

Inspiring connections: The student experience of an online creative arts journal

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This study investigates the learning potential of students' experiences working as editors and publishers for a university's creative arts e-journal. The study is based on a project which aimed to strengthen creative arts students' graduate attributes and employability skills associated with interpersonal and written communication skills, specifically editing and e-publication. The participants were surveyed prior to and after e-publication of each issue of the journal over a two year period. The study focuses on students' and teachers' perceptions of participating in a non-graded, discipline-based work-integrated learning (WIL) activity. The data were analysed in order to explore students' and teachers' attitudes and responses to the challenges with participating in an e-publication process. The findings indicated that students chose to participate in the activity to address certain employability skills as well as desiring an authentic work-based challenge that enhanced the university experience. The results revealed that students require more guidance and informal set lesson plans. The teachers' responses indicated that the most important teaching methods were: (i) provide authentic communication to students and (ii) illustrate relevant industry experience. Recommendations are made for the careful implementation and integration of the online creative arts WIL project into the University's curriculum in order to: (i) connect WIL pedagogy, courses, policies and objectives in higher education, (ii) provide career and self development for WIL teaching and learning practices, and (iii) continually redevelop and evaluate the WIL activity in order to pursue accreditation.

Introduction

Work-integrated learning

The literature on work-integrated learning (WIL) reveals that this is one type of many pedagogical approaches that is "curriculum design in which students spend time in professional, work or other practice settings relevant to their degrees of study and to their occupational futures" (Smith, 2012, p. 247). Numerous researchers have contributed to the theoretical understandings of learning in WIL situations. Some of the key researchers include Billett (2000), Boud (2001), Calway (2006), Coll & Chapman (2000), Eraut & Hirsch (2007) and Yorke (2006) to name just a few. The Australian Learning and Teaching Council also commissioned a good practice report on WIL activities in Australian universities (Orrell, 2011). The author of this report extensively reviewed 28 funded studies associated with discipline scoping studies, fellowships and projects (Orrell, 2011). Among the reviews a creative arts project focused on a WIL activity. This particular WIL activity integrated music teacher education courses in order to improve pre-service teachers' transition between universities and schools (ALTC, 2011, p. 36; Orrell, 2011). The literature illustrates the growth of robust scholarship and educational practice of WIL across the Australian university landscape. However, minimal focus is placed on the research area of WIL activities in the Creative Industries (ALTC, 2011; Bruns & Brien, 2002; Orrell, 2011).

The phrase “work-integrated learning” is used as an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that “integrate theory with practice of work within a purposely designed curriculum” (ALCT, 2011, p. 4). Often, the term is used as a generic title or to differentiate WIL programs from other teaching approaches such as activity-based learning (ABL), work-based learning (WBL), industry-based learning (IBL), workplace learning (WPL) learning in the workplace and community (LiWC) and cooperative education (Precision Consultancy, 2007, p. 29; McLennan & Keating, 2008, p. 1; Smith, 2012). Moreover, at times, teaching and learning activities that are “linked to work” and occur in higher education settings are also termed WIL (Fitch, 2011; McLennan & Keating, 2008). The literature also suggests that the effective implementation of WIL activities in higher education will encourage students to manage specific work-related outcomes. For example, WIL can assist in incorporating a mixture of real world and industry-related experiences, using a variety of teaching approaches such as independent study, self directed study, negotiated learning, work shadowing, and mentoring schemes with learning orientated internship approaches (Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Rossin & Hyland, 2003). Furthermore, WIL programs that function effectively in higher education can assist students with an opportunity in which they are “challenged to learn and have encountered authentic work-related learning experiences” (Australian Council of Education Research, 2008). According to Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) an authentic learning situation creates real world relevance and is, “ill defined and [produces] complex tasks to complete over a period of time with opportunities for reflection and collaboration” (pp. 62-63). However, due to the limited access to WIL initiatives, university students in Australia lack consistent opportunities to actively partake in WIL activities. As the Australian Council of Education Research Report (2008) points out: “the extent to which learners have blended academic learning with workplace experience is only 33.9% of Australia’s Higher Education students” (p. 10). In order to increase student participation in WIL, the mainstreaming of WIL across all disciplines is required (Cooper, Orrell & Bowden, 2003; Crebert, Bates, Bell, Patrick & Cragolini, 2004; Reeders, 2000). For this to occur, the following main challenges, which McLennan and Keating (2008) summarised at a National Symposium held at The University of Victoria, require further attention:

- securing placements as WIL becomes more widespread;
- fitting in with industry needs, and becoming a partner with industry and business in their human resource development;
- skills and experience of academic and general staff;
- embedding WIL pedagogy and courses;
- incorporating career development learning in WIL;
- resource intensiveness. (p. 10).

Despite the lack of a universal WIL model that addresses the above elements, WIL is being utilised in various higher education settings with varying results (McLennan & Keating, 2008). First, when WIL activities are incorporated into learning it is often utilised because it is understood as being a key opportunity for improving the work readiness of all graduates. This also includes students studying in disciplines that have not traditionally been linked to clear employment outcomes (Haigh & Clifford, 2011; Lee, McGuiggan & Holland, 2010). Second, WIL provides opportunities for students to develop skills for

working in “dynamic, complex and ambiguous situations” (Fitch, 2011, p. 493) which do not necessarily occur in the classroom “where assessment tasks are designated at the start of the semester and students are clear about learning outcomes” (Fitch, 2011, p. 493). Third, as a teaching method, WIL can bridge the gap between, “universities providing students with a strong knowledge base but without the ability to intelligently apply that knowledge in the work setting” (BIHECC, August 2007 cited in McLennan & Keating, 2008, p. 2).

Online creative arts journals in higher education

In a scan of the Word Wide Web using the key search words - creative writing online journal - on Australia’s (n=39), the United Kingdom’s (n=137) universities’ homepages and locating the same information for the United States of America (n=131) via the URL http://www.pw.org/content/literary_journals_us_mfa_programs?cmnt_all=1 [no longer current, see instead http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines], the results reveal that up to 33 universities support a creative arts and/or creative writing e-journal. The information also showed that out of 33 university-based e-journals, one e-journal advertised itself as a WIL activity. On further investigation each e-journal’s homepage presented a mission statement that described the e-journal’s production output. Each e-journal also disclosed specific functional characteristics that reflected three main areas of a community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998; Dey, 1993). Additionally, to further understand the specific differences and similarities between each e-journal’s CoP, the researcher abstracted certain characteristic traits from each homepage, noting patterns and variations. Three distinct categories emerged, which were:

- Category 1: is a type of e-journal that functions as a standalone, extra-curricular, student-centred and/or university academic publishing e-journal that is peer reviewed and offers undergraduate and/or postgraduate creative writing opportunities, showcasing multimedia and/or multi-platform works;
- Category 2: is a type of e-journal that functions as a standalone, disciplined-based, peer reviewed, creative arts e-journals that establishes connections within the university’s already established Creative Industries’ curriculum, producing opportunities and connections for assessment to publication;
- Category 3: is a type of e-journal that functions as a fully peer reviewed and refereed e-journal that e-publishes narrative, art and multimedia research from a diverse theoretical, methodological and empirical interest. These types of e-journals also publish creative writing, critical theory and/or practice-based research about the creative arts (see Table 1).

Which category?

The WIL program discussed in this paper places an emphasis on students’ editing experiences before encouraging interdisciplinary connections that are linked to assessment to publications. Therefore, the WIL activity is best represented as Category 1 with elements of Category 2 (see Table 1). As the WIL activity’s homepage states:

[The WIL activity] ...provides students with an editing experience that resembles a professional industry environment and assists in gaining future employment (see Figure 1).

Background

The developers involved in the WIL activity were aware that WIL teaching and learning practices were not ingenious or new to the university learning environment (Precision Consultancy & Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; Universities Australia, 2008; Duignan, 2003; Thacker, 2002; Martin, 1997). However, framing an e-journal as a WIL activity that utilises information and communications technology (ICT) as a method of delivery was topical. Moreover, the decision to structure the e-journal as a WIL activity was influenced by the knowledge that WIL enables, “a rich, active and contextualised learning experience” that contributes to “engagement in learning” (McLennan & Keating, 2008, p. 4).

Prior to presenting the researcher’s methodological approach it is important to explain the WIL activity’s development journey. The following section details this process before presenting the route of data collection, results, and finally a discussion and conclusion that presents various recommendations on how to improve the WIL activity. The overall aim of the present study was to develop insight into student’s own views of the WIL activity, and how to best support the teachers’ involvement.

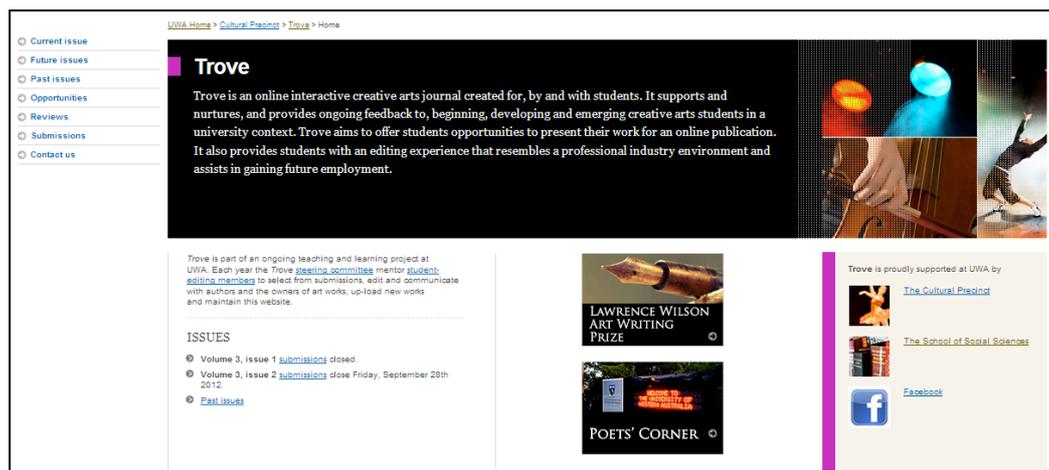


Figure 1: The WIL activity’s homepage (<http://www.trove.arts.uwa.edu.au>)

The project

Overview of the WIL activity

In 2010, the researcher tutored in an advanced University creative writing unit. On completion of the unit, the researcher discovered that students desired to develop and

Table 1: Summary of creative arts/creative writing e-journals supported in higher education

| | Journal | URL address | Institution | Cat |
|----|---|---|--|------|
| 1 | <i>Blackbird</i> | http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/ | Virginia Commonwealth University | 1 |
| 2 | <i>Barnstorm</i> | http://barnstormjournal.org/about/ | The University of New Hampshire | 1 |
| 3 | <i>Bright-ONLINE</i> | http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/study/english-literature-studies-brighton/brightonline | The University of Brighton | 1, 2 |
| 4 | <i>Bukker Tillibul</i> | http://lilydale.swinburne.edu.au/journal/editorial.htm | Swinburne University of Technology | 3 |
| 5 | <i>Café Américain</i> | http://www.american.edu/cas/literature/cafecamericain/index.cfm | The American University | 1 |
| 6 | <i>Colloquy</i> | http://arts.monash.edu.au/ecps/colloquy/ | Monash University | 1 |
| 7 | <i>Current Narratives</i> | http://currentnarratives.com/ | The University of Wollongong | 3 |
| 8 | <i>Dotlit</i> | http://www.dotlit.qut.edu.au/ | Queensland University of Technology | 2 |
| 9 | <i>Elephant Tree</i> | http://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/english/publications.asp | Chapman University | 1, 2 |
| 10 | <i>Eleven Eleven</i> | http://www.elevenelevenjournal.com/ | California College of the Arts | 1 |
| 11 | <i>Forum</i> | http://www.forumjournal.org/site/ | The University of Edinburgh | 1, 3 |
| 12 | <i>Free Verse</i> | http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/freeverse/Pages/Aboutus.html | North Carolina State University | 1 |
| 13 | <i>Greensboro Review</i> | http://www.greensbororeview.org/ | The University of North Carolina | 1 |
| 14 | <i>Hayden's Ferry Review</i> | http://www.asu.edu/piper/publications/haydensferryreview/ | Arizona State University | 1 |
| 15 | <i>Illumina</i> | http://illumina.sca.ecu.edu.au/ | Edith Cowan University | 1, 2 |
| 16 | <i>Innervate</i> | http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/english/current/innervate/index.aspx | The University of Nottingham | 1, 3 |
| 17 | <i>Hunger Mountain</i> | http://www.hungermtn.org/about/ | Vermont College of Fine Arts | 1 |
| 18 | <i>Loop</i> | http://www.as.wvu.edu/english/loop/ | West Virginia University | 1 |
| 19 | <i>Platform</i> | http://journals.culture-communication.unimelb.edu.au/platform/charter.html | The University of Melbourne | 1 |
| 20 | <i>Prism</i> | http://oregonstate.edu/prismmagazine/about/index.php | Oregon State University | 1 |
| 21 | <i>Rubric</i> | http://rubric.org.au/ | University of New South Wales | 3 |
| 22 | <i>Scope</i> | http://www.scope.nottingham.ac.uk/ | The University of Nottingham | 3 |
| 23 | <i>Second Nature</i> | http://secondnature.rmit.edu.au | RMIT University | 1, 3 |
| 24 | <i>Sitelines</i> | http://sitelines.humanities.curtin.edu.au | Curtin University of Technology | 1 |
| 25 | <i>SoundsRite</i> | http://soundsrite.uws.edu.au/ | University of Western Sydney | 1 |
| 26 | <i>Swamp</i> | http://www.swamp.edu.au/ | The University of Newcastle | 1 |
| 27 | <i>Tinge</i> | http://www.tingemagazine.org/about/ | Temple University | 1 |
| 28 | <i>The Bottle Imp</i> | http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/SWE/TBI/index.html | The University of Edinburgh | 1, 3 |
| 29 | <i>The Coachella Review</i> | http://www.thecoachellareview.com/about.html | The University of California | 1 |
| 30 | <i>Trove</i> | http://www.trove.arts.uwa.edu.au | The University of Western Australia | 1, 2 |
| 31 | <i>The International Journal of Screendance</i> | http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/study/pava/screendance/the-international-journal-of-screendance | The University of Brighton and the University of Wisconsin-Madison | 3 |
| 32 | <i>The Manchester Review</i> | http://www.themanchesterreview.co.uk/ | The University of Manchester | 1 |
| 33 | <i>The New River</i> | http://www.cddc.vt.edu/journals/newriver/09Spring/about.html | Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University | 1 |

maintain a creative arts e-journal. The researcher invited the select group of students to form a student editing team. The e-journal was purposely structured as a WIL activity in order to establish and enrich interdisciplinary connections while meeting an important aspect of the University's Education Principles:

to communicate clearly, effectively and appropriately in a range of contexts, to develop spoken and written English communication skills at high levels, to acquire skills in critical literacy and interpersonal communication (The University of Western Australia, 2012)

Once, the initial student editing team was orchestrated a steering committee was created. The steering committee consisted of three Creative Industries staff members and two Creative Industries postgraduate PhD candidates.

It is important to note that informant bias is possible regarding this research project. This is due to one of the PhD candidates being the researcher of this study and acting as Project Officer from 2010-2011. The other PhD candidate acted as Associate Project Officer from 2010-2011 and then as Project Officer in 2012. The Associate Project Officer took part in the teachers' interviews, which form part of the results section of this paper.

From 2010-2012, the Project Officers mentored up to sixteen students over a three year period. The Project Officers' main role was to assist student editors in planning, developing and designing the e-journal's website, sourcing student creative art works, facilitating student editors with critiquing and editing works and selecting works for e-publication each semester. The Project Officers also consulted with the steering committee on a periodic basis such as when the student editing team planned and developed the WIL activity's homepage, which states:

[the project] is an online interactive creative arts journal created for, by and with students. It supports and nurtures, and provides ongoing feedback to beginning, developing and emerging creative arts students in a university context. [The project] aims to offer students opportunities to present their work for an online publication [see Figure 1].

From 2010-2012, the WIL activity underwent continual evolution and evaluation due to the researcher's involvement in the collection of participants' feedback. This included administering surveys and receiving verbal feedback each semester. The feedback resulted in developing good practice guides in order to:

- make significant and effective changes to the website;
- fine tune recruitment processes;
- organise marketing and publicity strategies;
- develop criteria for the selection of works for e-publication;
- create industry-linked opportunities;
- create student opportunities for assessment to e-publication.

Recruitment

A select group of steering committee members were chosen by the Project Officers. The members selected were experts in their Creative Industry teaching arenas. Each steering committee member that accepted the invitation provided the Project Officers with a brief biography. The information was uploaded onto the e-journal's webpage and alongside the student editing members' details. The steering committee were encouraged to attend student editing meetings as well as to offer administration, teaching and learning support.

Except for the 2010 student and steering committee selection process all future students and committee members were invited by the following means: (i) a general email call out, (ii) an advertisement on the University's online newsreel and/or (iii) a hardcopy advertisement that was positioned at numerous popular student meeting hubs. Each option invited students to contact the Project Officers via email in order to express their interest and/or to gain additional information about the WIL activity. Each semester, up to fifteen potential candidates contacted the Project Officers. When the Project Officers received sufficient interest, students were invited to send via email to the Project Officers an overview of why they wanted to join the student editing team, their expectations, and any relevant experience. The Project Officers organised an informal meeting for the interested students. The meeting allowed potential student editors to ask questions and discover the WIL activity's learning objectives, expectations and the commitment and obligations required. Approximately, one week after the initial face to face meeting, the potential student editors were encouraged to re-contact the Project Officers to make known their confirmed interest. Project Officers in consultation with the steering committee members selected up to five student editors. All unsuccessful candidates were invited to reapply at a later date.

Student editors' role

Student editors met regularly with the Project Officers for at least one hour per week during each semester's teaching program. The meetings consisted of discussing and problem solving various issues such as meeting appropriate deadlines, adhering to "good practice" editing and e-publishing procedures, participating in marketing and publicity strategies and completing group-based selection processes of the submitted art works. Additionally, student editors volunteered at least three times each semester to document and to communicate via email the results of each meeting, and to plan future discussion topics. Often, student editors would volunteer to meet with the Project Officers more frequently, and for longer periods of time. This occurred during the art work selection process and when the editing and critiquing of students' art works prior to e-publication was required.

Project Officers' role

The Project Officers' main aim was to encourage the student editing team to regularly communicate via face to face, email and outside the designated weekly meetings. The Project Officers also encouraged and facilitated peer learning teaching practices in order

to promote a supportive learning environment and team work environment. Each week, the Project Officers facilitated feedback sessions with the student editors during the weekly face to face meetings. The feedback sessions focused on: how the group was problem solving such as discussing specific areas of improvement regarding editing procedures, best practices regarding critiquing student authors' art works, and how to work effectively as a team member.

Extra activities

Due to the student editors' feedback, the WIL activity expanded its core activities in 2011 to incorporate theatre and film reviewing for e-publication. Each semester, the Project Officer invited student editors to partake in the industry-based activity, which consisted of attending theatre and film review shows, drafting a 350-500 word review, receiving and implementing constructive feedback from the Project Officers. The students who took part in this initiative were given examples from a diverse range of film and theatre reviews as well as online resources that explained theatre and film reviewing techniques. The student editors were also given advice from the Project Officers via email on how to structure a review effectively, and which reviewing elements were important to the reader. The student editors were invited to supply drafts to the Project Officers of their reviews via a *Word* document. The Project Officers used track changes and provided feedback on the *Word* documents which were then sent back via email to the student reviewer. When the Project Officers advised the student editors that their review was acceptable for e-publication, a steering committee member completed a final edit and "close read" prior to the uploading of the review onto the e-journal's webpage.

Assessment

The student editors did not receive any credit towards their undergraduate studies for participating in the WIL activity. Two steering committee members were full time staff members and the Project Officers were PhD scholarship holders. Student editors' and Project Officers' commitment to the project was voluntary. The WIL was set up as a non-graded activity that functioned separately but alongside the University's set curriculum. The WIL activity's learning objectives were achieved when the student editors had successfully selected art works for e-publication, critiqued and edited the selected student authors' art works and made "live" the volume on the e-journal's webpage. In 2010, the first volume received 45 creative writing entries with the second volume in 2011 (Volume 2, Issue 1) receiving over 50 submissions. The third volume (Volume 2, Issue 2) received over 70 submissions which consisted of creative writing, film, visual arts and music (see Figure 1). The fourth volume (Volume 3, Issue 1) received 34 submissions which consisted of creative writing, visual arts and music.

Methods

This study is an exploratory investigation based on a formative evaluation process (Ross, 2005, p. 4) which investigated three key areas: (i) student perceptions of the WIL activity, (ii) its impact on students' current studies, and (iii) the value students placed on the WIL

activity to meet employability skills. Additionally, the findings pinpoint the project's strengths and weaknesses while providing a new outlook for identifying e-creative arts journals as potential WIL sites of discovery. The study addressed three descriptive research questions:

- What attitudes do students and teachers hold regarding the importance of the WIL activity?
- What factors affect a student's decision to participate in the WIL activity?
- How might the findings of this study inform current and future WIL activities for creative arts disciplines, and more specifically non-graded creative art WIL activities?

Sample

The sixteen student participants were sourced from the project's student editing team. The participants consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students from a variety of disciplines such as English (n=7), Communications (n=2), Law (n=2), Psychology (n=1), Science (n=2) and Postgraduate English students (n=2). The student editors were invited to complete two mixed method questionnaires prior to and post e-publication of a volume during each semester. Three teachers were also invited to participate in the research project and were recruited from the project's steering committee and Project Officers. The informants were selected for their industry experience and interest in teaching adult learners in the Creative Industries. Two interviewees had over 30 years of practicum and teaching experience in the creative arts arena and one teacher had over 10 years of practicum experience with less than two years teaching practice.

Student surveys

Thirty eight questionnaires were administered over a two year period in an informal setting that was completed either face to face or online. The project received ethics approval and the researcher obtained participants' consent (RA/4.1/4794). The first questionnaire was completed four weeks after the commencement of the WIL project. The second survey was completed one week post e-publication. The initial anonymous questionnaire comprised 10 set questions (see Table. 2). Questions one, two and three were multiple choice questions, questions four, five, six, seven, nine and ten were open ended questions. Questions eight and nine were quantitative data (closed questions) based on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, with a score of 4 indicating that the student believed the activity to be of a high benefit to their studies and beyond.

The second survey was completed four weeks after the project's objectives were met. The questions in the second survey focused on students' achievements and goals, the skills that they believed that they had demonstrated, and any new skills that they felt they had acquired during the WIL activity. It is important to note that questions seven, eight and nine presented in the second survey differed from the initial survey (see Table 2).

Table 2: The set questions prior to and post e-publication of a volume (2011 and 2012)

| Question | Pre e-publication | Post e-publication |
|----------|---|---|
| One | What is your gender? | What is your gender? |
| Two | What is your age range? | What is your age range? |
| Three | What are you studying (major and year of study)? | What are you studying (major and year of study)? |
| Four | What made you decide to take part in the project? | Do you feel you have achieved the goals that you set for yourself relating to this project for this year? |
| Five | What are some of the things you hope to achieve by being a part of this project? | Did this project enable you to use skills that you originally brought into it? |
| Six | Which skills do you believe you are able to bring to the project? For example: editing, grammar and spelling, teamwork, marketing/publicity, and are there any other skills not mentioned here? | Did you learn any new skills, or further develop your original skills? If so please outline. |
| Seven | Which skills do you believe you might need assistance with? Please explain: | How important do you believe that this project has been to your studies? |
| Eight | How important do you believe taking part in the project is to your current studies and why? | How important do you believe this project will be for you after you have completed your studies? |
| Nine | How important do you believe being a part of the project will be for you after you have completed your studies? | How has being a part of the project made you feel personally? |
| Ten | Any other comments, questions or feedback about the project so far? | Any other comments, questions or feedback about your experience regarding the project? |

Teacher interviews

The design of the teacher interview questions were influenced by the students' survey results. The three semi-structured interviews were administered using email communication with the researcher. The teachers were invited to reflect on various issues relating to the WIL environment. Teachers' prior experience and current perceptions about the WIL activity were also elicited. The online interviews delivered by email also invited participants to document their gender, age range and area of expertise as well to answer or elaborate on the following broad open ended questions:

- What types of "good" teaching skills do you think you need to have in order to be an effective WIL instructor?
- Do you think emotional intelligence is important when teaching in WIL environments, and if so, why?

- What are some of the things you do in order to engage the unengaged (or unmotivated) learner?
- How important is your own experience when teaching WIL activities?
- What are some of the things you do to ascertain if students have understood the content, ideas and practices you're delivering and/or discussing?
- What are your philosophies about assessment regarding WIL activities?

Data collection

The student survey data were coded using category names in order to “identify similarities in experience between participants”, while keeping in mind “the unique aspects of individual cases” (Walter et al, 2011, p. 419). The teachers’ semi-structured online interview via email communication was also coded and the findings were compared with the student survey data to ascertain any disparity or similarities. The students’ and teachers’ responses were re-examined post-coding in order to ascertain recurrent themes such as how the language discloses “levels of reflective thinking” (Orland-Barak, 2007). All data has been rendered anonymous, with disguising of other signifiers such as place (Christians, 2005). It is also important to note that due to the small number of informants (n=18), the researcher relied on a mixed method approach regarding data collection in view of engaging with “retrospective meaning making” from the participants’ responses (Chase, 2005; Kvale, 2007). The method style allowed for the exploration of relationships between categories, how categories fit within the research focus, and why certain themes emerged (Walter et al, 2011).

Results

The findings from the pre- and post surveys and the teachers’ semi structured interviews involved the grouping of the qualitative responses by theme, formulation of descriptive statistics as well as correlating the quantitative data. The following results sections showcase students’ overall perceptions of the WIL activity, their perceptions of the WIL activity to their current studies, their perceptions of the WIL activity to address graduate attributes and further areas for improvement. The result section that precedes the students’ perceptions, illustrates the teachers’ perceptions of the WIL activity, and focuses on communication, assessment as well as areas for improvement.

Students’ perceptions of the WIL activity

Students decided to participate in the WIL activity for a variety of reasons. For one, students believed that the project delivered opportunities to meet new people within a complex “working” situation that was team focused. Students also suggested that the project strengthened future career prospects. As one student wrote, “[taking part has] pushed me out of my comfort zone... the support and just being able to work together was such a big part of what made me join”; and “I intend to complete a master in publishing and editing... taking part... was giving me experience and testing to see if I enjoyed editing”. Students often noted the necessity for a “learning” challenge and believed that the WIL activity “presented an excellent opportunity as well as an amazing project that I was excited to be a part of”.

Students also mentioned positive feelings associated with being selected, such as “I am very happy to have been given the opportunity, especially to have been chosen from others who I thought appeared more qualified and experienced. I’m looking forward to the challenges”. Another student explained that taking part in the project was beneficial because, “[it] exists solely for the betterment of its student writers” and “it’s in a unique position to give extremely individualised attention.” Other students expressed similar thoughts by writing, “[it is] a teaching and learning experience that offered editing work that allowed formal training in editing and proof reading” because “editing is an extremely valuable skill to have”.

Overall, students rated the WIL experience highly, especially when they were able to work alongside other student editors who had similar interests and expectations. For example, “I wanted to meet others with similar goals while improve my language and writing skills and being exposed to other publishing techniques.” Alternatively, an international student expressed a desire to take part in the WIL activity due to connecting their university study with real world relevance, “I joined because I wanted more experience to equip me for the ‘real world’ and I know that learning in university should not simply be confined to the classrooms”.

Students’ perceptions of the WIL activity to current studies

When students were asked to rate the value of the WIL activity to their current studies, thirteen students said that it was important, two students said it was very important and one student said it was not important. The reasons varied, from students purposely desiring to align non-creative subjects alongside the WIL activity, to students acknowledging the benefits of incorporating a practical dimension to their studies. For example, one student wrote: “I feel it is important to be thinking about reading and writing in a creative sense, rather than just analysing and collating scientific data”. Another student suggested that “it gives me a new dimension to my studies” and “I think this program is a wonderful opportunity for students with a little initiative to step outside the theory of the classroom and into a practical application of their skills”.

The comment below reflects how one student perceived the program as allowing them a “well rounded” university experience:

... the... team has been great, giving me a well rounded experience, allowing me to try everything from public speaking to editing. I believe my university education has definitely been made more wholesome.

Whereas, another student expressed the importance of acquiring effective critical skills such as developing and learning how to provide professional constructive feedback:

... assistance with editing is important especially when reviewing someone else’s work and looking for the right thing to edit and then the process after that with giving constructive criticism because sometimes I can be quite blunt (as I’ve been told).

Other students recorded that the WIL activity assisted them to gain effective essay writing skills. Finally, another student explained that the WIL activity supported them to increase self confidence, “I have been away from the academic environment for a number of years and feel that the disadvantage of this is that I don’t always have the confidence in my own opinion”.

Students’ perception of relating the WIL activity to graduate attributes

When students were asked to rate how important the WIL activity was in addressing graduate attributes, eight students said it was very important with equal number saying it was important. Overall students commented on the worth of the WIL activity as a “gateway” into the workforce. For example, one student stated:

Being given the opportunity to review theatre and film has been a truly eye opening and education experience. I’ve never before critiqued with the aim of being published. With every completed review, I become that much more comfortable with the process. My first theatre review took 2 days and 8 hours and many emails before it was completed. My latest took only an hour plus editing.

And, another student said, “I desperately want a career in this industry [editing] and want to gain all the experience I can” and “I really appreciate that being a part of the project has opened up other opportunities such as judging virtual art competitions and developing funding proposals for [an international] Writers’ Festival”.

The below comment also illustrates students’ views about the various “doorways” that the WIL activity provided:

I am interested in working at a fashion publication and I believe that I need editing experience to be more attractive to potential employers. I wanted some practical experience that I feel is lacking in my theoretical studies.

One student noted the value of being involved in an authentic learning experience:

I’ve benefited from being under pressure to produce a [theatre and/or film] review under tighter deadlines that I’ve been used to. Also, I’ve benefited from having to think more deeply about the less obvious aspects of theatre informing my thoughts/opinions such as reviewing the sound design, something I wouldn’t normally concern myself with [sic].

Students’ perceptions about improvements

Students readily reflected on the WIL activity, giving advice on how the Project Officers might improve on the delivery of content. For example, one student noted:

I do wish that there was perhaps a bit more guidance at the beginning of semester, i.e. what makes a good editor... with a bit more steering in the ‘right’

direction the team would be even stronger. At this point, without a fully dedicated and keen editing team I don't see [the project] flourishing as well as it has.

Other students expressed the requirement for Project Officers to provide set lesson plans associated with improving student editing skills, or how to review theatre and film effectively. As one student suggested, "we need more of a scheduled set program of [theatre and film] reviewing" which might include "informal lessons on how to critique/review film/ theatre" such as "intensive editing courses". Another student pointed out that: "I honestly thought that there would be more work with industry professionals" and that they would be exposed to a range of creative pieces and not just primarily short stories and poetry.

Teachers' perceptions of the WIL activity

The teachers' qualitative data revealed the presence of three key themes. The first key theme that fits within the research topic relates to communication. The second theme is associated with the difficulties of assessment for the non-graded, group devised WIL activity. The last theme elaborates on the areas for improvement.

Communication

One teacher suggested that "being open minded and listening to ideas" helped students to understand that "the creative arts is a subjective art practice" and students' tastes "might not necessarily agree with my own perspective". However, the other two teachers explained that advising students at an early stage that the teacher is not the "last word on any subject", while being clear about expectations, "was slightly more important" than establishing what constituted "high art" and why. For example, one teacher noted that "students are often inwardly nervous about the task of wading into a new body of knowledge", therefore good communication skills are essential, "so that students feel that they can share the enterprise with the teacher and that everyone is going to give it a try."

Alternatively, one teacher believed that he/she could assist students to feel at ease and more engaged with the WIL activity by completing the following communication exercises: (i) provide written examples from professional writers and images from experts in the creative arts, (ii) discuss set editing topics in an imaginative way, and (iii) provide examples of student author art works. It was also important for this particular teacher to communicate realistic expectations and to continually compare his/her industry knowledge with other creative arts professionals, because it was crucial for ascertaining whether his/her practice was legitimate, "... if students do not agree with my ideas, I use my experience to show them where I'm coming from. I show them other creative artists' work so that they can make an informed decision". The same teacher further illustrated his/her method of communicating expectations effectively by writing:

We're a student journal. We're learning. We can't be perfect. People need to realise that... We started with bare bones first drafts [from students] that showed

a spark of talent and promise. We [the student editors and Project Officer] work with the authors and bring the writing up to scratch. It's the best that we can do. I'm proud of that. It's an opportunity that the [student] authors would not likely see so early in the professional world and I hope it helps them in the future.

Assessment

The way that one of the teachers discussed his/her assessment philosophy was essentially influenced from a practitioner-based approach, for example, "assessment [such as the completion of an e-published volume in the journal] is important because the publishing industry is highly competitive and demands are high"; and "it's always important to take into account individual tastes and ensure, through discussion that these tastes are coming from an informed background." On the other hand, a teacher expressed that assessment was, "important only when it gauges levels of learning"; and that "it is difficult to assess [levels of learning] in a non-graded, WIL activity which is team based".

One teacher also suggested that a "drawback" in the WIL activity's learning outcome was that it created problems with student editors' academic deadlines, which always became a priority, in direct competition to the WIL activity's assessment deadline. This teacher went on to explain, "there is no point in setting unrealistic assessment deadlines as this only increases everyone's stress levels" and "students and authors do not always check and answer their emails regularly, which is sometimes due to their inexperience of working in an editing environment, or because participating in the project does not equate to any credits".

Teachers' perceptions about improvement

One teacher expressed his/her concern about not being able to provide comprehensive editing information to student editors at the beginning of the WIL activity. This was mainly due to research commitments as a PhD candidate. The teacher also mentioned that there was a lack of intrinsic support from colleagues during her/his time as Project Officer. One recommendation that was made to combat this situation was to try and engage the student editors actively in the practice of editing past "rejected" submissions from student authors that had shown potential. However, due to the WIL activity not being an accredited program of study, learning objectives would always remain difficult to achieve. The following two excerpts illustrate this point further:

By the time we're ready to proof read the selected works the student editors and authors are doing exams and looking forward to semester holidays, and things are slowing down even more. And because no one is getting paid for this or getting credits, there is not much I can do but wait, unless I do it myself, but then it will no longer be a teaching and learning activity.

And:

If we could acquire more active steering committee members, I think this would solve the back and forth between student editors and steering committee

members and would save a lot of time and frustration and give the editing tuition that the students are looking for. At present there are not enough active steering committee members to do this as it would be too much work for one person to handle.

Discussion and conclusion

Slowly, WIL activities are becoming an important feature of the higher education landscape. This is mainly due to its long standing traditional place in professional education (Burns, 1995; Costley, Abukari & Little, 2008; Crespo & Dridi, 2007; Foskett, 2003; Rhodes & Shiel, 2007). Recently, there has also been considerable investment in expanding WIL in the higher education sector, beyond those programs in which it has traditionally featured (Abeysekera, 2006; Holt, Mackay, & Smith, 2004; Orrell, 2004). It is therefore imperative that adequate WIL support models are made available for students and staff, which is one of the main reasons for the present study.

It is important to note that this study was not intended as a prescription for all WIL curriculum designs, but rather as a stepping stone towards investigating and evaluating WIL activities within the creative arts arena. The findings here indicate that students commonly expressed excitement and enthusiasm towards the WIL project when teachers assisted student editors to partake in real world, editing and e-publishing experiences that were “complex and occurred outside the classroom environment” (Fitch, 2011; Herrington, Oliver & Reeves, 2003). Additionally, students’ personal enjoyment was rated high when working with other student editors who had similar interests and expectations.

The responses from teachers correlated with Harris & Willis’ (1993) and Grow’s (1991) studies, which advocated that teachers who demonstrate an honest and approachable manner will assist in establishing rapport, so that everyone can share in the industry-linked enterprise. In this study, one of the most important teaching methods was listening to students’ needs, while valuing the individual’s learning journey. Moreover, all three teachers rated “authentic communication” as an important teaching tool and used their industry knowledge to enhance student engagement. While assessment was noted by the experienced teachers as an important pedagogical task that illustrates student’s understandings of learning tasks, assessment was also seen as a complex situation in the non-graded WIL activity.

The results from the students’ and teachers’ responses pointed towards the necessity for embedding WIL pedagogy, policies and statements into the curricula. This process would be valuable so that students are aware that participating in the WIL activity will require less teacher control and more emphasis placed on students managing their own learning and educational goals. Additionally, by approaching the learning and teaching in this way, realistic expectations and the management of Project Officers’ workloads will become manageable. Furthermore, teachers’ responses showed that maintaining standards and ensuring high quality learning outcomes was a challenge when dealing with student editors. In order for the WIL activity to occur effectively in higher education as a “crucial means of preparing [students] for career” (Krause et al., 2005, p. 5), the project requires

further curricular alignment, program development and evaluation. Additionally, to increase students' involvement and sustain authentic industry links and professional editing and publishing situations, the teachers who have a "sophisticated understanding of the field but limited pedagogical understanding" require professional development (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009; McLennan & Keating; 2008, p. 4; Phillips, 2005; Tynjala, Valimaa, & Syarja, 2003).

As stressed in this article, the educational and practical benefits of providing WIL opportunities within the Creative Industries should not be underestimated. The presence of a WIL activity that students can access, no matter what discipline they are studying in, can provide a unique social platform and an engaging work-based learning environment. WIL activities, such as the one described in this paper, can help address graduate attributes and employability skills such as communication, ICT literacy and teamwork abilities. As Billett (2009) argues, WIL activities have the ability to, "construe, construct and engage" (p. 838) while creating "a complex set of experiences" that has the potential to develop students' professional capacities for the future (Grubb & Badway, 1998, p. 493).

Lastly, tertiary institutions have an obligation to design and provide authentic, work-based learning experience for all students and disciplines. WIL activities require effective pedagogical support in order to be valued more. This will then enable graduates the opportunity to compete effectively within a vast changing, shifting and competitive work environment where holding a degree is just the beginning.

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