Chapter 11
Practices and Perspectives of First–Year WIL Activities:
A Case Study of Primary Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences are in demand as higher education (HE) institutions endeavour to develop profession-ready graduates. However, Generation Z has reported a lack of preparedness and uncertainty entering the workforce. Designing WIL experiences across a degree engages these students in meaningful opportunities to apply theory to practice. Despite the support of degree-wide approaches, little is known about the prevalence of WIL opportunities within the first year of tertiary study. This chapter reports the findings from 10 interviews with first-year subject coordinators in the Bachelor of Primary Education (BPrimEd) degree, gaining insight into subject coordinators' roles and their perceived purpose of WIL in the first year of HE. Findings suggest subject coordinators recognise the value of and use WIL activities, yet a number of internal and external constraints also limit embedding WIL within first-year curricula. The research in this chapter is student-led and includes reflective insights from the lead student author.

INTRODUCTION

The first year of tertiary studies is a crucial time for students as they learn a range of new practices that enable them to study and pursue a discipline or profession of interest (Kift, 2009; van Rooij et al., 2018). The function of this transitionary time however, in relation to providing both a successful transition into university as well as an orientation to the profession, is under-developed. For the most part, undergraduate students pursuing tertiary education fall into the category of Generation Y and Z (Gen Y, Gen Z). Specifically, first year undergraduate students are more likely to be in Gen Z, those who have recently left high school studies and are born between the years of 1996 and 2012 (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018). In important studies focussing on Gen Z's transition, they often report that they leave university feeling unprepared for the real world (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

Engaging students with practice-based activities within curriculum can support preparing Gen Z students for the workplace. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a pedagogical approach engaging students in authentic work experiences with industry or community. Recent literature points to the need for WIL experiences across a degree program, and not just in the final year, to provide students with a variety of opportunities for relating content to practice and for contemplation of future career possibilities (Dean et al., 2020). Given the significance of the first year of study and arguments to develop WIL across a degree, it is surprising that little work has unpacked practices and perspectives of WIL in the first year. The purpose of this study was to explore insights into WIL from first year coordinators as well as the extent to which WIL activities were employed in the first year of study.

In order to examine the utility of embedding WIL into first year, this study set out to examine the practices and perspectives of first year subject coordinators, those who design first year curriculum in HE. The study examined WIL practices through an existing conceptual framework that ascribes various types of WIL activities across specific years of a four-year degree program. Kaider et al.'s (2017) authentic WIL activities framework designates types of WIL into one of three categories: Introductory WIL, 2nd & 3rd Year WIL, and WIL Placements. This framework is the lens to examine first year WIL practices in a single case study, a four-year Primary Education degree at the University of X. In Australia, the Bachelor of Primary Education (BPrimEd) degree is a vocationally oriented degree, meaning that there are mandatory professional WIL components in the form of both placement and non-placement WIL (see Dean et al., 2020) tied to accreditation. Full time students complete four six-point credit subjects per semester resulting in a total of 192 credit points at the end of the four-year degree. This degree offers an interesting case study where course design is the responsibility of individual subject coordinators while also governed by internal administration and external regulating bodies.

The chapter presents part of a larger Honours project, a partially autoethnographic study undertaken by a fourth year student. This research places value on WIL and first year experiences, as was lived through by the chief researcher who was a student and part of Gen Z. To centralise the Gen Y and Z student voice, this chapter opens and closes with reflections by the first author as she narrates her HE experiences, and articulates the motivation and urgency for this research.

FROM A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE: PREFACE

On a personal level, this study has great relevance to my own journey. Over the last four years, I have had an ultimate goal of emerging into the workforce as a highly skilled, compassionate and enthusiastic

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