DEFINING WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

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Introduction

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an inclusive term used to describe a range of related work-focused learning models. These learning models are similar in purpose, share common design components, and generate comparable learning outcomes; however, they are described using a wide range of individual terms. Of late, WIL has received increasing attention by curriculum developers and educational institution leaders, in part in response to increasing pressure on higher education institutions to better evidence direct links between higher education and employability outcomes and, at times, employment outcomes (Jackson, 2013; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). In response, many higher education institutions are introducing or expanding their WIL offerings as a way to evidence and strengthen the links between educational delivery and employability outcomes (Jackson, 2013, 2015; Jackson & Greenwood, 2015; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). Although discussion of the employability benefits of WIL has dominated the literature and curriculum designers’ thinking, WIL affords further benefits such as greater student self-awareness of their values and dispositions, confidence and self-efficacy, and community citizenship (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2011; Cox & Simpson, 2016; Drysdale & McBeath, 2014; Salter et al., 2021).

Broadly, WIL encompasses an educational approach whereby students engage in work-focused tasks, similar to those expected of working professionals (Ferns et al., 2014). These tasks may require students to be fully immersed in an organization for a set duration (e.g., work placements, cooperative education, internships, practicums, field placements) or be campus-based whilst completing tasks required by an external stakeholder (e.g., client reports, developing a product, consultancy projects, scoping projects, community-based projects) (Zegwaard et al., 2022). While WIL models vary considerably, a consistent defining element across all models is the involvement of an external stakeholder (e.g., employer, client, community) and engaging students in relevant, meaningful practice (Groenewald et al., 2011). The practice of WIL, the use of the term, and related research has mostly been higher education focused; however, it is not restricted to this sector (e.g., the practice of co-op at Canadian secondary schools; see Government of Ontario Canada, 2018). WIL is an academic field in its own right that overlaps with the fields of work-based learning, vocational education and training, and experiential learning/education (Helyer & Fleming, 2015). These respective fields...
draw from similar theoretical underpinnings, such as those developed by Dewey, Kolb, and Piaget, and some research literature from each of these fields are relevant to WIL.

The term ‘WIL’ is particularly useful as it groups together various work-focused educational models with similar intended outcomes that are described using different terms (Coll et al., 2009; Gardner & Bartkus, 2014). Patrick et al. (2008) provide particularly useful guidance on the use of the term as “an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum” (p. 44). This description is often cited as a definition; however, it was not intended to be a definition and is missing the elements of what defines WIL. Patrick et al. (2008) were the first to clearly state that the term encompasses a range of existing similar practices and helped embed the term ‘WIL’ into the literature as a ‘capture all’ (umbrella) term for grouping similar educational models. The umbrella term eliminated confusion around different practices using the same term, and the same practices using different terms (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011a).

To date, there is no single agreed definition of WIL; however, many authors have defined it for the purposes of their institution or program. It is our intent in this chapter to explore some of these definitions, describe the unique elements that define WIL as separate from other educational approaches, and present a definition that is inclusive of the diverse educative practices currently accepted as WIL.

**History of the term ‘work-integrated learning’**

In the literature, early reference to the term ‘WIL’ can be found in the late 1990s (e.g., Barrett et al., 1998; Coll, 1996; Jancauskas et al., 1999; Kvale, 1998; Sauter, 1999), including similar terms such as ‘integrated learning with work’ (Raelin, 1997) and also in relation to classroom task-focused learning rather than workplace-related tasks (Stuber, 1998). Prior to 1995, WACE evidently included the term ‘WIL’ within a vision statement, declaring that “by the year 2000, WACE will be viewed as a highly valued leader in enhancing work-integrated learning worldwide” (quoted by Bradford, 1995, p. 9; emphasis added). In 1999, the National Commission for Cooperative Education (NCCE), USA, also used the term “work-integrated learning” (Hutcheson, 1999, p. 1) within an executive summary report; however, they used the phrase ‘integrated learning’ without the word ‘work’ in the remainder of the report.

The practice regarded as WIL had existed under different terms prior to this time. For example, the Sandwich Education Plan was developed in 1903 (Sovilla & Varty, 2011), with forms of sandwich degrees perhaps being practiced as early as 1840 (Brewer, 1990). In 1906, Herman Schneider, at the University of Cincinnati, introduced the cooperative education program, acknowledging that integrating work with learning was a concept already practiced in legal and medical education and technical apprenticeships (Sovilla & Varty, 2011).

Over time authors have developed typologies (e.g., Fincher et al., 2004; Kaider et al., 2017; Rowe et al., 2012) and frameworks (e.g., Groenewald et al., 2011; McRae & Johnston, 2016) in an attempt to bring uniformity around the uses of terms within WIL. Kay et al. (2018) undertook an analysis of terms used to describe non-placement WIL practices and found natural groupings of: micro-placements; online projects or placements; hackathons, competitions, and events; incubators/startups; and consulting.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some authors used the term ‘WIL’ as a synonym for cooperative education (e.g., Coll, 1996), likely reflecting that many authors had a background in cooperative education and work placement programs and were less familiar with non-placement forms of WIL. However, the intended scope of the term was broader than the practice of cooperative education and work placement and included other forms of work-focused learning.
Defining work-integrated learning

models involving external stakeholders (Dean & Campbell, 2020; Dean et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020; Zegwaard et al., 2020). Until recently, research and scholarly discussion of WIL had been dominated by placement forms of WIL, whilst discussion of non-placement WIL had been mostly neglected within the literature (Jackson & Greenwood, 2015; Rowe, et al., 2022; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic created an immediate need to have diverse WIL offerings at higher educational institutions, initiating a focus on developing and researching non-placement forms of it (Dean et al., 2020; Kay et al., 2022; Zegwaard et al., 2020).

Definitions of work-integrated learning within the literature

Early discussions of WIL refer to the difficulties of defining it; for example, when needing to describe the term as part of the cost analysis of delivery (Sauter, 1999). Rowe (2017) echoes similar difficulties with defining the related term ‘experiential education.’ The difficulty, in part, of defining these terms is due to the significant variability of practices, the range of labels used, and the inconsistent use of these terms (Rowe et al., 2012; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011a), in addition to the range of different definitions developed to reflect disciplinary, institutional, local, and national contexts. Furthermore, national and international associations have also developed definitions for WIL relevant to their professional community’s interpretation of its application within their national context (e.g., see CEWIL, WILNZ, ACEN, WACE). These definitions commonly include locally preferred wording, institutionally branded terms, and good practice components deemed important for strategic purposes. Therefore, it has been preferable to focus on describing the practice rather than the term used (Peach & Gamble, 2011; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011a).

Authors have attempted to describe the defining elements of WIL as, for example, a discipline-centered curriculum that uses authentic engagement with practices in the workplace (Ferns et al., 2014), part of a course of study involving experience in a practice setting (Cooper et al., 2010), and integration of knowledge and practice with exposure to the world of work (Smith et al., 2014). The literature presents a number of definitions of WIL, a selection of which are presented in Table 3.1. The authors of these definitions did not intend to define WIL in its entirety, but rather to define it as practiced within their respective institution or program, or to describe the context as part of a research publication. However, it is useful to explore these definitions to determine common defining elements of WIL.

Table 3.1 Examples of definitions used to describe work-integrated learning within a context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s) and definition/description</th>
<th>Defining elements</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patrick et al. (2008, p. 44)</td>
<td>Integration of theory with practice of work, purposefully within the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billett (2009, p. v)</td>
<td>Learning from practice setting experiences, integration, professional understandings, and dispositions; being critical of practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIL refers to the process whereby</td>
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<tr>
<td>students come to learn from</td>
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<td>experiences in educational and</td>
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<td>practice settings and integrate the</td>
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<td>contributions of those experiences</td>
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<td>in developing the understandings,</td>
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<td>procedures and dispositions required</td>
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<td>for effective professional practice,</td>
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<td>including criticality.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Author(s) and definition/description</th>
<th>Defining elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coll et al. (2009, p. 14)</td>
<td>Linking on-campus learning with experience in the workplace, relevant to study direction, career focused, and in higher education context.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smith et al. (2009, p. 8)</td>
<td>Learning embedded within work, meaningful for the student, and for career development. Very broad as to where, when, and how; includes outside, before, and after student engagement with curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooper et al. (2010, p. xiii)</td>
<td>Mixing theory learning with practice learning and productive (meaningful) work, drawing on knowledge from other sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin et al. (2011, p. 7)</td>
<td>Structured learning experience, linking/bridging theoretical learning with workplace experiences; career and profession focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver (2015, p. 62)</td>
<td>Authentic tasks related to professional life, within or near a professional context, across different educational levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (2012, p. 247)</td>
<td>Curricular, time spent in a workplace setting (or similar), relevant to the degree and career direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sattler and Peters (2013, p. 13)</td>
<td>Educational activities, integration of on-campus learning with practical application in a workplace, relevant to student study or career focus, excludes shadowing, field trips, career mentoring/guidance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Defining work-integrated learning

The definitions in Table 3.1 present elements of the educative process that results in WIL; however, none capture its full scope. The defining elements can broadly be grouped into the following:

- Integrating (intersecting, bringing together, bridging, merging) theory with practice;
- (Purposefully) within the curriculum;
- Educational strategy (intentional focus on learning);
- (Some) time spent in, or with, the workplace or professional practice setting;
- Authenticity, or (the practice of) productive and meaningful work with/in a real-world workplace;
- Relevant to the study/degree and career goals/direction;
- Intentional (i.e., intentional tasks and intentionally within the curriculum);
- (Not clearly stated but consistently implied) external partner involvement with the work-focused tasks and the student learning.

Interestingly, inclusion of an external partner (e.g., workplace supervisor, mentor, client, host organization, community) is not specifically mentioned within any of the definitions in Table 3.1 (except for Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016); however, it is an implied underpinning element within each definition by way of the context of a workplace or a place of practice and authenticity of the tasks. Clear statements of the inclusion of the external partner are more common within definitions of cooperative education (a form of WIL) (Groenewald et al., 2011) and within the well-established WIL literature discussing the tripartite relationship of the student, the educational institution, and the employer/community (e.g., Braunstein et al., 2011; Coll et al., 2009; Ferns et al., 2022; Fleming, 2015; Ruskin & Bilous, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

More detailed discussion exploring the defining elements of different models of WIL (rather than WIL generally) within a Canadian context was undertaken by McRae and Johnston.
These authors presented two comprehensive tables describing different models of WIL, including the terms used to describe them and distinguishing elements; however, they did not offer a broad definition of WIL.

**Exploring the defining elements of work-integrated learning**

As outlined earlier, many localized definitions offered by authors in the literature have common themes highlighting the defining elements of WIL. The literature discussing quality dimensions and professional accreditation of WIL provides deeper insight into good practice around the defining elements (e.g., Campbell et al., 2019; Ferns et al., 2022; McRae et al., 2018; Orrell, 2011; Sachs et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2022; Winchester-Seeto, 2019). Recurring themes in the literature include WIL as an educational approach that embraces the involvement of an external stakeholder, the authenticity of the WIL experience (in reference to discipline, workplace, and tasks), meaningful activities, and is purposefully situated within the curriculum.

The defining elements identified earlier are not necessarily independent of each other, for example, ‘authenticity of the learning experience’ is connected both to ‘meaningful tasks’ and the ‘relevance to the study and career direction.’ For purposes of this chapter, some elements have been combined to create a list of defining elements of WIL to be considered within a definition:

- Integrating theory and practice;
- Intentionally within the curriculum;
- Authenticity of the learning context;
- Meaningful practice of work-focused tasks;
- Related to study, career direction, and citizenship;
- External partner involvement.

**Integrating theory and practice**

Perhaps one of the most widely reported purposes (and benefits) of WIL is that it provides students with the opportunity to apply theory to practice. That is, it allows students to link theoretical learning to the application of authentic work-focused tasks, requirements, and practices, where they can critique and challenge both the theory and practice. This integration of experiences between educational and practice settings helps students develop “the understandings, procedures, and dispositions required for effective professional practice” (Billett, 2009, p. v), thereby supporting their transition from student to practitioner.

The origins of this concept can be traced to early adult learning theories, namely John Dewey, who proposed that people learn from real life experiences through interacting with their environments. This general theoretical principle has been incorporated into various theories of experiential learning, for example, the work by Kolb and Schon, which underpins the theoretical bases of WIL.

Ideally, the integration of theory and practice in WIL should align both with industry requirements (Sachs et al., 2017) and educational institutions’ perceptions of the future of work. However, despite its importance, integration has not always been enacted in an intentional and systematic way, hence it is important that integration remains “an explicit learning objective supported by pedagogies that foster and measure it” (Rowe & Winchester-Seeto, 2022, p. 100). When effective, WIL aligns academic and industrial requirements, thereby acting as a ‘boundary spanner’ that can better prepare students for their chosen career direction (Asplund
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& Flening, 2022) and push students beyond the ‘traditional curriculum’ into unknown (and less safe) spaces that empower learning advancement.

Intentional within the curriculum

WIL is described as being intentionally within a qualification, that is WIL is either curricular or co-curricular but not extracurricular. WIL activities should be situated within the curriculum (curricular) or be a required component that sits alongside the curriculum (co-curricular) where the WIL requirement is an intentional part of the education program and central to student learning outcomes and graduate capabilities. Co-curricular WIL needs to be a required component of the curriculum (but not within the curriculum) and (ideally) includes assessment of the learning experiences with learning linkages to taught offerings. For example, it is common for accredited Bachelor of Engineering degrees to require compulsory work placement that sits alongside, rather than within, the degree structure (i.e., compulsory co-curricular requirements).

Curricular requirements include assurances that expected student learning outcomes are achieved along with a measure to confirm the learning progression. Therefore, WIL within the curriculum or as a co-curricular requirement must include assessment of student learning (Yorke, 2011). Ferns and Zegwaard (2014) describe assessment as the core of an educational institution’s responsibilities. A challenge for assessment in WIL is that student learning, which often occurs within a socially constructed context, happens across highly varied contexts (Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014; Garnett, 2012). Yorke (2011) refers to WIL assessments as “messy” (p. 121), as tasks are less defined and contained than a typical academic assignment that is dominated by measurement and marks.

Common assessment tools include reflective learning assignments, technical reports, work performance evaluation completed by the external partner, journaling, presentations, and portfolios (Ajjawi et al., 2022; Ferns & Bosco, 2014; Connaughton et al., 2014; Ferns & Comfort, 2014). Some educational institutions will have limitations on the maximum weighting of a single assessment item, thereby essentially setting a required minimum number of assessment items per WIL offering, creating the opportunity to select several different assessment tools. Assessments focused on technical aspects of the discipline are important (especially for technical subjects such as engineering and science); however, the highly situated and authentic nature of the WIL experience provides the opportunity to assess for difficult-to-teach aspects such as professional identity development, interpersonal skills, career clarification, and ability to reflectively self-assess.

Authenticity of the learning context

A recurring defining element in Table 3.1 is the authenticity of the student-learning context, an element regularly highlighted in the WIL literature (e.g., Orrell, 2011; Sachs et al., 2017). The learning context needs to reflect the context of authentic practice as expected for the relevant discipline of practice, where expected tasks are set by the external partner (employer, client, community) rather than the completion of an educational artifact for grading that are a preserve of the educational institution assessment system (e.g., essays and exams). The authenticity needs to include the linking of theory and knowledge to relevant practice and application, that is, the students are bridging the ‘academic world’ with the ‘real world’ (Martin et al., 2011).

The location of the authentic learning context may range from campus-based, home-based, to workplace-based. For work placement models of WIL (e.g., cooperative education
work terms, practicums, clinical field placements, and internships), the context of the learning environment has a high degree of authenticity by virtue of the students’ proximity to relevant practices through full immersion (Kaider et al., 2017). However, an authentic learning context does not require physical positioning in the workplace and instead may be generated by the authenticity of the tasks and interaction with (but not situated within) a site of actual practice, such as that for non-placement forms of WIL. Furthermore, within the context of the evolving modern workplace and the application of advanced technologies, the workplace may no longer be a physical location or a single location. Instead, the workplace may be an online environment accessed remotely from many locations (Kakihara & Sorensen, 2002), such as on campus (but with an external client) (Dean & Campbell, 2020; Dean et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2020), at home (Zegwaard et al., 2020), whilst on public transportation, different office locations, and from different countries.

### Meaningful practice of work-focused tasks

The activities that students undertake during WIL form a core part of the WIL learning experience and yet are not explicitly referenced in most of the definitions in Table 3.1. For two definitions, there is no notion of work responsibilities, rather reference to time spent in a workplace setting. Five of the definitions describe WIL as the connection between theory and practice and use a variety of phrases to describe either work or ‘practicing work’ including the practice of work, workplace learning, practical application, productive work, and real-world problems. The integration of theory and practice is a key feature of WIL as elaborated in the previous section; but in the exploration of what defines WIL, there is a need for further understanding of practice, that is: What is the work in work-integrated learning?

Research that explores students’ perceptions of WIL reveals that work is meaningful when it relates to their academic programs or career interests (Drewery & Pretti, 2021), when it contributes to tangible outcomes for an employer or external partner (Bean & Dawkins, 2022), or when the work is what would be typically expected for individuals of a given profession (Smith & Worsfold, 2015). This distinguishes it from relevant or authentic work that students might complete in their studies within a course where the impact of the completion of the work does not go beyond completion of the course.

The fact that WIL students undertake meaningful work has significant implications for WIL outcomes for both the student and the external organization. Meaningful work is associated with a number of student-related outcomes including the development of workplace competencies (Jackson et al., 2021), career clarity (Nevison et al., 2017; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011b), and satisfaction with the WIL placement (Drewery & Pretti, 2021). Engaging students in meaningful work has also been associated with important outcomes for the partner organization (see Chapter 25 in this Handbook) such as productivity (Pretti et al., 2020), innovation (Hodge & Smith, 2019), and the development of talent pipelines (Drewery et al., 2020).

It needs to be acknowledged that, within WIL, the very nature of authentic and purposeful tasks also directly implies risk for the student, the educational institution, and the external stakeholder. However, this risk is an important part of authenticity and meaningfulness for the student. These risks need to be carefully managed (Cameron & Orrell, 2022; Fleming & Hay, 2021) and institutions must accept that engaging with WIL requires some institutional risk-appetite; however, it is important that risk management of WIL does not reduce the authenticity, purposefulness, and meaningfulness of the tasks for students.

Student payment by the employer/client is common within some disciplines, especially work placements; however, student payment does not always occur. Whether students are paid
for their tasks or not is irrelevant to whether the activities are deemed as WIL. However, the literature has indicated that WIL experiences, especially work placements that include payment (e.g., hourly rate), change the nature of the relationship between the student and the employer and raise expectations of the outcomes and the motivations to achieve these outcomes, therefore enhancing the meaningfulness and authenticity of the WIL experience (Hoskyn et al., 2020; and Chapter 34).

**Related to study, career direction, and citizenship**

WIL is a student learning experience within (or alongside) the curriculum. As part of a qualification, the WIL experience and the tasks within should relate to the qualification’s expected graduate outcomes; that is, WIL needs to relate to the discipline of study and/or the relevant career direction. The extent of the relevance of the WIL experience to the discipline of study has been a point of debate among practitioners. Accredited qualifications (e.g., professional degrees) typically have specific accreditation requirements around the duration and the extent of the relevance of the WIL experience to the discipline (e.g., medicine, nursing, engineering, teaching). Non-accredited degrees tend to have greater flexibility around the context of the WIL experience, and some disciplines (e.g., the humanities and social sciences) lead to diverse career options and, therefore, diverse WIL contexts will be relevant to these disciplines.

Relevance of the WIL context to the study discipline is important; however, curricular designers and practitioners need to be cautious about how this relevancy requirement is applied. Much literature has been devoted to the transferability of skills from one context to another (Freudenberg et al., 2011; Martin & Rees, 2019a) and the need for T-shaped graduates with a broad base of boundary-crossing competencies (Gardner, 2017; Martin & Rees, 2019b), developed through diverse learning experiences that may be extended beyond their study discipline context (Bridges, 1993; Gibbs, 1994). For example, service-learning, a model of WIL that includes activities (often in a volunteering capacity) on community projects not necessarily directly related to the student’s discipline of study, has a strong focus on developing citizenship and awareness of community needs (Patrick et al., 2022; Valencia-Forrester et al., 2021), two elements arguably highly relevant for any discipline and career path. The development of citizenship is common, to some extent, across all WIL models, for example through enculturation into a community of practice, developing professional identity within a professional community, immersion into community work, awareness of social issues and responsibilities, socially and ethically aware critical thinking, international WIL experiences, or active and agentic engagement (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2011; Goldman & Stirling, 2020; Lucas, 2017; Salter et al., 2021; Trede, 2012; Zegwaard et al., 2017).

Furthermore, professional practice needs to be considered in its entirety, including supporting elements such as leadership, administration, documentation, planning, budgeting, and reporting. These supporting elements are core to the practice of the discipline, and therefore relevant as part of the overall WIL experience.

**External partner involvement**

A high-profile defining element of WIL is the inclusion of an external stakeholder. The external stakeholder can be identified by a range of terms, such as employer, client, host organization, community, governmental authorities, and professional bodies. Given WIL entails a blend of work or career-related practice and educational theory, the role of external partners in supporting students through real-world learning experiences is particularly important (Orrell,
The employability of graduates, important for economic productivity and sustainability, cannot be achieved by universities working in isolation from other stakeholders (Fleming et al., 2018). Partnerships with external stakeholders to ensure the currency and relevance of WIL learning experiences are essential for actuating WIL and for providing authentic student learning experiences that nurture appropriate workplace skills, awareness, and expertise (Ferns et al., 2019). Employers, industry personnel, community agencies, government representatives, and professional accreditation bodies are integral to successful WIL outcomes.

The roles and responsibilities of external stakeholders may vary across a broad spectrum of involvement. Co-designing curriculum and assessment ensures contemporary industry-focused and authentic learning experiences, and facilitates student agency (Ruskin & Bilous, 2022). In addition, industry practitioners are valuable mentors, and can provide meaningful feedback for students and role-model professional behaviors (Hodges et al., 2014). Feedback from diverse sources promotes student engagement and strengthens skill development, self-awareness, and self-efficacy (Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014). Furthermore, stakeholder collaboration establishes a shared vision, clarifies expectations, builds social capital, and broadens the perspective and capacity of stakeholders (Ferns et al., 2019). Partnerships based on trust and reciprocity facilitate “a shift from the instructional paradigm to the learning paradigm” (Evans-Greenwood et al., 2015, p. 20). Mutual benefits and tangible outcomes are pivotal components of stakeholder partnerships in WIL.

The level of involvement of the external stakeholder can vary from ongoing day-to-day (full immersion, work placements) through to only a few points of contact (e.g., non-placement WIL with a client where contact is only at the start and the end, entrepreneurships with limited industry mentoring). The external stakeholder’s input in the student experience can occur via a myriad of approaches including scoping and negotiating work-based problems, conducting workshops for students, providing feedback on proposed solutions, co-designing curricula and assessments, and providing feedback on student performance.

The external stakeholder can also be the educational institution itself. These institutions are large, complex entities with many activities and responsibilities beyond providing education to students (e.g., administrative functions, research activities, community events), that is, educational institutions ‘wear many hats.’ Educational institutions can offer WIL opportunities in areas outside the student’s typical, on-campus, learning activities, and engage the student in an experience where the institution is either an employer or client (i.e., wearing the ‘external stakeholder hat’).

Establishing a definition of work-integrated learning

The challenge of developing a definition of WIL is the tensions between what defines the ‘practice’ of WIL, the ‘good practice’ of WIL, and the ‘intentions’ of WIL. The focus here is to define the ‘practice of WIL,’ acknowledging that the intentions may, for a wide range of reasons, not always be fulfilled, and that defining ‘good practice in WIL’ is subject to separate scholarly discussion (e.g., Campbell et al., 2019; McRae et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2022; and Chapter 22) where what defines ‘good practice’ varies significantly depending on the context. As many educational institutions and authors have developed definitions to reflect elements of good practice, as well as defining features of their local context, it is, therefore, not surprising that the literature presents many varied definitions of WIL.

By incorporating common defining elements of what constitutes WIL from Table 3.1, along with the earlier exploration of the WIL literature, a broad definition of the practice of WIL
Defining work-integrated learning

Box 3.1 The definition of work-integrated learning and details of the defining elements

An educational approach involving three parties – the student, educational institution, and an external stakeholder – consisting of authentic work-focused experiences as an intentional component of the curriculum. Students learn through active engagement in purposeful work tasks, which enable the integration of theory with meaningful practice that is relevant to the students’ discipline of study and/or professional development:

- **An educational approach**: intentionally supports student learning through a range of practice models.
- **Involving three parties: the student, the educational institution, and an external stakeholder**: all three stakeholders are engaged in the experience, where the external stakeholder, or host organization, can be an employer, client, community organization, government agency, or an educational institution (where the educational institution is an employer or client).
- **Authentic work-focused experiences**: tasks undertaken by the student are related to activities expected at a place of practice (e.g., a workplace, a community, or remotely online with an external stakeholder).
- **Intentional component of the curriculum**: either curricular or co-curricular but not extracurricular. By definition of curricular and co-curricular, the student learning outcomes must be assessed.
- **Students learn**: there is an emphasis that the student, while engaging with the tasks, is learning through doing.
- **Active engagement in purposeful work tasks**: the student is an active participant (i.e., not an observer) within the context of the place of practice to which the tasks are intended to be purposefully applied.
- **Integration of theory with practice**: applying, critiquing, and forming opinions about principles, theories, and knowledge learnt through formal teaching to authentic practice.
- **Meaningful practice**: the tasks are work-based and relevant to the student and have relevant purpose for the external stakeholder, whereby the student engages with the tasks in a similar way to that expected of a working professional.
- **Relevant to the students’ discipline of study and/or professional development**: the experience supports and correlates to the student’s knowledge and skill development requirements as part of their study and/or career interests.

can be established (Box 3.1). This definition focuses on the defining elements of the practice of WIL (e.g., external stakeholder) rather than the intentions of WIL (e.g., employability outcomes). This definition includes defining elements that must be included for the practice to be WIL.

The intent of this definition is to capture current understanding about what constitutes WIL and to support developments in the WIL literature. It may also inform individual educational institutions, national associations, and countries in developing their own definitions using terminologies that reflect institutional, local, and national contexts, priorities, and values.
What is not work-integrated learning

Preparation for, and reflection on, work-integrated learning

Preparation for WIL and reflection during and after the WIL experience are an essential requirement for ensuring quality learning (Rowe & Winchester-Seeto, 2022; Smith et al., 2014). Student preparation for WIL is integral to successful student engagement and subsequent learning outcomes. However, preparation on its own is not WIL; instead, it is appropriate preparation of the student prior to engaging with WIL. This preparation may include health and safety and other relevant legal requirements (Cameron & Orrell, 2022); preparation for learning, for example, reflective learning (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2010); wellbeing (Drysdale et al., 2022); employer expectations (Fleming et al., 2018); ethical expectations (Campbell & Zegwaard, 2015); and other essential components such as self-regulation of learning (Zimmerman, 2009). Debriefing and reflection during and after the WIL experience enhances the learning gained from it and is an important component within quality WIL programs; however, the post-WIL debriefing and reflection is not WIL on its own, rather it is a learning activity that is a part of, or after the, WIL experience. Many institutions include preparation for WIL and post-WIL debriefing and reflection as part of the wider ‘WIL program,’ and often prescribe preparation for WIL as a compulsory activity.

Field trips

Field trips are a common practice-based educational strategy included in curricula that either involve students undertaking practical activities within an authentic context (e.g., geology students undertaking a field-mapping trip) or learning through the observation of activities in an authentic context (e.g., environmental engineering students visiting a wastewater treatment plant). Such activities are useful for enhancing student comprehension of complex principles within their discipline; however, these activities do not meet the defining WIL elements of ‘authentic and purposeful work-focused tasks,’ and external stakeholder involvement (if any) is usually limited to explaining workplace processes rather than engaging the student with active learning through work-focused tasks.

Case studies

Case studies are a useful approach for enabling knowledge development of an industry sector or a particular context. Many case studies do not actively engage an external stakeholder nor engage students in authentic and meaningful work tasks that are intended to be applied in a workplace or community setting. Therefore, it is best to see such studies as learning activities that may be ‘related to WIL’ but not WIL per se. It is important to distinguish between such case studies and models of non-placement WIL that at times are also labeled as case studies, for example, as student consultancy reports where the report was prepared for an external stakeholder (e.g., a client) around a real problem (authenticity) with the intent for the work to be applied in the workplace (e.g., meaningfulness).

Shadowing

Shadowing has been a controversial discussion topic among WIL practitioners where some institutions have included it as a high proximity and low authenticity form of WIL whilst
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Others see it outside of the scope of WIL. Shadowing provides students with useful learning experiences and draws from similar literature that informs WIL. However, the predominant practice of shadowing involves students following and observing (shadowing) an employee who is undertaking work activities in the workplace (Watts, 1996) without allowing the student to participate in the work in an authentic, meaningful, and purposeful way. Thus, shadowing may be useful preparation for WIL, contribute to the understanding of employability skills, and allow for the observation of authentic tasks; however, without students actively engaging in authentic, meaningful, and purposeful tasks, shadowing cannot be considered as WIL. There are sporadic mentions outside the literature of ‘enhanced shadowing experiences’ where, in addition to shadowing in the workplace, students are also engaged in some work activities. If these activities actively engage students in meaningful, authentic, and purposeful work-focused tasks, consideration should be given that these activities are perhaps a variant of the workplace model of WIL rather than shadowing.

Simulations without an external stakeholder

The inclusion of simulations within WIL has been actively debated by the WIL community, with some educational institutions including simulations as a form of WIL. Simulations can be virtual learning experiences, such as online activities using virtual reality around a common workplace scenery (e.g., flight simulations, police training of armed confrontations), engaging with work-related tasks with a virtual, computer generated ‘employer,’ or artificial non-virtual settings that mimic a real setting (e.g., role-play, nurse and doctor training) (Chernikova et al., 2020). Such simulations provide insightful learning experiences for students; however, depending on the nature of the simulation design, they may not be WIL (Wood et al., 2020).

Simulations were subject to discussion by Wood et al. (2020), who delineated them as a model of WIL from the practice of simulations that are not WIL. Here the relevant defining element of WIL is the inclusion of an external partners or lack thereof. An example of simulations as WIL is where a real (authentic) external stakeholder has direct input into the student’s work activities and where the work activities will be meaningful for the external stakeholder (e.g., where student work is intended to refine the workplace practice). However, simulations that do not include direct input from an external stakeholder are learning activities that do not include one of the defining elements of WIL. However, it is not uncommon to include such simulations in a WIL program as part of preparing students before they engage with WIL (see, e.g., Carmody et al., 2020). It is likely that further technological advances in virtual reality will inform continued debate around whether high-quality simulations should be seen as a model of WIL.

Extracurricular work experience

Extracurricular experiences encompass a diverse range of experiences outside the curricular requirements that may or may not in part be arranged by the educational institution whereby students voluntarily engage with a range of activities such as sport, interests, clubs, community volunteering, through to part-time work. By definition, what is extracurricular is not situated within the curriculum. Extracurricular experiences have been shown to benefit student development of interpersonal skills and study commitment (Feldman, 2005). Workplace-based extracurricular experiences, especially when relevant to the student’s study direction, can be informative learning opportunities that may inform his or her future actions and choices; however, as such experiences are outside the curriculum, there is no requirement to assess
the student learning progression and outcomes. It is, however, not unusual for educational institutions to legitimize extracurricular experiences as WIL by, for example, shifting these experiences into a WIL offering (i.e., reforming extracurricular experiences as curricular experiences). Similarly, educational institutions have pathways that allow prior work experiences (before attending the institution) to be recognized as meeting WIL learning outcome requirements through Recognition of Prior Learning credits. Such recognition of prior learning would require appropriate evidence that the WIL learning outcomes have been satisfactorily met.

**Conclusion**

As WIL continues to expand and evolve across the higher education sector, it is important to articulate what the practice of WIL is, allowing for subsequent discussions around intentions and good practice. It is important to acknowledge that defining the practice of WIL is a separate, albeit related, discussion from defining ‘good practice’ of WIL and describing the intentions of WIL (e.g., employability outcomes, citizenship). The definition of the practice of WIL presented in this chapter is offered to help clarify the outer realms of the field of WIL and inform the WIL literature as it further explores and develops elements of good practice and quality.

The definition identifies WIL as a curriculum-based educational approach including multiple models, involving three parties (educational institution, the student, and an external stakeholder), and where the student is both a learner and a worker. This definition will assist educational institutions and national associations in developing their own definitions to suit their specific strategic directions and contexts. As the scholarly understanding of the practice of WIL continues to advance, the contexts where WIL is applied continue to develop, and local and international circumstances continue to change, so our understandings of what defines the practice of WIL may also evolve and adapt. It is, therefore, important to see defining the practice of WIL as an ongoing discussion.

As research and development improves the practice of WIL, the learning approach will continue to provide students with transformational learning opportunities where benefits gained will impact students’ immediate and long-term career choices and the workplaces where they seek out their careers. It is our hope that this chapter will inspire further development, refinement, and research in the field of WIL.

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**Notes**

1 WACE: The international association for WIL, formerly an acronym for the World Association of Co-operative Education, now operating as the World Association for Co-operative and Work-Integrated Education, retaining WACE as the formal short version of the name.
2 CEWIL: Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada.
4 ACEN: Australian Collaborative Education Network.
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