & Pickford, 2007). Given WIL is thought to be more resource intensive than university based teaching, this would suggest that this aspect of WIL can be a challenge (Patrick et al., 2008).

The employer or host supervisor may also be directly involved in the assessment task. The literature encourages this, with the active involvement and feedback from experts adding to the quality of the learning experience for students (Billett, 2014). For professionally accredited practice-based disciplines such as engineering, nursing or teaching, placement or workplace reports are a common feature of WIL assessment that require employers to make judgements about student proficiency and competence (Peach et al., 2014). Peach, Ruinard and Webb (2014) also highlight the employers' role in providing ongoing performance feedback and broader capability development to students. As a result, the employer plays a significant role in ongoing assessment which can raise potential issues.

Several studies have noted the challenge of ensuring WIL activities can be reliably and validly measured and graded (McNamara, 2013; Mackaway et al., 2011). A lack of support, employer inexperience and the conflicting roles of being both mentor and supervisor can contribute to a reluctance by employers to engage with assessment, potentially placing pressure on university staff to ensure assessment based feedback is academically sound (Mackaway et al., 2011). Bates (2003) also raises the continuous contact needed with the employer to insure the completion and timely return of WIL assessment being a feature that is unique to WIL-related workload. These studies show that the university must work closely with the employer to manage expectations and provide support when needed. This research will contribute to the literature by adding an understanding of how the assessment strategies are used for WIL projects.

WIL and supervision

Supervision is the practice of keeping in touch with students during WIL experiences, to clarify expectations about purpose, and to support and monitor learning (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Billett, 2014). This aspect of WIL placement curriculum design is one of the most variable across disciplines and is affected by the collaborative relationship between the university and employer (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). This task of supervision is split between the university and the employer and is a shared responsibility (Billett, 2014). The involvement of employers varies depending on the type of WIL experience and the nature of the placement undertaken by the students (Ferns & Moore, 2012). Billett (2014) suggests that employer supervisors should offer direct guidance and develop students' procedural capacities and required practice; whereas, university supervisors focus on preparing students as learners, such as the importance of observations, interactions and

activities though which they learn. In addition to employer relationships and employment outcomes for students, employers are also motivated by the university-employer relationships developed through WIL, which can lead to research partnerships, new initiatives and consultancy work (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Patrick et al., 2008).

The literature also identifies a number of supervisor-related challenges that can have an impact on student learning during their WIL experience. This includes: a lack of resourcing, poor support levels, poor staff capacity to mentor and supervise students, and a lack of information to guide supervisors (Patrick et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014). To address these challenges, Smith, Ferns and Russell (2014) offer the following recommendations to guide this aspect of WIL:

- Appropriate professional development opportunities should be developed for WIL practitioners and industry/community partners.
- Industry and community partners should be more involved in supervising students and providing feedback on student learning and workplace performance.
- Industry and community partners and universities should collaborate on curriculum development and design, supervision of students and feedback on assessment.
- Relationships between universities and industry/community partners should be structured, intentional and resourced.

(Smith, Ferns and Russell, 2014, p. 364)

WIL projects further contribute to the variability of this aspect of WIL by offering another type of collaborative relationship between the university and employer. Bringing expertise into an organisation, advising organisations on their strategic needs and developing

projects to address these needs is a material change to the contribution usually made by the university in these collaborative relationships. This has potential flow on effects to the level of supervision taken on by the university. This research will contribute to the literature by developing an understanding of the impact of this unique approach to the WIL experience.

Benefits of WIL

Students are focused on employment when enrolling in university and demand programs, such as WIL, that can help them with their future employment (Henderson & Trede, 2017). WIL experiences can help students develop an understanding of the careers they may wish to pursue by offering an opportunity to experience potential future occupations (Patrick et al., 2008; Zegwaard & McCurdy, 2014). A number of studies also show that students who participate in WIL also enjoy higher rates of employment and higher starting salaries in post-graduate employment (Stern and Briggs 2001; Walters and Zarifa 2008).

The literature highlights the development of skills from the authentic practice-based setting of WIL experiences. This includes, to be a proficient practitioner, use information effectively, develop an ability to contribute to the workplace, and apply theory to unique workplace situations (Blasko, Brennan, Little, & Shah, 2002; Billett, 2009; Billet, 2014; Smith & Worsfold, 2015). Generic skills, such as interpersonal communication, written and oral communication, teamwork, time management and professionalism are also developed during the experience Jackson, 2013; Billett, 2014; Yorke, 2006; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). In addition to the development of relevant skills and attributes, embedding WIL experiences in university courses is also considered to be an important strategy for

developing employable graduates who contribute to Australia's economic growth (Australian Department of Education, Science & Training, 2004).

This research will contribute to the literature by finding out if the established benefits of WIL are still provided to students through their participation in WIL projects.

WIL challenges for students

The literature also identifies some specific WIL challenges for students. One often overlooked area is the personal impact of participating in WIL on students (Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017). The WIL learning experience can be an intense period of learning that can impact on other areas of a student's life, such as adding financial stress, contributing to social isolation or having a negative impact on study/work/life balance (Bergin & Pakenham, 2015). This research will contribute to the literature by developing an understanding of the potential challenges students face when participating in WIL projects.

Literature review implications for this research

This literature review has revealed that WIL projects are an under-researched area of WIL. The findings of this research will add to the literature by exploring the development of graduate employability through Work Integrated Learning (WIL) projects. Although integrating projects are firmly established in the literature, WIL projects offer a new context to explore the multidimensional and evolving nature of graduate employability. This research will add to the literature by contributing a new approach to university-employer

collaboration through the expanded provision of expertise provided by the university and the extension of the university's supervisory role in WIL experiences. This novel way of developing project-based learning opportunities offers new opportunities of theoretical and practical integration, along with associated assessment considerations, benefits for students and potential challenges. This emerging area of WIL and gap in the literature will be addressed by this research.

Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a central foundation upon with which research is constructed (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018). The epistemological approach, that is the conditions of the knowledge and its making in this research is also of concern when developing a theoretical framework. Walsham (1995) reasons that interpretive case studies, such as this one about Work Integrated Learning (WIL), use theory to create "an initial theoretical framework which takes account of previous knowledge, and which creates a sensible theoretical basis to inform the topics and approach of the early empirical work" (p. 76). With this in mind, a theoretical framework was developed that accommodates rich participatory research. In pursuing the aims of this research, the following theoretical principles and concepts have been used to guide the methodology, inform the literature review and underpin the data analysis and associated discussion and conclusions.

The theoretical framework assists in situating the research in the literature (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). By focusing on graduate employability in relation to WIL projects in the context of university learning, this research aims to extend our understanding of the curriculum and pedagogical practice of integrating work life learning. Billet's (2009) research into workplace learning offers a theoretical perspective about learning and curriculum theory that addresses issues associated with understanding, identifying and utilising the educational worth of authentic experiences, and proposing how these experiences might be integrated within university courses. The perspective focuses on conceptual understandings of learning "through the relations between the personal and social contributions to human development (i.e. learning), the remaking of culture (developing further culturally-derived occupational knowledge) (Billett, 1995; Billett, 2009; Billett, 2011) and curriculum perspectives emphasising learning through practice (Billett, 2014). This

perspective will be used to position the study in the literature as building on our understanding of learning through practice and assist with explaining the study's findings.

WIL and the personal and social contribution to human development

Billett (2009) acknowledges that "both personal and social contributions are important, mediated by social forms and practices, and shaped by the personal process of construing and constructing what is experienced" (p. 828). Billett (2009) argues that all education should be vocational and aim to help individuals to realise their vocations, and that where education is occupation specific, "individuals are able to learn domain-specific conceptual, procedural and dispositional knowledge associated with occupations" in a practice-based setting. Trede (2012) states that the development of aspects of this type of knowledge is often a hidden outcome of WIL. Therefore, Billett's view of WIL and its personal and social contribution to human development through domain-specific vocational knowledge offers a useful way of understanding how WIL projects develop this type of knowledge. These views will be considered when discussing the findings. Domain-specific knowledge goes to the core of vocationally and occupationally oriented learning, by inducting students into the cultures of practice within the domain and the social practices that characterise the relevant context. As this research explores WIL in a business and economics course, the expected practices associated with the culture of the field students are seeking to break into. The students, the lecturers and the employers that provide the authentic learning are all engaged in the circulation and development of domain-specific learning, that is both social and cultural.

WIL and curriculum perspectives emphasising learning through practice

An important aspect of WIL learning is understanding how students can be prepared and supported as learners during their experience. Billet (2009) argues that "to secure the educational worth of these experiences, particular curriculum and pedagogic responses are needed prior to, during and after students' engagement in practice-based learning experiences, in order to maximise their contributions and integrate those experiences" (p. 829). This is a reasonable starting point when exploring curriculum and pedagogical aspects of WIL; however, it becomes clear that the literature is inconsistent with the use of these terms.

Curriculum and words used in a WIL context, such as planned, taught experiences, assessed and evaluated curricula are inconsistent across the literature and add to the challenge of conceptualising related terms (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Barnett & Coate, 2005). In response, Smith, Ferns and Russell (2016) conducted a literature review, 2001-2016, to identify the curriculum factors as predictors of employability skill development for students on WIL placements. The review focused on "six WIL curriculum factors which empirical evidence suggests are important for describing placement WIL curricula in general terms" (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016, p. 198). These factors were identified as authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration.

Six facets of the curriculum that matter:
- Authenticity: How often did you contribute worthwhile outcomes for the organisation (such as a product, or change in practice or policy)?

- Preparation: I had a preparation program or resources that helped me prepare for the placement to help me maximise my learning whilst on placement.

- Supervision: I had regular contact with an academic supervisor from the university in order to discuss my learning whilst on placement.

- Debrief: I had time with my academic supervisor after the placement to reflect on my learning from placement.

- Activities focused on integration: How often did you reflect on applying your discipline knowledge in the workplace?

- Assessment focused on integration: How often were you assessed on your use of theory to justify practice decisions.

(Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016, p.200)

Framed by Billet's (2009) curriculum and pedagogical responses, these six WIL-curriculum factors will be used in the study. The factors, and associated literature review, consolidate the use of key terms associated with WIL and curriculum perspectives emphasising learning through practice. Therefore, these factors constitute a broad and inclusive theoretical framework that provides the basis for rich descriptive results. Additionally, this theoretical framing structures the analysis to further understandings about how; and what pedagogical practices, in relation to WIL projects, contribute to employability (refer to Figure 1).
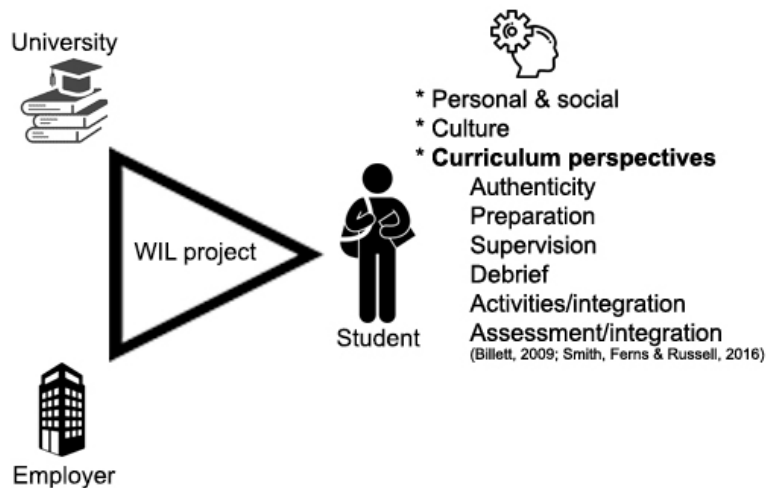
Figure 1: Study overview: WIL projects and curriculum considerations.

Employability

The definition of employability is continually evolving. Politicisation of the term, industry-based influence and a continually changing set of identified skills and abilities are all contributing factors (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Smith, 2016; Jackson, 2014, Yorke, 2006). With this in mind, this study will use Yorke's (2006) widely accepted definition of employability, that employability is taken as:

> "A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy". (Yorke, 2006, p. 8).

For this research, it is necessary to further elaborate on what is meant by the skills, understandings and personal attributes that contribute to employment. Smith, Ferns & Russell (2016) propose that these skills, understandings and personal attributes can be distilled into six domains of employability. These aspects of skills, understandings and depositions are based on a number of studies that identified the fullest range of

skills/abilities in the employability literature and then distilled into discrete areas (Jackson, 2013; Ferns, Smith & Russell, 2014; Smith et al., 2014). The six aspects of employability are:

Employable graduates:

- are competent for autonomous, responsible and ethical practice;

- can work with other people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally;

- use information in judicious ways for specific work-related purposes;

- are willing to continue to learn to improve practice and are able to identify areas for self-development;

- integrate theory and practice;

- have confidence and self-awareness to seek and gain employment in a job market

(Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016, p. 210)

These six aspects of employability form the basis of analysis and discussion of the results with regards to potential impact on employability (refer to Figure 2).
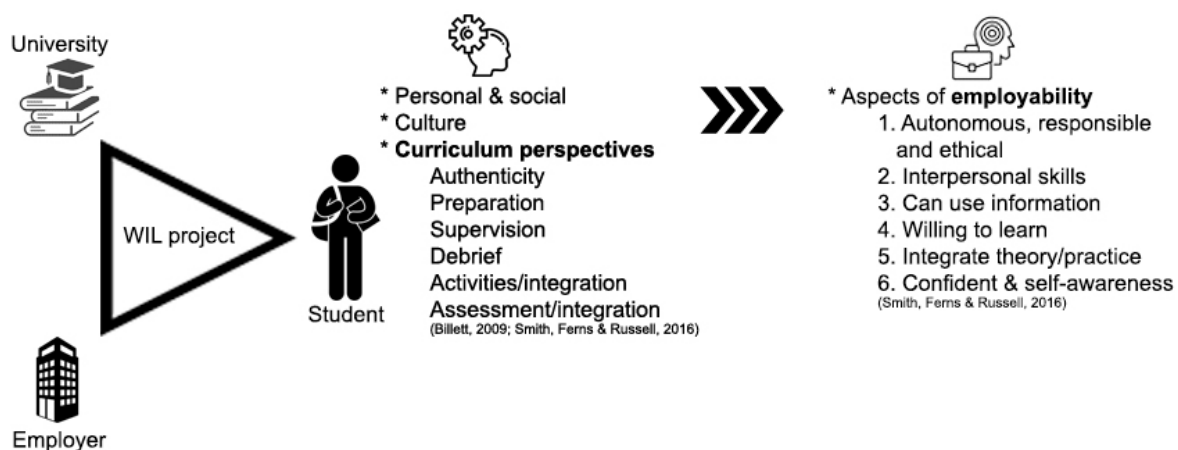
Figure 2: Study overview: WIL projects, curriculum considerations and aspects of employability.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate how the pedagogy of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) contribute to students graduate employability. The study will focus on the perspectives of three key stakeholders – the student, academic staff and the employer, and is guided by a theoretical framework. The study is grounded in a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology.

Ontology, epistemology and methodology

Research is guided by a set of beliefs or a world view, known as a paradigm. Gubba and Lincoln (1994) define this paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (p. 105). Ontology refers to the study of our existence and the fundamental nature of reality or being (Gubba & Lincoln, 1994). This therefore has an impact on what exists, what is true and how we can sort existing phenomena.

Epistemology and methodology are driven by ontological beliefs. Epistemology examines the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known (Gubba and Lincoln (1994). Therefore, it refers to how we come to know what we know during the research process. Methodology is how we go about discovering knowledge in a systematic way. As a result, the methodology is driven by the researcher's ontological and epistemological beliefs.

This study is grounded in a constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. The ontological view is that there is no single reality or truth and that reality is created by individuals involved in

the phenomenon. Reality needs to be interpreted to understand the underlying meaning of the area of study. Therefore, an interpretivist theoretical approach will be used to achieve this, and will inform the methodology.

After considering the researcher's beliefs, it is important to consider which methodology will be the best for the study. Rowley (2002) suggests that there are three factors to consider.

The type of questions to be answered.

The extent of control over behavioural events, and

The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historic events.

(Rowley, 2002, p. 17)

Although WIL projects are not a new phenomenon, the limited literature recognises that capturing insights from the experience is complex and challenging (Venville, Lynch & Santhanam, 2018). The three-way partnership between the university, employers and students adds complexity when attempting to develop a better understanding of not just how WIL projects contribute to employability, which is the focus of this study, but also in developing a systematic approach to evaluating the experience (Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015; Venville, Lynch & Santhanam, 2018). Consequently, these aspects of the study have been taken into consideration during the selection of a research design.

Case study approach

This study deploys a qualitative instrumental case-study methodology. Merriam (1998) defines a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. xiii). Merriam (1998) goes on to state its unique distinctive attributes:

> Particularistic: It focuses on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon.
>
> Descriptive: It yields a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study.
>
> Heuristic: It illuminates the reader's understanding of phenomenon under study.

Furthermore, Stake (1995) goes on to define two types of case study – the intrinsic and the instrumental case study. The purpose of an intrinsic case is not to come to understand some abstract concept or generic phenomena, but for the researcher to "subordinate other curiosities so that the case may reveal itself" (Stake, 1995, p. 237). In contrast, the instrumental case study attempts to provide insight into an issue, "it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else." (Stake, 1995, p. 237). In the case of this research, this would be to facilitate our understanding of the WIL pedagogy of WIL projects and how it impacts employability.

This methodology is compatible with the phenomenological aspects of the study. The WIL project program provides the study with a particularistic focus. The WIL project program is also a phenomenon over which the researcher has little or no control, where participants' behaviour cannot be manipulated. A case study methodology is useful in this situation (Yin, 2002, p. 9). The thick, rich description generated by the methodology will allow a thorough exploration of the WIL projects program to generate new knowledge and

accommodate the complexity of multiple stakeholders. Additionally, it will allow for the flexible exploration of the WIL projects from multiple perspectives, contributing to a greater understanding of the phenomenon and therefore the literature.

The ontological and epistemological positions informing the study are also accommodated. The case-study approach allows for the exploration of multiple interpretations of the same phenomenon, including how it is shaped by context. In the case of this study, this would be the interpretations of students, academics and employers of the same phenomenon. Epistemologically, this allows for an emic perspective to research, where the researcher is more directly involved and able to attain an insider's view of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). This also means that researchers rest upon their intuition and see research basically as a researcher- subject interaction, which is compatible with the constructivist epistemology (Yin, 2002; Stake, 1995).

Bounding the case

A defining characteristic of case study research is to view a case as a phenomenon that occurs in a bounded system (Merriam, 1998). WIL projects occur in a tertiary education setting. Within this setting, they may be offered as discipline-based WIL projects or cross-discipline WIL projects. Each instance involves a three-way partnership between student, academic and employer and inherent in all WIL initiatives, aims to contribute to student employability (Henderson & Trede, 2017). This setting was considered when determining whether to focus on a single-case study or cross-case study.

This study relies upon a diachronic single-case study. By focusing on one case, in this instance the 'BEX345x/BEX5x12 (University unit codes) Industry project', a WIL-project unit offered by the Faculty of Business and Economics at Monash University, the study provides the opportunity to develop greater depth in understanding how WIL project pedagogy contributes to graduate employability. WIL projects are completed by small teams of students in collaboration with an employer and the university. By considering multiple cases, the study would compromise the depth of findings offered by studying one case in greater detail for a shallower investigation across multiple cases of WIL-project initiatives that would likely make a limited contribution to the field. It is also likely that the single case is representative, and therefore generalisable, to other potential cases in other disciplines, so a cross-case comparative study will yield less significant results. Boundaries such as this help avoid a tendency for researchers to answer a question that is too broad (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). Additionally, by using a diachronic approach, which considers a phenomenon over time, the study will investigate WIL-project pedagogy through a student, academic and employer lens and consider the impact on graduate employability throughout the experience.

Bounded context for this case	
Tertiary setting	Monash University
Discipline	Faculty of Business and Economics
Unit	BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project across one semester
Participants	Students Academics Employers

Table 1: Bounded context for this case.

Data gathering

With case-study research it is important to draw on data from multiple sources to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety, with data needing to converge in a triangulating manner (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2002). In addition to drawing on multiple sources, Yin (2002) argues that a study will benefit from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data analysis and collection. In contrast, other advocates of case-study research offer a more flexible approach, suggesting that data collection can lead to fundamental alterations in the enquiry process (Stake, 1995). For this study, the collection of data will primarily be guided by theoretical propositions; however, some consideration will be given to allow for the capture of unanticipated insights from evidentiary sources.

A theoretical framework was created to develop key theoretical propositions to guide the data collection and analysis. Walsham (1995) reasons that interpretive case studies, such as this one, use theory to create "an initial theoretical framework which takes account of previous knowledge, and which creates a sensible theoretical basis to inform the topics and approach of the early empirical work" (p. 76). As established in the study's theoretical framework, the curriculum and pedagogic responses needed prior to, during and after students' engagement in practice-based learning experiences will be theoretically informed by the six facets (*authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration*) of the curriculum considered most important in contributing to graduate employability (Billet, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). These propositions will be used to guide the collection techniques used in the study.

Case study researchers typically make use of a number of qualitative-based data gathering tools (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). This includes documentation, archival records, interview, direct observations, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2002). With consideration given to the constructivist/interpretive ontological and epistemological approach, this study will be using documents, interviews and direct observation to gather data (refer to Table 2: Overview of data gathering tools and sources).

Data-gathering tool	Source(s)
Documents	BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide
Interviews	Students Academics Employers
Observation	Student end-of placement reflective presentations

Table 2: Overview of data gathering tools and sources

Data gathering: Documents

In addition to using interviews and observations, case study researchers often review existing documents from which to gather information related to their research (Hancock and Agozzine, 2006). This study will interrogate the BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide. This document provides a comprehensive outline of the WIL project unit. The guide is developed for students by University academics and provides details such as learning objectives and assessment tasks. The study's theoretical framework will guide the interrogation of the document which will provide a descriptive analysis based on literal and interpretive answers (refer to Table 3: Data gathering – Document).

Curriculum and pedagogy facets (Billet, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016)	Document: **Monash University. (2018). *BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide*. Retrieved from** x
Authenticity:	Literal answers
Preparation:	Literal answers
Supervision:	Literal answers
Debrief:	Literal and interpretive answers
Activities focused on integration:	Literal and interpretive answers
Assessment focused on integration:	Literal and interpretive answers

Table 3: Data gathering – Document

Data Gathering: Interviews

Interviews are particularly useful for developing a deeper understanding of a participant's experiences, allowing the interviewer to pursue in-depth information around the topic (McNamara,1999). Interviews of individuals also allow the researcher to attain rich, personalised information (Mason, 2002). Key stakeholders involved in WIL projects as part of the BEX345x/BEX5x12 unit will be interviewed as part of this study.

A researcher should identify key participants in a case whose knowledge and opinions may provide important insights regarding the study (Hancock & Agozzine, 2006). Students, academics and employers are key stakeholders involved in WIL projects (Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015), and will be the focus of interviews for this study.

Although time consuming, participants will be interviewed individually. Group interviews run the risk of not fully capturing all participants' viewpoints (Hancock & Agozzine, 2006). Individual interviews can capture significant amounts of information at a greater depth,

which is suitable for this study given that students and employers all collaborated on unique projects under unique circumstances.

Data gathering: Interviews - Sample size and saturation

When conducting interviews, it is important to consider the sample size. "Qualitative samples must be large enough to assure that most or all of the insights that might be important are uncovered, but at the same time if the sample is too large data becomes repetitive and, eventually, superfluous" (Mason, 2002, p. 8). Furthermore, an important concept to consider in relation to sample size is saturation. Saturation refers to the point at which the collection of new data no longer adds new insight (Glaser & Stauss, 1967). Due to the varied nature of case-study design, the literature offers mixed guidance on sample size, coming back to the unique circumstances of the study in question.

For case studies that look at developing an understanding of a particular phenomenon, Morse (1994) and Creswell (1998) offer some guidance. Morse (1994) suggests a sample size of at least six, while Creswell (1998) suggests five to 25, with both views considering the depth and context of the study. Given that this study focuses on one WIL projects program within one discipline, and aims to go into depth on particular aspects of the experience and considers multiple perspectives, it is reasoned that a limited number of participants (middle/lower band of the spectrum [5-25], Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998) are needed to reach saturation. Based on this logic, the sample size will be made up of the following:

Participant type	Number
Student	6
Academic	2
Employer	3
Total	11

Table 4: Study sample

Data gathering: Interviews - Question types

Interview question types fall across a range; from informal, with questions derived from the ongoing context, to predetermined structured and sequenced questions (Paton, 2002). All question types have their advantages and disadvantages and a researcher should consider the question type that will best reveal important insights. This study will make use of semi-structured interview questions, informed by the study's theoretical framework (refer to Table 7: Data gathering – Semi-structured interview questions). Semi-structured interview questions are well suited for case study research.

> "Using this approach, researchers ask predetermined but flexibly worded questions, the answers to which provide tentative answers to the researchers' questions. In addition to posing predetermined questions, researchers using semi-structured interviews ask follow-up questions designed to probe more deeply issues of interest to interviewees. In this manner, semi-structured interviews invite interviewees to express themselves openly and freely and to define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher."
> (Hancock & Agozzine, 2006, p. 40)

The use of semi-structured interview questions aligns with the study's ontological belief, that there is no single reality, and that each participant will have their own

phenomenological experience that needs to be interpreted to understand the underlining meaning in relation to the study.

Furthermore, contextualised questions will be developed for each participant type; students, academics and employers. The development of the questions will by grounded in the study's theoretical framework, ensuring that the emphasis will still converge on the study's focus.

Curriculum and pedagogy facets (Billet, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016)	Interview participants		
	Student (6)	**Academic (2)**	**Employer (3)**
Warm up questions:	What interested you in this course? What are the most important outcomes of your course? Why do a WIL project?	Why offer WIL projects? What drives students to take a WIL project? What are the employer's expectations?	How did you get involved in WIL projects? Did the project bring expertise to your organisation or does it support/ complement existing expertise?
Authenticity: How often did you contribute worthwhile outcomes for the organisation (such as a product, or change in practice or policy)?	What was the output of your project?	How are WIL projects developed with the employer? What do you consider when designing a project?	What do you consider when designing a project? What impact did this project have on your organisation?
Preparation: I had a preparation program or resources that helped me prepare for the placement to help me maximise my learning whilst on placement.	How were you prepared for your WIL project?	How do you prepare students for the experience?	How did you introduce/ induct students to your organisation?
Supervision: I had regular contact with an academic supervisor from the university in order to discuss my learning whilst on placement.	How were you supervised?	How are students supervised throughout the experience?	What proportion of the project management/ supervision did your organisation undertake?
Debrief: I had time with my academic supervisor after the placement to reflect on my learning from placement.	How was your WIL project connected to the curriculum?	How is the WIL project connected to the curriculum?	
Activities focused on integration: How often did you reflect on applying your discipline knowledge in the workplace? **Assessment focused on integration**: How often were you assessed on your use of theory to justify practice decisions?	How was your WIL project connected to the curriculum?	How is the WIL project connected to the curriculum?	
Post placement	What was the most valuable part of your WIL-project experience?	How does the WIL project contribute to students' employability? Have WIL project students been employed?	How do you think this WIL experience prepares students for future employment? What are the most significant skills developed by students during your project? Would you employ a WIL project student?
Final questions	What suggestions do you have to improve any aspects of the WIL project experience? Any further comments?	What are the barriers for WIL projects? What is the future potential for WIL projects? Any further comments?	What suggestions do you have to improve any aspects of the WIL project experience? Any further comments?

Table 5: Data gathering - Semi-structured interview questions

Data gathering - Observation

A frequent source of information in case study research is observations of the research setting by the researcher (Yin, 2002; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Unlike interviews, which rely on people's sometimes biased perceptions and recollections of events, observations of the setting by a case study researcher may provide more objective information related to the research topic (Hancock & Agozzine, 2006). Students involved in WIL projects are required to give a presentation to their student peers at the end of their placement. This presentation gives an overview of the project, their experience and personal reflections and learnings.

This activity, a summative assessment task, was identified as an opportunity to gather rich personal insights on the phenomenon; particularly, in relation to the 'debrief' and reflection-based 'activities/assessment focused on integration' curriculum and pedagogy facets. When intending to carry out observations, a case-study researcher should create an observation guide – a list of areas of focus to be addressed during a particular observation, and able to capture initial impressions and interpretations of the activities under observation (Bodgen & Bilken, 2003). As with previous data-gathering tools, the observations were grounded in the study's theoretical framework (See Table 6: Data gathering – Observation).

Curriculum and pedagogy facets (Billet, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016)	Observation guide: **Student post-project presentations**	
	Initial impressions	**Interpretations**
Authenticity:		
Preparation:		
Supervision:		
Debrief:		
Activities focused on integration:		
Assessment focused on integration:		

Table 6: Data gathering – Observation

Data gathering - Principles of data collection

Although case study methodology is a frequently used qualitative methodology, it can have weaknesses. Critics challenge the legitimacy of the approach due to a lack of well-defined and well-structured protocols (Yin, 2002). While this offers researchers flexibility when developing their research design, it can also cause confusion that can impact negatively on the validity of the research (Merriam, 1998). In addition to the development of a theoretical framework to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2002), the following strategies have been adopted to address these potential concerns.

Data gathering - Triangulation of evidence

This study will use multiple sources of evidence. By using evidence from documentation, interviews and observations, the results are able to converge into one set of findings for

the purpose of triangulation (Yin, 2002). The triangulation of evidence from multiple

sources aids in offsetting the potential weaknesses inherent in the data gathering from

each source and strengthens the validity of the findings (Yin, 2002: Stake, 1995; Merriam,

1998).

Data gathering – Case-study database

Yin (2002) suggests that a formal assembly of evidence, distinct from the final research

document, helps researchers understand and manage data. This also strengthens the

repeatability of the research, and increases the transparency of the findings is a well

organised collection of the evidence base (Rowley, 2002). With this in mind, a 'case-study

database' was created (refer to Table 7: Data gathering – Case-study database) that is

stored on the researcher's server storage administered by Monash University.

Case study database			
Study documentation	**Evidence base**		
	Documents	**Interviews**	**Observations**
-Ethics application -Explanatory statement -Consent form -Interview questions: Student -Interview questions: Academic -Interview questions: Employer	- BEX345x /BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide -Document analysis guide -Document analysis notes	-Interview notes -Completed participation forms -Interview voice recordings (WAV file) -Interview transcriptions -Interview summaries	-Student presentation timetable -Observation guide -Observation notes and interpretations

Table 7: Data gathering – Case-study database

Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the collected data and presenting it in a way that others will understand. The process involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process of making meaning (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Marshall and Rossman (2006) concede that there is no formula or single method for transforming qualitative data into findings, and that it is up to each researcher to determine a suitable approach, guided by the general tasks of consolidating, reducing and interpreting. With this in mind, the following steps will be followed to analyse the data generated from the document interrogation, interviews and observations.

Steps of analysis - Consolidating

To aid the consolidation of data, this study is guided by a structured approach to the analysis. Yin (2002) suggests that the validity and reliability of the data benefits from well-defined and well-structured data analysis procedures. Such procedures help researchers draw systematically from previous knowledge and cut down on misperception. This can be particularly helpful for case-study research as researchers often conduct data collection and analysis processes simultaneously.

All data collection tools were grounded and structured by the study's theoretical framework. The case-study database also provided some structure. As a result, some analysis will occur during the collection of the data. Key words, phrases, sentences or

sections will be labelled across the data sources and consolidated, ready to be reduced and summarised for the next stage.

Steps of analysis – Reducing

Once consolidated, the study's data needs to be reduced in as systematic way to make sense of the potentially large amounts of data. Data reduction is "a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that conclusions can be drawn" (Miles & Huberman, p. 21). This may be through the use of diagrams, tables or graphs to visualise the information, and by subject or theme (O'Leary, 2014). Using subjects and themes can assist with sorting and reducing the text and make it easier to identify emerging patterns within the case. The development of codes and categories provides a systematic approach to this process (Creswell, 1998). A code structure is often developed to guide this part of the analysis.

There are a number of approaches available to a researcher when considering a code structure. The development of a coding structure may occur inductively, through the gradual sorting and reducing of data, or it may use a 'start-list method', a more deductive approach where the researcher begins with a list of predetermined themes drawn from the literature to act as a scaffold (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An integrated approach is also possible, taking aspects of both approaches into consideration. The most suitable approach will be determined by the nature of the study.

This study will use an integrated approach, with a leaning towards the deductive approach. Given that the study focuses on the curriculum and pedagogical facets of WIL projects, the

consolidation and reduction of data will converge towards themes within this topic. As with

the data-gathering tools, the development of a coding structure will be grounded in the

study's theoretical framework and inform the development of a 'start list'. WIL curriculum

and pedagogy facets, informed by Billet (2009) and Smith, Ferns and Russell (2016),

(refer to Table 8: Steps of analysis – Coding structure | Curriculum and pedagogy facets)

and aspects of employability, informed by Smith, Ferns and Russell (2016), *(refer to Table*

9: Steps of analysis – Coding structure | Employability), will be used to develop codes and

categories to sort and reduce the text. Furthermore, to accommodate for any significant

data that falls outside of the start list themes, the code structure will allow for the addition

of codes as required. This rounds out the integrated approach to reducing the data.

Code:	Themes:
	Curriculum and pedagogy facets (Billet, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016)
1.1	**Authenticity**: How often did you contribute worthwhile outcomes for the organisation (such as a product, or change in practice or policy)?
1.2	**Preparation**: I had a preparation program or resources that helped me prepare for the placement to help me maximise my learning whilst on placement.
1.3	**Supervision**: I had regular contact with an academic supervisor from the university in order to discuss my learning whilst on placement.
1.4	**Debrief**: I had time with my academic supervisor after the placement to reflect on my learning from placement.
1.5	**Activities focused on integration**: How often did you reflect on applying your discipline knowledge in the workplace?
1.6	**Assessment focused on integration**: How often were you assessed on your use of theory to justify practice decisions?
1.x	Other significant curriculum and pedagogy themes

Table 8: Steps of analysis – Coding structure | Curriculum and pedagogy facets

Code:	Themes:
	Aspects of employability (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016, p. 210)
2.1	Graduates are competent for autonomous, responsible and ethical practice.
2.2	Graduates can work with other people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally.
2.3	Graduates use information in judicious ways for specific work-related purposes.
2.4	Graduates are willing to continue to learn to improve practice and are able to identify areas for self-development.
2.5	Graduates integrate theory and practice.
2.6	Graduates have confidence and self-awareness to seek and gain employments.
2.x	Other significant employability themes.

Table 9: Steps of analysis – Coding structure | Aspects of employability

Steps of analysis – Interpreting

Once data is consolidated and reduced, the relationship between 'curriculum and pedagogy facets' and 'aspects of employability' will be examined to reach the point of meaningful understanding. Further engagement with the literature will also add to this meaning. This process can be described as a process of 'drilling in' and 'abstracting out', whereby data is reduced for sense making, and enriched to apply theoretical meaning (O'Leary, 2014). The interpretation of data will be grounded in this process.

Method

This study follows a qualitative instrumental case-study methodological design to find out how WIL projects contribute to the development of graduate employability. The study makes use of a number of data-gathering tools. The following sections will outline how the research will be conducted.

Participants

Participants will be made up of students, academics and employers associated with a single cohort of the BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit offered by Monash University through the Faculty of Business and Economics. The methodology outlines the rationale behind the sample size, being; six students, two academics and three employers.

Sampling

A non-random sampling procedure was followed to select participants. With the assistance of the Faculty, access was provided to students, academics and employers involved in the WIL projects program, from which a single cohort was selected. A written and verbal invitation to participate in the study was issued. Responses were followed up with an explanatory statement and consent form. Responses were sought until saturation was reached.

Data gathering techniques

The following data gathering techniques were used for the study. Their design is informed by the study's theoretical framework and rationale for their use is provided in the methodology.

- Document analysis. – Analysis of the BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide.

- Semi-structured interviews. – Interviews with key stakeholders; being, students, academics and employers.

- Observations. – Observations of students giving end of project presentations providing an overview of the project, their experience and personal reflections and learnings.

Procedures

Document analysis procedure

Analysis of the BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide.

- The BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide is a private document available to staff and students involved in the unit.

- Faculty staff provided access to the document, an electronic PDF.

- A document analysis guide will be used to guide data gathering

- Data will be collected in the form of notes that relate to curriculum and pedagogical facets of WIL projects.

- Notes will be recorded in a literal and interpretive manner.

Semi-structured interviews.

Interviews with key stakeholders; being, students, academics and employers.

- Participants will be provided with an explanatory statement and consent form prior to the interview which will be collected on the day of the interview.

- A meeting room will be booked for each interview.

- On the day of the interview (both face-to-face or over phone), the researcher will introduce themselves, explain the research, consent form, confidentiality and how the interview will be conducted.

- An interview guide will be followed (Please refer to Table 7: Data gathering - Semi-structured interview questions) which outlines the questions.

- The interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

- The interview guide will be used to structure notes throughout the interview.

Observations

Observations of students giving end of project presentations providing an overview of the project, their experience and personal reflections and learnings.

- A time to observe the WIL project presentations will be negotiated with the Faculty.

- On the day of the presentation, the researcher will introduce themselves, outline the explanatory statement and consent form prior to the presentation session starting.

- The researcher will be a passive observer of the session, which is facilitated by a BEX345x/BEX5X12 academic.

- An observation guide will be used to guide data gathering (Please refer to Table 5: Data gathering – Observation).

- Data will be collected in the form of notes that relate to curriculum and pedagogical facets of WIL projects.

- Initial impressions and interpretations will be recorded in a literal and interpretive manner.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process a researcher must act with "responsibility, integrity and the rights of those involved in the production of knowledge need to be protected at all times" (O'Leary, 2014, p. 47). These ethical principles also include not doing harm to the research site, and that the research may possibly be of benefit to participants (Somekh & Lewin, 2006). O'Leary (2014) goes on to list the following areas of ethical obligation:

Ensuring respondents have given informed consent

Ensuring no harm comes to respondents

Ensuring confidentiality and, if appropriate anonymity

(O'Leary, 2014, p. 64)

These principles act as guides for this study, with all relevant Monash University guidelines and policies being followed to ensure this. All participants have been given informed consent and made to feel comfortable, informed of the process, valued as a participant, and given the opportunity to withdrawal at any time. All participants were voluntarily involved and assured of confidentiality. All data has been managed by following the Monash University research data management guidelines.

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity can be considered criteria to judge the quality of research, and common to all social science methods (Yin, 2002).

Reliability refers to whether your data collection techniques and analytic procedures would reproduce consistent findings if replicated by another researcher (Shipman, 1988). Therefore, reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instruments or procedures. Shipman goes on to identify four potential reliability errors:

Participant error – Factors that adversely alters the way in which a participant performs.

Participant bias – Any factor which produces a false response.

Researcher error – Any factor which alters the researcher's interpretation.

Researcher bias – Any factor which induces bias in the researcher's recording of responses.

Shipman (1988)

Awareness of internal bias is important as interpretations are always "entwined with a researcher's biases, prejudices, world views and paradigms – both recognised and unrecognised, conscious and unconscious (O'Leary, 2014, p. 307). The researcher involved in this study works for the organisation under investigation and has a working relationship with academic participants. Awareness of this relationship and any potential bias was kept at the forefront of the researcher's mind during data gathering.

To minimise the potential for these errors, this study was grounded in a theoretical framework that informed the selection and development of data-gathering instruments. Furthermore, instrument protocols were created to provide guidance and consistency across the data-gathering stage with the aim of minimising participant or researcher error or bias. Yin (2002) argues that by using such protocols, along with a case study database (refer to Table 7: Data gathering – Case-study database), reliability is increased.

Validity is also important when judging the quality of research. There are three types of validity to consider as a researcher. Construct validity is concerned with the extent to which research measures what it claims to measure (Cook & Campbell, 1979). In case-study research the triangulation of sources of evidence is an agreed approach to meeting this challenge (Yin, 2002; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). This study uses triangulation by gathering evidence from multiple sources – documents, interviews and observations, and is underpinned by a theoretical framework to support the basis from which it makes claims.

Internal validity is established when research demonstrates a causal relationship between two variables (Cook & Campbell, 1979). This study focuses on the relationship between the Curriculum and pedagogy facets that are part of WIL projects and graduate employability. This relationship is grounded in the literature and informs the study's theoretical framework. The previous disclosure of researcher bias is one strategy to enhance internal validity (Merriam, 1998).

External validity is concerned with whether a study's research findings can be generalised across other relevant settings or groups (Cook & Campbell, 1979). This study will address this concern through its grounding in a theoretical framework that will allow for the findings to be positioned in the literature by offering generalisations from a strong theoretical base (Yin, 2002). Moreover, the case will unearth generalisations about how and what pedagogical and curriculum-based facets of WIL contribute to graduate employability.

Results

This chapter will outline the perspectives of students, academics and employers involved in WIL projects. These perspectives will be informed by the semi-structured interviews with students, academics and employers; observations of students' end-of-WIL project presentations and document analysis of the BEX345x/BEX5X12 Industry project unit guide. After an initial overview of each perspective, the chapter will go on to explore the student perspective, followed by the academic and employer perspectives in detail. Participating employers were made up of NGOs and a public hospital. Projects were focused in the areas of finance, management and marketing. The structure of the chapter will be guided by the semi-structured interview questions and the theoretical framework.

Overview of student perspective

The interviews revealed that students generally find the WIL project a positive experience and are motivated by a desire to take on experiences that will make them more employable, particularly to large corporate employers. As part of the WIL project experience, students valued the opportunity to be part of a multi-disciplinary team and the authentic nature of the project. The development of communication skills, problem-solving and relevant technical skills were seen as a valuable part of the experience. The students also identified that the ongoing support from the university-based industry fellow throughout the project experience was identified as important. Although students viewed the experience as positive, interviews revealed that students had a preference for projects aligned with their discipline area and set in a corporate environment, for example, a finance student preferred to work on a finance-related project for a large corporate

employer. Ongoing communication with the project host throughout the experience was found to be challenging for students.

Overview of University perspective

Interviews with academics revealed that WIL projects offered the University an alternative to WIL placements, which are challenging to provide for all students. Also, it was revealed that WIL projects based at non-profit organisations is a new and growing segment of WIL project employers. This is due to the University providing projects in areas of expertise not based in the organisation and the removal of related barriers, such as having to provide a physical space for students and dedicated supervision. A high level of collaboration occurs between the university and employers. A significant amount of work goes towards liaising with employers to develop projects, particularly for non-profit organisations. Assessment is made up of reflective tasks that encourages students to identify key learnings and reflect on themselves as future professionals. During the WIL project, students are given an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, communication skills, project-management skills and problem-solving skills. Challenges reported by academics include limited access to the host organisation for students, communication challenges between all stakeholders and intensive supervision requirements.

Overview of employer perspective

Employers became involved in WIL projects through existing relationships with the University or for smaller non-profit organisations, through networking events. Once

involved, WIL projects were seen as a way of accessing external expertise not easily accessible to the organisation. Interviews revealed that employers depend heavily on the University to provide expertise and guidance around project development and ongoing supervision.   All employers believe WIL projects made a meaningful contribution to their organisations and offered an authentic learning experience for students that provided an opportunity to develop communication, teamwork and problem-solving skills using a consulting-type approach. Logistics and ongoing communication were identified as challenges for employers.

Student perspective

Student attitudes towards graduate employment

When students were asked about the most important outcomes of their course, a strong theme emerged around the importance of what could be described as graduate employability. For all student participants, there was an expectation that the course would enable them to gain future employment. Participants agreed that it was important that the course provide a pathway to "future employment", "well-paying jobs", "job opportunities" or business skills.

Most students revealed that they were seeking employment with large corporate graduate employers with the exception of some participants who stated the importance of the course to enable them to "contribute to the family business" (Student 1; Student 2). This highlighted the potential influence of family attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and graduate employment.

WIL projects and graduate employability

Student participants identified a number of key aspects of the experience as contributing to graduate employability during their WIL project as being valuable. The opportunity to work as part of a team in a work context was identified as a significant part of the WIL experience (Student 1; Student 3; Student 4; Student 5). Working as part of a diverse and multidisciplinary team provided an opportunity to "meet and work with other people" (Student 1; Student 3; Student 5). Student 5 explained,

> One thing I found valuable is that I made friends with my group members and they helped me a lot. They were from different areas. One was from Human Resources and she helped me prepare for [these parts of the project]. And one is [sic] from banking and finance and she told me how to do the budgets. I worked on marketing which is not my area. …I think this is very valuable for me and my future career. (Student 5).

This highlighted the significance of the opportunity provided for students to experience interdisciplinary knowledge and work through industry-based projects.

Students also valued the authentic nature of the projects. The challenge of engaging in authentic problems for an employer was seen as an important part of the experience. This included developing the interpersonal skills required to "work across real organisations" and interact with the employer and their peers. For student 2 this also included community engagement by having to organise a community forum.

The project-based approach was seen as a useful way of framing the experience. Projects allowed students to analyse and "develop solutions to real problems" (Student 2; Student 6) and engage with the community and other stakeholders on significant issues that had a real impact on the organisation. As Student 6 explained, "We weren't solving theoretical problems, it was real life". The experience helped students to become "familiar with a work environment" and understand how to get things done (Student 3). Experience in the Australian business context was also seen as a valuable part of the experience by international students (Student 6).

Graduate employability skill development

For all participants, communication skills – written, verbal and interpersonal, and teamwork were identified as skills developed during their experience. "Working with other people" (Student 1), cooperation and teamwork (Student 2; Student 4) and maintaining team cohesion (Student 3) were some of the comments made by participants that highlighted this. All participants highlighted the ongoing communication between team members, the organisation and supervisor (industry fellow) as providing this opportunity.

Linked to communication skills, a number of participants described the value of developing the skills related to defining and managing project expectations as being valuable. The interactions related to working on the analysis of the problem, ongoing project management and reporting provided an opportunity to develop these skills. This highlighted the value of the project-based learning approach used by WIL projects.

A strong theme across the interviews was that the outcome-based nature of the WIL project experience provided the opportunity to apply and develop a number of practical technical skills. The skills identified by student participants included improved report writing (Student 2), presenting data using tools such as Excel (Student 1; Student 2) and other communication and productivity tools used to facilitate meetings and communicate (Student 1).

How is the course curriculum connected to the WIL project?

Student participants had mixed views on the extent that their course curriculum was connected to the curriculum. Most participants were involved in projects directly related to their discipline. These participants reported that discipline-related knowledge was applied during their WIL project experience. Student 3 noted this link and stated how she "applied this knowledge to develop strategies related to the project". Another student spoke of developing a risk-management profile for the organisation based on unit knowledge (Student 6). These examples demonstrated the integration of theory and practice.

In contrast, some participants reported that projects did not directly align with their discipline; however, these students still expressed that they had had a positive experience as they saw this as an opportunity to work outside of their discipline and found it interesting. For example, Student 2 explained that she was doing a "finance major, with no strong connection to [the project], but still found it interesting. Another student reported that she had been introduced to a discipline she found interesting, and one that she now intends to pursue (Student 4).

Students also referred to the application of generic skills that were developed during their course. Unsurprisingly, all students referred to skills related to working in teams. The application of these skills was seen an important part of the experience. Student 5 went further and explained that "the cross-cultural communication [unit] was particularly useful" in navigating the challenges of working in her team. Practical skills developed during their courses, such as report writing and the use of productivity tools such as Microsoft Excel, was also acknowledged as being very useful during the experience.

How is students' learning facilitated throughout the WIL project experience?

Interview data revealed that initial university-based seminars, organisation induction and the ongoing support of the university-based industry fellow were crucial in facilitating the WIL project experience. Participants reported that the initial university-based seminars were effective at setting expectations, particularly around workforce professionalism. For example, Student 6 reported that "the initial seminar was really helpful". She went on to explain that at times she didn't enjoy the project and found the host challenging but the initial university-based seminars "helped her maintain her professionalism". By recognising what behaviours were appropriate in the workplace and what strategies she could use to maintain her 'professionalism' she demonstrated that she was integrating her learning in a practice-based setting.

Furthermore, all participants reported that they received an organisation induction and then ongoing communication with a senior member of the organisation and the university-based industry fellow, who acted in a supervisor-type capacity. This indicates that the

university and organisation shared ongoing responsibility of supporting students throughout the WIL project experience.

All participants reported the importance of the university-based industry fellow in the success of the WIL project experience. Participants reported that the university-based industry fellow provided ongoing support to varying degrees with regard to working in a team, aspects of managing the project, research, working with the organisation, managing expectations and dealing with ambiguity. As Student 6 explains,

> [He] was excellent at helping along the way… we would meet when we were confused or help with how to deal with dilemmas. He's very knowledgeable. (Student 6).

Participants described the university-based industry fellow as a mentor, guide and expert who provided help, support, guidance and knowledge, particularly with how to deal with dilemmas, clarify direction and expectations. The interviews reveal that the university-based industry fellow plays a significant role in providing students with the necessary ongoing support to successfully complete the project.

WIL project Challenges

Although students were generally happy with their projects, if given the choice, most would have preferred projects aligned with their discipline and based in a large corporate setting. Student 1 explained that although "[the project] wasn't what he was looking for" he still found it useful. Other students shared this sentiment by stating that "a discipline-specific

project would be ideal" (Student 4) or "more relevant to their area of interest" (Student 2).

Interestingly, Student 5 had initially wanted to do a traditional WIL placement in a

corporate environment but chose the WIL project when there were no places left. Student

6 also explained her preference for a corporate environment due to the limitations of her

placement.

> My host was an inexperienced CEO [of a small NGO]. There was a lack of
> direction… and no protocols around how to gather information. The project was
> very [rudimentary]… and not challenging enough.
> (Student 6).

During interviews students maintained a positive view of their experience but the project

focus and host organisation was, to varying degrees, a significant issue. This highlighted

that not all experiences fully met students' expectations and that the organisational reality

of the practice-based setting and project parameters are factors that impact students'

learning experience.

Ongoing communication throughout the project was an issue for a number of students.

Some students explained that it was difficult to maintain regular communication with their

supervisor and host (Student 2; Student 5; Student 6). With their host based in NSW,

Student 6 found "working over long distances challenging". Although there was fortnightly

communication she felt there was limited time to clarity ongoing expectations. Student 2,

explained that more meetings with the project host would have been helpful as they had

only had one initial meeting. Student 5 also found it "hard work to keep in touch with the

supervisor and host"; however, when they did meet it was useful. This opens the

possibility that some students may not actually ever be based at the organisation during

their WIL project experience. These experiences and their implications suggest that the frequency and mode of ongoing communication between students is impacted by variables such as host location, availability and the nature of the project. These variables have a direct impact on students' learning experience.

Academic perspective

The rationale for WIL industry projects

Academics involved in this research praised the educational worth of WIL and spoke passionately about the personal and professional development of students that they witnessed through their involvement in WIL units. During the interviews, academics exhibited a strong commitment to preparing students for the workplace and highlighted the growing interest from students and the Faculty to provide these practice-based experiences for students.

The interviews revealed that with the growing interest in WIL it was an ongoing challenge to secure traditional placements for students. WIL projects were seen as one way of providing a more flexible form of WIL to help meet this need. It was reported that employers, particularly smaller organisations, have limited office space to accommodate students and limited resources to supervise students so would be less likely to offer WIL placements for students.

> Placements require a bum on a seat for at least two days per week. Many organisations are using all available space. Employers [don't accept placements because they] are just too busy and don't have anyone to look after [students]. (Academic 1)

WIL projects can be offsite. By offering university-supported projects we overcome the limitation of employers having to physically accommodate a student (Academic 2).

It was found that by offering WIL industry projects the university was able to work with a significantly larger pool of employers and provide more WIL opportunities for students. Academic 1 explained that the university looked beyond the usual large public and private sector organisations and started to approach smaller not-for-profit organisations looking for projects.

> We recognised that budgets, financial reporting, risk management, marketing, compliance and legislative requirements were still important for not-for-profits, with many operating under Corporations Law. [They offered] a potentially rich learning environment for students and the possibility [for the university] to support not-for-profits.
>
> (Academic 1)

This highlights the pressure universities are under to find WIL opportunities for students. These interviews show that by shifting these resourcing costs to the university, access to WIL opportunities is increased to smaller not-for-profit organisations.

What drives students demand for WIL projects?

Participants revealed that flexibility and interest were the key drivers of student interest in WIL projects. Students are attracted to the high degree of flexibility offered by WIL

projects in that they were not confined to an office-hours based placement with an organisation (Academic 1; Academic 2). Students work with a high degree of autonomy and manage their own meeting schedule and negotiated project milestones. It was also reported that interest is also generated via word of mouth (Academic 2). Students who missed out on traditional WIL placements offered by the university were also drawn to WIL projects. Consequently, this raises questions around the educational basis of a student selecting to do a WIL project.

Providing WIL projects that align with a student's discipline area was found to be an important factor. WIL projects are framed as opportunities to solve real-real world problems (Academic 1). They provide an opportunity for students to be adaptable, work in a diverse team on a potentially cross-discipline problem as they might if working at a consulting firm (Academic 2). Despite this, it appears that a number of students prefer to focus on a project within their own discipline. For example,

> [A]n accounting student will want to do an accounting finance task but might have to do something else, such as [a] marketing [project]. [This occurs] more than 50% of the time. One or two students may back out [of the project] at this point. (Academic 1)

This finding is consistant with student data where students want work related skills in their major, however projects by their nature cross majors and involve skills in a range of areas.

Collaboration between the University and the employer

The interviews revealed that the Faculty-based industry fellow plays a pivotal role in developing and maintaining the collaborative relationships between the University and employers. Ongoing networking efforts on the part of the industry fellow forms the basis of the growing pool of employer hosts, particularly smaller non-profit organisations (Academic 1). Academic 1 goes on to explain,

> We recognise the barriers faced by these organisations when considering WIL involvement – lack of office space, no available staff to mentor students and often a lack of discipline expertise. By understanding these organisations and working closely with management… we are able to provide guidance and expertise on potential projects.
> (Academic 1)

This means that the industry fellow is able to work with an employer to lead the analysis of a potential problem within the organisation and shape a WIL project that offers a meaningful learning experience for students.

The actual WIL projects are negotiated through collaborative relationships between the Faculty-based industry fellow and employers. Based on course disciplines, projects focus on the areas of management, leadership, HR, governance, board processes/recruitment/formation, risk management, compliance, financial reporting accounting, financial risk and marketing (Academic 2). Academic 1 explains that projects are based on organisational need, which includes areas that the organisation does not

necessarily have the expertise or resources to pursue, either internally or externally via a management consulting firm.

> [The] participating organisations have varying degrees of expertise with regards to developing project briefs, particularly in areas outside their expertise. As a result, [the Faculty Industry Fellow] will work with senior staff to develop the brief considering the organisation's goals and shaping a learning experience for students.
>
> (Academic 1)

By using this approach to compensate for the lack of expertise within an organisation the university is extending its traditional role of simply providing suitable students for organisations to supervise and guide during a traditional placement. This has implications on resourcing and expectations and highlights the shifting role of the university by taking on the role of providing students with the work-related discipline expertise and guidance which would primarily come from the employer during a traditional placement.

As a result, interviews with academics revealed that the university plays a significant role in defining the WIL project, assembling the team of students and their ongoing supervision. Students are offered:

> [w]ork experience in tackling a real-world problem the host [organisation] is trying to solve, unlike a placement where [students] fill a role within an organisation. The organisation identifies the project, this is what we want. Not-for-profits don't have the staff, expertise or resources to do this, so work with [the university].
>
> (Academic 1)

Academic 2 explains that the university provides professional advice to many of the not-for-profit organisations regarding potential projects, with the host organisation ultimately selecting the project. The university, via the industry fellow, also plays a significant role in defining the scope of the project, particularly in areas outside the expertise of the host organisation.

There is growing demand from employers, particularly non-profit organisations, wishing to collaborate with the University on WIL projects. In addition to the opportunity to provide students with work experience, the University recognises the appeal to employers, especially non-profit organisations.

> [The non-profit organisations] benefit from the work that gets completed for which they may not have the expertise or resources. There are currently more organisations involved than the university can accommodate… and enormous growth potential.
> (Academic 1)

Organisations are also interested in employing WIL project students. Academic 2 explained that a number of students have been employed by host organisations and many more would like to but are restricted by the funding limitations of the non-profit sector.

Preparing and assessing students for the WIL project

Interviews with academics reveal that a significant amount of preparation and assessment is involved in facilitating WIL projects. Preparation is made up of seminars that outline expectations, including working in a team and professionalism in the workplace. The industry fellow works with students to varying degrees to develop the initial project scope.

> [The industry fellow] works with students to frame up their issue or problem which forms the basis of the project. Students then have the freedom to refine the project as needed.
> (Academic 2)

Throughout the project students produce a reflective journal based on their experiences and a put together a reflective presentation for their peers at the completion of their project. Academic 2 explains the satisfaction students feel when finishing the presentation at the completion of the project,

> Towards the end students recognise that their work is going to provide input for the organisation to make decisions. That their work is going to make real changes or introduce something new.
> (Academic 2)

Students reflections also provide other insights on how they potentially see their future careers.

> [The reflections] provide insights on industries. At times, it really changes students. There's also recognition that these organisations might be good to work for and that they may never have previously considered them.
>
> (Academic 2)

The reflective assessment tasks also encourage students to see the learning in all experiences and themselves.

> Even students who have challenging experiences for various reasons, as occurs in all workplaces, are able to talk about how they worked through these challenges. The end of project reflection is designed to encourage this thinking regarding the experience. It's not about good or bad experiences, it's the story and learnings – what have I learnt about myself? What have I learnt about fitting into a workplace, working with clients, communicating with staff and problem solving?
>
> (Academic 1).

Consequently, these reflections are based on the unique setting of WIL projects where students interact with the workplace using a consulting-type of approach. This offers a unique student-workplace relationship and experience when compared to traditional WIL placements that offer a workplace-based graduate student/manager relationship and experience.

WIL and employability skills development

The WIL project experiences provide students with an opportunity to develop a number of related employability skills. This includes interpersonal skills and the ability to work across an organisation and in diverse teams. Students also develop their written and verbal communication skills and apply their research skills to solve a problem (Academic 1). Project management skills are also developed – defining a project, allocating resources and ongoing project management. Reflective skills are also developed through the unit's assessment that provide students with a story to share.

> The WIL project gives students a real-life experience solving a problem for an organisation. This provides students with a narrative to share with potential employers demonstrating that they have experience working through the challenges and delivering a tangible solution.
> (Academic 1)

WIL project challenges

Access to the host organisation for students is a challenge for WIL projects. As Academic 1 explains, "the project is sometimes done at a distance; the closer to the organisation the better". Physical distances can limit students' ability to engage with the host. "Placement is the ideal situation" (Academic 2).

For example, [a large mining company] flew students to Perth for a month and put them up in a hotel to work intensively on a problem. This is an ideal situation; however, this is rare with non-profits and volunteering organisations.

The interviews also highlighted that not all organisations had a dedicated outward-facing liaison officer to work with the University and that this had a negative impact on the experience for students. "You don't know what it's like until you are there, [for example], in one instance the organisation had rotating leadership and there was a lack of stability" (Academic 1).

Furthermore, this places pressure on student supervision by the university. As Academic 2 explains, "supervision is intensive" with regular meetings already scheduled with students throughout the project and problems likely to add to the load. Despite this, supervision is described as being "on par with [traditional] placements and with current numbers, is doable".

Employer perspective

Employer involvement

Interviews revealed that employers initially became involved with WIL projects through existing relationships with the University or through the University reaching out at networking events and had maintained the relationship since. Some employers had a history of providing traditional placements, and in recent years had also hosted WIL projects (Employer 1; Employer 3). As Employer 3 explained:

We had an existing relationship with Monash for the placement of medical students on site. [The industry fellow] approached us [about WIL projects] a few years ago and we've been involved since then.

(Employer 3)

This highlights the important role played by the industry fellow in establishing these relationships. Employer 2 met the [industry fellow] at a networking event and saw the potential of working with a University to help launch a non-profit start-up.

Motivation behind WIL project involvement by employers

Although there was some acknowledgement of providing a learning opportunity to students, employers primarily saw WIL projects as an opportunity to access external resources to address organisational need. Employers considered what students could reasonably achieve within their capacity but ultimately developed projects that were of value and would be utilised. Employer 3 explained that WIL projects focus on organisational need and "enables us to work with someone without using our resources". This was echoed by Employer 1, where WIL projects look at "projects we are unable to do or put time towards, particularly requiring research, for example, policy development takes time and research". For Employer 2 the history of WIL projects within the organisation had followed the growth of his non-profit start-up:

> [The WIL projects] give students an opportunity to work on a start-up. [We] use [WIL] projects to progress the start-up, address gaps in the service by bringing in expertise for research, benchmarking, etc…
>
> (Employer 2)

It becomes clear that in addition to external resources, employers also see WIL projects as an opportunity to access expertise that does not exist within the organisation. WIL projects bring in business expertise. It means "not needing to go outside of the organisation, we didn't need to bring [commercial consultants] in" (Employer 2).

University, student and employer collaboration during WIL projects

Employers reported that regarding student/employer communication, there was contact with student teams during initial stages of the project and then much of the ongoing communication was conducted using technology. Employer 1 explained that students were "provided with a site visit to see the work that the organisation did". This was typical of all employers, as was using tools such as Skype and phone links to maintain communication with students. Also, online access was often provided to allow access to organisational information, such as documentation.

Students worked on their WIL projects with a high degree of autonomy, with the university taking on much of the supervisory role during initial stages of the project. Employers acknowledged the extensive work done by the university via the industry fellow to consult with senior staff to develop projects.

> [The industry fellow] goes above and beyond when working with our organisation to understand our challenges and suggest a project.
>
> (Employer 1)

Ongoing student supervision was shared between the industry fellow and the employer. Interviews indicated that many of the team cohesion issues and trouble shooting was supported by the University while the ongoing supervision by the organisation focused on the problem solving and organisation-based project delivery.

> We'd get [the students] to figure things out… get them to show initiative, like in the real world. Enough to chase something, but not the whole thing. We'd provide an open forum for when they got lost.
>
> (Employer 2)

The interviews revealed that all employers provided weekly or fortnightly feedback throughout the project. "We'd check if they were on the right track and their work was appropriate for our setting", explained Employer 3. The industry fellow would monitor project updates and progress, and make sure the students were happy with their progress as a team.

Student development and WIL project impact

All employers spoke positively about WIL projects and students' skill development. For employers, WIL projects were recognised as a way for students do develop communication skills, teamwork skills and problem-solving skills in an authentic setting.

The application of research skills also emerged as a common theme across employers. Students had to make sense of the context and do research to find a solution (Employee 2). Employee 3, also explained,

> [S]tudents now understood how we run projects in the health industry. They have worked with key stakeholders, have used our tools and understand the work environment. They have great work experience. We would employ them.
> (Employee 3)

Employer 1 explained how WIL projects offered a consultation type of experience for students,

> [WIL projects] offer a great opportunity for students to work with an organisation as a consultant on a real-world example. [Students] hear about constraints an organisation has, and work with real numbers and real people.
> (Employer 1)

Employers also talked about the direct impact WIL projects had on the organisation. The WIL projects were seen as bringing in expertise to address real organisation challenges. Employer 1 explained that "the project enabled the CEO to achieve a number of things that needed to be done". The WIL project "brought new ideas, perspectives, strategies and policies which were operationalised" and had a direct impact on the organisation (Employer 2). For employer 3, the project also "allowed them to focus on what they were experts at" and to be guided by external experts in areas where they were not.

WIL Project challenges for employers

Logistical challenges and ongoing communication with students was a challenge for employers. Employers discussed the challenge of working with limited face-to-face opportunities and having to rely on technology to maintain ongoing communication with students. Employee 2 who was not located near the university outlined the logistical challenges due to the distance, "it would be good to get [students] as placements" for more regular face-to face communication. Employee 3, who was based in a regional area, also found the lack of face-to-face communication had in negative impact on the project by slowing progression down due to the need for ongoing clarification so that students had a comprehensive understanding of the organisation and related project.

In summary, all participants from all three perspectives found WIL projects a worthwhile experience. Students valued the authentic nature of the project and the opportunity to work in a multidisciplinary team. Students also revealed a preference for projects aligned with their disciplines and raised ongoing communication as a challenge. The significance of the industry fellow became apparent across the results. This included for employers, who relied on the industry fellow to develop projects and provide ongoing supervision. For the university, the results highlight the ability of WIL projects to develop new WIL opportunities for students and engage with the community more widely. Employers, mainly made up of NGOs, reported the benefit of WIL projects providing guided expertise to their organisations and access to potential future employees. These results will be considered in more detail in the following discussion and explore how the WIL project experience contributes to the development of graduate employability.

Discussion

This chapter will critically examine the research findings and make judgements about what the research reveals about how the pedagogical approach used by WIL projects contributes to the development of graduate employability. This examination will include what is new and novel about WIL projects, how the experience differs from traditional placements to develop graduate employability and how WIL projects add new insights to the WIL literature. The research theoretical framework will guide the examination through the consideration of curriculum factors that contribute to aspects of graduate employability. The chapter will first consider the WIL project practice setting, curriculum and pedagogy before examining the authenticity and development of WIL projects through the collaboration between the university and the employer. The discussion will then examine the integration of theory and practice during WIL projects and student preparation, supervision and debriefing. The final section will focus on WIL project assessment tasks focused on integration.

This study reinforces the view that universities, when engaged in Work Integrated Learning, are operating as providers of higher vocational education. Distinct from the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, universities engaging in WIL as higher education providers are addressing student, community and industry expectations that many university courses will provide a transition into professional employment. The results from students involved in the study underline this expectation. On top of this the lecturers, industry fellow and employers further accept the principle that preparing students for professional employment is a key component of higher education, especially in the area of undergraduate degrees in business, that made up the case study in this project. Billet (2009) argues that in meeting these expectations an educational emphasis is placed

on providing students with access to and engagement with authentic instances of professional practice that resembles authentic employment contexts that are effectively integrated within higher education programs. WIL projects, which were developed by the University under investigation, aim to meet and achieve this need.

When attempting to understand how WIL projects contribute to the realisation of this heightened expectation and educational aspiration as well as developing graduate employability, it is important to reconsider how practice settings are approached pedagogically and with regard to the curriculum to ensure their educational worth in higher education settings. In this regard, Billet (2009) defines a number of pedagogic and curriculum considerations that focus on promoting the integration of students' experiences in both academic and practice settings. After focusing on the particularities of WIL projects and their purposes as practice settings, the following discussion will then consider the issues that arise in practice-based curricula and pedagogies. Smith, Ferns & Russell (2016) aspects of graduate employability, made up of skills, understandings and personal attributes provide a way to appreciate how WIL projects enable and/or constrain these aspects of employability.

The practice setting of WIL projects

When considering a student's graduate employability capacities for future employment, it is important to have insights into the types and sorts of occupations particular students are seeking. Billet (2009) explains that an individual's choice in desired vocation is a relatively new phenomenon given that circumstances of birth, and generational inheritance shaped an individual's occupational destiny for much of human history. This is generally no longer

the case, with individuals now afforded and expected to exercise a high degree of agency. As a result, given the significant investment made by students to pursue occupational aspirations through higher education, providing students with an opportunity to test an occupation's suitability is desirable. Jackson et al. (2017) argues that it is "critical that higher education allows students to gain a clear understanding of the connection with the core values, expectations and behaviours central to most professions" (p. 835). These opportunities are typical and well bounded in disciplines such as nursing and teaching where WIL placements are an established feature of related courses. For business studies and commerce students, WIL projects are seen as playing a role in giving students an opportunity to experience their future occupation and reflect on its suitability. When considering the experiences, and to a lesser degree the expectations of the students who participated in this study, the majority reported that they were not directly involved in projects aligned with their discipline area. For these students, the WIL project helped them recognise the experience was a mismatch with their professional ambitions with regard to the sorts of occupations they had in mind. WIL projects as experienced by students in this study were organisationally focused and subsequently less focused on professional roles and well bounded occupations as they exist and are experienced by nursing and education students. This difference challenged the students' conceptions and expectations about their professional lives after university and was considered by many to be a limitation. Furthermore, the identification of this limitation was by student feedback, when students identified a lack of alignment with their desired discipline as a mismatch with their expectations, they identified this as something they would change. Students were clear about their expectations and intentions professionally in an occupational sense more than in a project sense. For example, becoming an accountant, marketing and promotions manager.

The lack of alignment between student discipline areas and WIL projects emerged as a reoccurring theme through the research. In addition to the results from students expressing a desire to change this aspect of the experience, academics involved in the study conceded that finding discipline-aligned projects was a challenge, and one that results in a small proportion of students withdrawing from WIL project units in initial stages of their projects. These circumstances can be attributed in part to the inclusion of employers who do not have the resources to host students in a conventional manner, that is, with students located on site in a specific and well-defined role with a supervisor who could be considered an expert in the student's desired occupation. Interviews with the academics reveal that many of these organisations are non-profits with limited resources. It was also revealed that despite these inherent limitations, much of the growth in the availability of WIL projects being offered to students came from these types of organisations – typically small non-profits. Academics highlighted the educational worth and virtue in supporting these types of organisations and were grateful for their willingness to collaborate with the University. However, the research highlighted a number of limitations that had an impact on students' ability to integrate their learning. First, their inability to consistently provide students with physical access to a practice-based setting where students are exposed to the daily tasks of their desired professions. Second, their inability to provide students with access to a discipline-based expert to act as a mentor. These are important aspects of a WIL experience that contribute to the authenticity of the experience (Smith, 2012; Billett, 2014; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016).

Employers consistently reported favourably about the involvement of university students in WIL projects. Many saw WIL projects as an opportunity to bring in what they describe as *"expertise"* that did not exist within the organisation and saw it as a chance to engage students and the resources of the university in projects with minimal organisational

resources. The ongoing supervision and expertise provided by the industry fellow based at the university acting as a faculty conduit managed and minimised risk for the student and the host organisation to ensure that WIL projects could be delivered upon. The WIL projects were represented by the industry fellow and the faculty as authentic and based on actual organisational need that had real impact. From the host organisation perspective, an employer explained during the interview that the WIL project was directly helping the CEO achieve planned organisational goals. All employers held a similar view, with the WIL project outcome having a genuine impact on their organisation and reinforcing existing literature on this being a desired outcome of WIL involvement (Barbolla & Corredera, 2009; Henderson & Trede, 2017.

An advantage for employers involved in WIL projects is that they have limited exposure to the challenges often associated with providing a WIL placement. This includes the opportunity costs of providing a placement for students, students' steep learning curve and the provision of training and ongoing supervision requirements, which are disadvantages acknowledged as typically being associated with taking on a business student for placement (Elijido-Ten & Cloot, 2015). With WIL projects, much of this responsibility has shifted to the University. This is recognised in the interviews, with academics acknowledging the inherent challenge of supervision across WIL projects and also by students who acknowledge the significant contribution the industry supervisor makes in providing ongoing guidance and assistance. Additionally, the expertise provided by the industry fellow to assist the employer in analysing their organisation and defining projects in areas outside the organisation's expertise highlights the flexibility that universities are prepared to offer in seeking practice-based opportunities for their students. This is an indicator of the challenge faced by universities when seeking WIL opportunities for their students.

With regard to the impact of WIL projects on student learning, exposure to the imperatives and actual ambitions of organisations is a key feature of such projects (Henderson & Trede, 2017). Despite expressing a preference for the discipline alignment of WIL projects, students still viewed their experience as a positive one. The research indicates that WIL projects potentially offer an opportunity for students to experience aspects of a number of disciplines in organisations made up of many occupations. The multi-discipline nature of the WIL project provides students with an opportunity to reflect on their chosen and intended occupation by working on projects outside of their discipline. Although the exception, the research did highlight one student who expressed a desire to change future occupation as a result of having been given the opportunity to work on a WIL project outside of her discipline. This was a direct result of the cross-discipline nature of WIL projects, suggesting that this can be both a potential strength and a weakness, and a unique aspect of these types of WIL projects. Nevertheless, given that the research establishes a strong theme of students not being directly involved in WIL projects based in their discipline areas, this has wider implications on the potential for practice-based learning for occupational purposes and support for that learning.

Billett (2009) states that there is an established recognition that experiences in work settings are viewed as opportunities for students to practice or contextualise what they have learnt within programs. This is reflected to a greater extent in the results of students who were placed in discipline-aligned WIL projects, for example, the student who applied course knowledge to develop a risk-management profile for the project host. This student was provided with the opportunity to integrate discipline-knowledge in a practice setting, an important part of the WIL experience (Billett, 2014; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). Students not working on projects aligned with their discipline were not given the same

opportunity, highlighting a potential limitation of WIL projects for students in these circumstances.

In addition to providing students with an opportunity to practice or contextualise what they have learnt at university, the WIL project setting should provide students with an opportunity to generate important learning in their own right. Historically, learning practices for occupations across a range of cultures and countries occurred outside of educational programs and institutions (Billett, 2014). Billett (2014) argues that much of the learning through practice originally involved individuals learning on the job in which they practice and learn their occupation along with pedagogic practices comprising activities and interactions that can augment those experiences to construct knowledge. This highlights the importance of providing students with the opportunity to engage in occupation-specific activities and interactions with an expert as part of their practice-based experience given that this is no longer provided elsewhere and the privileging of learning arising through university learning. It is likely that this development contributed to the debate between academics and practitioners regarding the role of theory vs practice in accounting during the professionalisation of the occupation early in the 20th century where practioners were highly critical of the theoretical approach (Lockwood, 1938). Billett (2014) argues for the need to be critical of the privileging of 'schooling' and its associated discourses, orthodoxies and assumptions as the legitimate premise for realising intentional learning and to not overlook the forms, contributions and potentials of intentional learning through practice, especially as it occurs in workplaces and organisations. With this in mind, WIL projects need to be considered beyond just providing students with an opportunity to practice or contexualise what they have learnt from academic programs.

Another view on this would be that the focus on a desire for discipline-aligned projects by students does not reflect the changing nature of work in the 21st century. Well defined occupational roles and professional identities have become less fixed precisely because of project-based work shaping contemporary employment (Boltanski & Chaipello, 2005; Smith, 2016). Although students highlighted the lack of alignment of projects with discipline areas as an aspect of the experience that they would change, the group-based multi-disciplinary approach used by WIL projects is a more accurate reflection of the needs of a contemporary workplace and the type of skills and attributes that contribute to graduate employability (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). This highlights an advantage WIL projects have over tradition WIL placements and that students would benefit from having a greater understanding of the changing nature of work and how they might position themselves in the workplace.

The practice curriculum of WIL projects

The WIL project provides a unique practice experience for students with inherent differences to a typical WIL placement where the student is located with the employer for the duration of the experience. The research revealed that students found it difficult to maintain regular contact during the experience, "it was hard work to keep in touch with the supervisor and host". With the exception of meetings with the employer to discuss key project milestones, students generally spend little time in the workplace throughout the duration of the WIL project. Instead, much of the ongoing communication is done via other means, such as email and over the phone. Billett (2014) considers the societal shaping of occupations and learning through practice and finds that historically a significant amount of learning occurred as part of an individual's involvement in common occupational-based

work activities where the learner had a responsibility to learn, most likely through observation and imitation, under the guidance of more experienced co-workers. For much of the WIL project experience students are working with other students without experienced co-workers. The research highlights the frustration of one student where the expectation of this guidance was not met while working on a project for a small organisation run by an experienced CEO, "[m]y host was inexperienced… There was a lack of direction". As a result, much of this guidance was picked up by the industry fellow, "[the industry fellow] was excellent at helping along the way… [h]e's very knowledgeable". Which highlights the significant role played by the industry fellow in being a source of guidance for students throughout the project and in place of the employer when needed. This is a new approach to supervision and a material difference to traditional WIL experiences.

This aspect of the WIL project - Not requiring students to be placed in the workplace, has broadened the number of employers, particularly non-profits, able to partner with the University; however, despite the additional WIL opportunities this provides to students, it can be argued that the lack of experience offered in a practice-based setting may diminish the worth of the initiative. Billett (2014) states that a students' learning in a practice setting occurs through:

> participation in that practice and specific arrangements that assist securing experiences that otherwise would not occur. Consequently, practice curriculum can be found in the progression through the everyday lived experience within the particular practices of a (work) community or culture of practice…
> (Billett, 2014, p. 683)

This highlights a limitation of the WIL projects as they do not allow students to spend a significant amount of time progressing through the everyday lived experiences within the particular practice of their desired occupations or placed in a discipline-focused organisation. For students working on projects not aligned with their disciplines this opportunity is not provided at all. An argument could be made that the WIL project provides a practice-based setting for the occupational work of management consulting. In the interviews one of the employers stated that the students involved in the WIL project had acquired an understanding of the project methodology used in the health sector. This highlights the potential of WIL projects in their current form to be more aligned with a particular occupation, however this would need to be an explicit outcome of a student's underlying course to ensure that the experience is structurally aligned with the course and meets the student's expectations (Jackson, 2016).

Billett (2014) adds that the deliberate structuring of experiences in a particular circumstance of work also forms part of the practice curriculum. This would presumably include when a WIL project is aligned with a student's discipline in a related function of an organisation and provides an opportunity for the student to experience and learn an aspect of their occupation with guidance. Arguably, the WIL projects offer this potential through the role of the Industry Fellow to define the project by liaising with the employer and considering the student cohort. Although the exception, based on the research, the student who applied course knowledge to develop a risk-management profile for the project host highlights this.

In summary, in relation to practice curriculum, WIL projects are limited in their ability to provide students with the opportunity to access the learning gained from being directly exposed to the lived experience of desired occupations in their relevant contexts.

However, WIL projects do have the potential to provide a deliberately structured authentic experience in a particular circumstance of an occupation and learning occurs where there is disciplinary-alignment with the student. WIL projects also raise interesting questions regarding the evolving role of Universities through their collaboration with employers and highlights a potential paradigm shift in relation to the impact and role of higher education.

Practice pedagogy of WIL projects

When considering the practice pedagogy of WIL projects, it is important to remember that the curriculum practices play a role in supporting the integration of practice-based experiences. Both aspects of a student's experience contribute to learning (Billett, 2007). Smith, Ferns & Russell (2016) propose six WIL curriculum factors – authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration. After focusing on how WIL projects are identified and developed, these curriculum factors will be applied to the WIL project context and discussed in light of what happens prior, during and after the practice-based experience and then considered in relation to graduate employability.

Developing a WIL project

The results highlighted how WIL projects may differ from traditional WIL projects offered by employers. Before a WIL project can be offered to students as part of the program an employer needs to be identified and a suitable project must be developed. Projects are created by the Industry Fellow and the employer, and are primarily based on the needs of

the employer's organisation and the interest and skill capacity of students. The Industry Fellow considers the students' discipline areas, difficulty of the work, related tasks and potential learnings. Guidance is provided to employers who do not have expertise in the project area, for example, a non-profit organisation developing corporate governance policies for the first time. Guidance is also provided to employers in defining a suitable scope for the project.

In a WIL placement, much of this initial work is done by a staff member within the organisation. Billett (2014) states that to ensure effective occupational practice, when planning such an experience it is important to consider how the learning can be best structured, organised and refined. A potential advantage of WIL projects over traditional placements is that the Industry Fellow has significant input into this process to ensure students are given the opportunity to engage in an authentic, meaningful and well-structured project. These are important aspects of WIL (Billett, 2014; Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2017). This also overcomes some of the potential limitations of learning during a practice-based experience. This might include experiences that don't provide an opportunity to practice, don't include tasks that develop understanding or are personally or professionally confronting for students.

Billett (2014) argues that educators need to maximise the contributions of practice settings while addressing potential limitations. Possibly more than other forms of WIL, WIL projects are able to do this through the highly collaborative hands-on role of the Industry Fellow rather than having to rely solely on the host organisation to provide this during a student's placement. A strong collaborative approach between the University and the employer ensures that there's a shared understanding regarding expectations from all

parties and has been shown to enhanced WIL experiences (Patrick et al., 2009; Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015).

Authenticity of WIL projects

Authenticity can be considered the degree to which the WIL experience provides the student the opportunity to do meaningful work, with appropriate levels of autonomy and responsibility and which has meaningful consequences of value for the employer (Smith, 2012). This is a key feature of practice-based experiences, with the authenticity of a WIL experience having a significant impact on the learning outcomes and satisfaction for students (Smith & Worsfold, 2014; 2015). WIL projects have a high degree of authenticity due to the highly collaboratively approach used by the Industry Fellow when working with the employer to identify and develop potential projects.

This has advantages over other forms of WIL in several ways. By working closely with the employer to understand the organisation's needs, the Industry Fellow is able to identify real problems that can potentially be addressed through a project. When defining the scope of the potential project the Industry Fellow is able to consider students' abilities and have direct input into the type of work, level of autonomy and level of responsibility required to complete the project during the allocated time. The research shows the benefits of this through the acknowledgement from employers that the projects have a direct impact on the organisation, for example, "enabled the CEO to achieve a number of things that needed to be done", the WIL project "brought new ideas, perspectives, strategies and policies which were operationalised" and "address gaps in the service by bringing in expertise for research, benchmarking, etc…" or "help us complete projects we

are unable to do… particularly requiring research, for example, policy development". This aligns with the literature and is especially relevant for smaller non-profit organisations where the capacity to complete these types of projects does not exist and the project output has a material impact on the organisation (Atkinson, 2016; Jackson et al., 2017).

Students also recognise this and praised the authenticity of the WIL projects. "Developing solutions to real problems" were highlights for all students involved in the WIL projects. Traditional placements do not have the benefit of the Industry Fellow to liaise directly with the employer to develop a focused longer-term experience addressing a significant problem for the organisation. Billett (2014) stresses the importance of considerations such as the purpose of the experience, employer and student expectations and duration. WIL placement experiences are often made up of multiple tasks based across the organisation and allocated throughout the experience that vary greatly depending upon the organisation size and the student's immediate supervisor (Elijido-Ten & Cloot, 2015). Therefore, the significant input into the development of the WIL project is a strength of the WIL project experience.

WIL projects and the integration of theory and practice

An important aspect of graduate employability is that students are able to integrate theory and practice (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Billett, 2014; Billett, 2009). The high degree of access to and collaboration with the employer ensures that the WIL project can be developed to give students a good opportunity to integrate theory and practice. The Industry Fellow is able to maximise the educational worth of integrating the WIL project practice experience by recognising and identifying the pedagogical potential within the

employer's organisation, and consider how this can be engaged and integrated with course curricula to develop a WIL project that will maximise students' learning experience (Billett, 2014). The results highlighted some of these instances, for example, when one of the students involved in the study stated how she applied curricula knowledge to develop strategies related to her WIL project, or when another student developed a risk-management profile for the employer based on course-unit knowledge. These aspects of the experience demonstrate the effectiveness of WIL projects at being able to provide an opportunity for students to integrate discipline theory and practice, which is an important curriculum factor when considering the development of graduate employability (Billett, 2014; Smith, 2012; Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2017).

The research also highlighted the integration of other aspects of the course curricula. Students involved in projects not aligned with their discipline area expressed some discontent on this aspect of their experience but highlighted other areas of course-curricula integration that indicated learning, particularly with regard to working in a team with people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally, which is an important aspect of graduate employability (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Billet, 2014; Smith, 2016; Jackson, 2013; Jackson, 2015). WIL project teams are made up of a diverse group of cross-discipline students, including local and international students. The research indicates that a significant amount of learning was done during the WIL project while working through the challenges of cross-discipline teamwork. "The cross-cultural communication [unit] was particularly useful for working well as a team" stated one student. This highlights the collaborative learning that occurs during the experience through effective peer interactions in a practice setting. Billet (2014) identifies this as an important curriculum and pedagogic activity during the practice-based experience, and one that contributes to graduate

employability through the development of a student's ability to work with people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally.

The ability to use information in judicious ways for specific work-related purposes is another important aspect of graduate employability (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016; Smith, 2016). This aspect features heavily throughout the WIL project given the problem-solving nature of the experience. Students are required to liaise with the employer to gather information on the organisation to understand the context of the WIL project. Independent research is also required to meet the requirements of the project brief and produce the output of the project, for example a policy or strategy. A project management methodology guides this process which leads to the operationalisation of the project output. Having a practice-based experience made up of a series of sequenced activities in this way, through the use of a project lifecycle, enhances the learning experience for students (Billett, 2014; Jackson et al., 2017). The impact on this aspect of graduate employability is captured by the employer who stated that they would employ the WIL project students as they understood how to run projects in the health industry, including how to work with stakeholders, research, use relevant tools and understand the work environment.

Preparing students for WIL projects

In preparing students for a WIL project it is important to clarify expectations about purposes, support and responsibilities, such as goals for learning (Billett, 2009). For students, this does not only refer to a students' readiness to learn but also their intentionality, effort and direction of their engagement processes that ensure that they fully

engage with the learning that is offered (Richards, Sweet & Billett, 2013). This was considered useful by students who referred to the initial induction as outlining the expectations of the experience and providing guidance for how to behave when engaging with the employer. Students also work with the Industry Fellow to identify personal and professional development goals to manage their expectations.

Understanding the expectations of all parties at the beginning of any WIL-type program is particularly important for students (Jackson, et al., 2017). This sets up students for their experience and they need to be informed about a number of things related to their WIL experience including: the purpose of the WIL experience, understand how to access support, their responsibilities and the goals for learning (Billett, 2014; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). For WIL projects, much of this is initially provided by the university in the form of a compulsory induction held on campus that ensures that the program is understood by students before commencing their projects. The Industry Fellow meets with students to outline the project and organisation. Students are also supported by a 60-page unit guide and resource folder that outlines general information, assessment and evaluation information, placement guidance and a student code of conduct.

The placement guide and student code of conduct prepare students for their entry into the workforce by contributing to their understanding and development of what it means to be a professional in the workforce. In the study, students praised the preparation for WIL projects, with one student explaining that at times she didn't enjoy the project and found the host challenging, but the learnings from the seminar helped her maintain her "professionalism". Professionalism is a focus of teaching and learning for higher education programs as they prepare graduates for the workforce (Trede, Macklin & Bridges, 2012). Reich, Rooney & Boud, (2015) suggest that meaningful professionalism learning and

professional identify development can be fostered by authentic practice-based experiences, such as WIL projects. This study supports this by demonstrating that WIL projects can provide student with the opportunity to develop their professionalism through the integration of theory and practice.

Supervision of students during WIL projects

Supervision is the practice of maintaining contact with students during a practice-based experience and includes the monitoring of students' learning and their reactions to the experience (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). Supervision involves a degree of collaboration between the university and employer which varies significantly across disciplines, with health and education-related disciplines traditionally using a formalised approach to supervision and other disciplines, such as business, using a less formalised approach (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2014). This is reflected across WIL projects, with each project using a flexible approach to supervision, usually dependent on project complexity and practical considerations, such as employer location and availability.

A designated staff member at the employer and the Industry Fellow share supervision responsibilities throughout the WIL project. Supervision from the designated staff member focuses on project progression and providing any needed employer information or guidance. Supervision from the Industry Fellow focuses on providing guidance on applying discipline knowledge, project management guidance, conflict resolution and general assistance. Driven by student need, supervision contact is usually weekly or fortnightly, with initial contact and key milestones being face-to-face where practical while ongoing contact is maintained using technology, for example Skype.

This approach to supervision provides a practice environment that requires students to be agentic learners in how they utilise supervision. This means students learn how to take on responsibility by managing their project and developing competence for autonomous practice. The process of having to manage project requirements (such as arranging access to staff or information from the employer) through proactively liaising with the employer-based supervisor and proactively accessing help and guidance from the Industry Fellow provide a rich learning experience for students given the nature of and complexity of WIL projects.

The interactions with the Industry Fellow offer valuable learning for students as agentic learners. Human agency is defined as the ability "to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstance" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). With this in mind, the development of knowledge is as likely to arise as much through the practice-based experience as it is through the course curricula (Billet, 2014). Through regular participation in the interactions with the Industry Fellow and employer supervisor, students have an opportunity to be able to make meaning of their experience. The quality and kind of learning that occurs during these interactions is dependent on learner engagement and access to teachers or experts (Billett, 2014). WIL projects offer ongoing access to this kind of learning through the expertise of the Industry Fellow. "[He] was excellent at helping along the way… we would meet when we were confused or help with how to deal with dilemmas. He's very knowledgeable". This highlights the proximal guidance and development provided to students through the use of scaffolding (Jackson, 2015), coaching, and guided learning (Billett, 2009; Billett, 2014; Litchfield, Nettleton & Taylor, 2008). As a curricula and practice-based expert, the Industry Fellow's use of these practices exemplify the apprenticeship learning process through the ongoing guidance by

a more expert partner who can assist in student development through these pedagogic practices (Billett, 2014).

The pedagogical practice of this aspect of WIL projects is highly dependent upon learner engagement. The learner may find the supervisor not worthy of their interest. For example, the student who felt frustrated by her inexperienced employer supervisor, "My host was an inexperienced CEO. There was a lack of direction… and no protocols… the project was very fundamental… and not challenging". This contributed to a lack of engagement with the employer supervisor and a missed opportunity to fully engage with the potential practice-based learning offered by the WIL project. This situation is indicative of known WIL challenges regarding employer participation which include a lack of shared understanding among employers of what WIL entails and insufficient resources for coordinating and supervising students (Jackson, 2015; Jackson et al., 2017). This highlights that the potential learning that occurs from a WIL-project is not just dependent on the affordances of the educational institution and the workplace, but how students elect to engage with what is afforded them in the practice setting (Billett, 2014; Jackson, 2015). This also applies to other forms of WIL; however, the regular access to both the Industry Fellow and employer supervisor throughout the experience offers a greater chance of student engagement and learning and forms a good basis for this pedagogical approach. This adds to the literature by highlighting a new approach to WIL supervision.

Debriefing the WIL-project experience

The debrief stage of a practice-based experience is the process of 'looking back' and making sense of the experience at an emotional or education level (Billett, 2009; Cantrell,

2008). This provides students an opportunity to share and draw out experiences to explicitly make links to what is taught at university and what is experienced in practice settings (Billett, 2009). Debriefing occurs formally and informally throughout the WIL-project experience. Students maintain a reflective journal and produce a 1500-word personal reflection report and presentation. Reflective journals and reports are a widely accepted pedagogical approach to debriefing used across WIL experiences and offer a highly effective means of promoting the process of critical reflection, and evidencing this higher order thinking (Harvey & Coulson, 2013).

Where WIL projects may differ from other WIL experiences is the ongoing debriefing provided by the regular interaction with the Industry Fellow and through collaboration with other students in the group. This is highlighted in the research by comments from students such as, the Industry Fellow "was excellent at helping along the way" and "we would meet when we were confused or needed help with how to deal with dilemmas". This can be compared to the nursing literature, a discipline that has established a strong consensus that debriefing enhances students' learning, where nursing students regularly reflect upon challenges encountered during a placement experience and how they might improve their future practice (Cantrell, 2008).

The regular interaction with peers in a team setting is also a defining characteristic of WIL projects that provides further opportunity for students to debrief. In the study students received a lot of support from other group members. "I made friends with my group members and they helped me a lot". Students described how they worked together on the project and helped each other with the various components of the project that needed to be completed. In a practice-based setting, this type of situated-peer learning provides the type of rich environment needed for behavioural and attitudinal change (Trede, 2012;

Billett, 2014). Also, the magnitude of the peer-group learning effect is proportional to the student's frequency, intensity and interaction with the group, which means students benefit from this effect due to the completion of the project requiring frequent and ongoing interaction between peers and more instances of reflection and meaning making, along with the associated debriefing (Harvey & Coulson, 2013). Positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal skill development and group processing of activities are five important principles that guide effective groups (Archer-Kath, Johnson & Johnson, 1994). These principles feature extensively across the WIL project experience and underscore the merit of using a group approach for the experience.

WIL project assessment tasks focused on integration

The results highlighted the use of a conventional approach to WIL assessment. The integration of theory and practice is one of the primary educational goals of WIL. Therefore, it is important to consider the degree to which the activities students engage in, and the assessments they are subject to, focus on this outcome (Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016). For WIL projects the assessment tasks are made up of a mid and end-of-project personal performance evaluation completed by the student and employer; a placement portfolio made up of a daily journal, weekly reflective reports and a reflective placement essay; and an oral presentation. These tasks are typical of WIL experiences, which tend to vary and evolve according to disciplinary and professional requirements and contexts (Bosco & Ferns, 2014). Unlike longstanding and highly regulated components of professionally accredited programs, WIL practices that have emerged in unregulated contexts, such as business, are often the result of innovative and experimental design and

need to be considered along fundamental pedagogical principles (Bosco & Ferns, 2014; Orrell, 2011).

Higher Education Standards require the progressive development and assurance of programme-level learning outcomes targeting discipline-specific and generic knowledge, skills and applications, as well as capabilities required for the successful transition to the workplace (Australian Department of Education, Science & Training, 2004). Higher education assessment tends to focus on knowledge and conceptual understanding, whereas WIL curriculum has the potential to bridge the theory-practice divide and requires robust assessment that engages in and reflects on the complexity and ambiguity of real-world practice (Bosco and Ferns, 2014).

The daily and weekly reflections completed by students form the basis of all the other assessment tasks and require student to note activities, such as meetings, training and instances where students demonstrated initiative, planning and good time management. Guided by their initial placement goals and journal prompts, students are also required to record feelings when workplace situations are analysed. This is considered a good approach to integrating learning given that these tasks require students to continually make meaning from situations in an authentic workplace setting that contribute to students reflexively evaluating their performance (Bosco and Ferns, 2014). However, as Billett (2009) recognises, this places the responsibility on the student to actively engage in work tasks and interactions during the experience. For this task to successfully integrate student learning, students must take on the responsibility of wanting to learn the occupation and applying their learning through work (Billett, 2014).

Completed by the student and the employer, the mid and end-of-placement reports evaluate student performance throughout the WIL-placement and is designed to help students recognise their strengths and identify areas for improvement and new challenges. Features of employability skills, such as organisation and planning, written communication skills and team work are evaluated against expectations by the employer, who also has the option of adding their own criteria. Having an employer contributing to the assessment, including establishing the marking criteria and directly marking is considered an effective approach to ensuring assessment tasks focus on integration (Bosco and Ferns, 2014).

In summary, this critical examination has shown how the practice setting, curriculum and pedagogy of WIL projects contributes to the development of graduate employability. This examination has also revealed how WIL projects make use of practice setting, curriculum and pedagogy to contribute to the development of graduate employability. The collaboration between the university and employer used by WIL projects, the unique approach to supervision through the role of the industry fellow and the inclusion of non-traditional employers involved in WIL projects also contribute new ideas to the literature. In responding to the study's aims and questions, the following chapter will summarise this research and outline the contribution made to the literature.

Conclusion

This research aimed to develop an understanding of how WIL projects develop graduate employability. Based on a qualitative analysis of interviews with students, academics and employers, observation of students and document analysis, it can be concluded that the pedagogical practices behind WIL projects make a significant contribution to the integration of theory and practice, and the development of graduate employability. This confirms and extends our understanding of WIL and the importance of integrating practice-based experiences between universities and employers in developing graduate employability, as discussed in the literature (Billett, 2009, Billett, 2014). This research also confirms the that curriculum factors of authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on integration and assessments focused on integration identified by Smith, Ferns & Russell (2014), contribute positively to developmental outcomes for students with regards to graduate employability.

This research confirms and extends our understanding that through authentic practice-based WIL, and more specifically WIL projects, students develop the skills to be competent for autonomous, responsible and ethical practice (Smith, 2012; Billett, 2014). This was highlighted by the research through the authenticity of the WIL project experience and the high degree of autonomy afforded to students throughout a project, particularly compared to traditional placements. The research highlights this through the work-based context of the experience, where students are required to take on the responsibility of managing the progression of the project with limited oversight and engage with support as needed. This supports the literature that a project must be central to the experience, problem focused, realistic and student driven to some degree to offer a rich practice-based experience (Thomas, 2000; Overson, 2003).

Although integrating projects are not new, these WIL projects offer a new context to explore the multidimensional and evolving nature of graduate employability. This research highlights a new approach to university-employer collaboration through the provision of expertise provided by the university and the expansion of the university's supervisory role to be inclusive of smaller non-profit organisations traditionally not involved in WIL.

The research has shown that preparation seminars attended by students prior to beginning the project also contribute to the development of responsible and ethical practice. This occurred through how students applied this knowledge, such as maintained professionalism, when faced with challenges during the experience. This confirms existing literature that the educational worth of WIL experiences is enhanced by adequate preparation (Billett, 2009; Smith, Ferns & Russell, 2016).

This research has shown that WIL projects offer students an opportunity to develop the ability to work with other people effectively, fairly and cross-culturally. The very nature of the experience embodies this aspect through students' work in cross-discipline teams. The authenticity of the project context also ensures that students develop an understanding of the challenges of working in teams and how to solve problems as they arise. The preparation seminars play a role in preparing students for this curriculum factor. The ongoing supervision and related debriefing also provide students opportunities to make sense of their experiences of working in a team. This occurs more frequently during WIL projects than traditional placements and offers an advantage over other forms of WIL.

WIL projects develop students' ability to use information in judicious ways for specific work-related purposes. This research has shown that the problem solving and project-

based nature of WIL projects drive students to find and use information to respond to an authentic work-based problem. This aspect of developing graduate employability allows students to develop their skills in critical thinking, problem solving and effective communication. The active role played by the university in defining the project, and therefore the experience, through the industry fellow offers an advantage over traditional placements where the experience is left solely to the placement supervisor within the organisation.

Another important part of WIL project experiences that contributes to graduate employability is that the experience develops a willingness to learn to improve practice and be able to identify areas for self-development. This research has shown that this occurs through ongoing supervision and debriefing with the employer and industry fellow. The integration-focused assessment tasks prompt students to consider their ongoing self-development through regular and ongoing self-reflection and a formal mid and end-of-project self-evaluation.

WIL projects develop graduate employability through the practice-based integration of theory and practice. WIL projects provide students with an opportunity to apply theory they have learnt at university to solving a real-world problem. This was particularly evident for students who were involved in discipline-aligned projects and organisations. This aspect of the research reinforced existing literature where students given the opportunity to participate in WIL aligned with their discipline interest were more likely to develop professional employability narratives and early career identities (Wilton, 2012; Billett, 2009). Although still satisfied with the overall WIL project experience, students working on projects not aligned with their disciplines expressed some disappointment at not having been given this opportunity.   This challenge is recognised in the literature and highlights

the role of academic staff to review the university screening process to manage these expectations (Elijido-Ten & Kloot, 2015). This also highlighted students' lack of understanding of the changing nature of work and that they may not recognise the alignment of their WIL project experience with the needs of a contemporary workplace.

WIL projects contribute to the development of students' confidence and self-awareness to seek and gain employment in a job market. This research has shown that although not all students worked in areas aligned with their disciplines, the experience provided an opportunity for students to adapt to the requirements of the project and work flexibly, which reflects the changing nature of work. The research found that employers involved in WIL projects recognised the value of the experience for students as they considered them employable and competent in being able to work on projects within their sectors. Not all students necessarily recognised this development as the research revealed that many students still sought projects with a discipline and occupational-aligned focus on what they sought from the experience regarding future employment. This research highlighted some of the established problems associated with WIL, such as the potential for a lack of clarity in expectations and goals from students (Jackson, 2015), and varying levels of commitment and perceptions from all stakeholders (Patrick et al., 2008).

While a case-study approach with limited sampling cases limits the generalisablity of the research (Yin, 1984), this approach has provided new insight into how WIL projects contribute to graduate employability and how this approach differs from more understood forms of WIL such as traditional placements. Also, while Smith, Ferns & Russell's (2016) model of curriculum factors that improve graduate employability offered a useful framework to inform this research, our understanding of graduate employability continues to evolve and the research needs to be considered with that in mind.

This research illustrates the nature of WIL projects and how this approach has found new learning opportunities in smaller non-profit organisations, but also raises the issue of growing pressure on universities to provide WIL opportunities for students and their need to look beyond traditional employer groups to provide these opportunities.

This new type of collaborative relationship between universities and employers challenges the existing paradigm where the employer provides the discipline-aligned expertise and practice-based setting and takes on the associated roles. This research has shown that the university is prepared to take on the role of providing the expertise and forgo the practice-based setting requirement for employers to provide a WIL experience for students. This research has highlighted some of the pedagogical implications of this shift including how WIL projects are approached and the impact on meeting the expectations of students.

To better understand the implications of this research, future studies could address the evolving role of universities in meeting the demands of providing WIL opportunities for students. The collaboration with small non-profit organisations to provide WIL projects has highlighted a shifting burden of responsibility from employers to universities in providing the 'expertise' and supervision to students that is traditionally provided within the employer's organisation. The collaboration with small non-profit organisations who require the expertise of universities to lead their engagement with WIL offers a new way of approaching WIL.

In summary, this research has shown that the pedagogical approach used in WIL projects include factors such as authenticity, preparation, supervision, debrief, activities focused on

integration and assessments focused on integration that are effective at contributing to the development of student graduate employability. Compared to traditional placements, WIL projects offer greater input from the university in shaping the learning experience and a greater provision to provide ongoing guided supervision and reflective experiences for students. This research has also highlighted a new type of WIL collaboration between a university and employer through the inclusion of small non-profit organisations and the implications.

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