

# Work-integrated learning as a landscape of practice

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This article proposes that work-integrated learning (WIL) is a Landscape of Practice (LoP) within the wider higher education ecosystem. It applies concepts from the LoP literature to present a new perspective on WIL programs and ecosystems. It further emphasizes that students are central within the WIL LoP, developing knowledge as they traverse individual communities including industry partners, professional accrediting bodies, careers services, academics, curriculum, and support staff connected to WIL. Additionally, the article highlights the role of higher education institutions in addressing tensions of difference between communities comprising the WIL LoP. The article contributes to the literature on WIL and higher education by conceptualizing WIL as a LoP, revealing a new understanding of how various communities support student development through WIL. It also offers higher education institutions practical implications for developing and maintaining student-centered communities of practice that constitute a supportive WIL LoP.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, landscape of practice, community of practice, student development, boundary crossing, community engagement

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This article proposes that work-integrated learning (WIL) is a Landscape of Practice (LoP) within the wider higher education (HE) ecosystem. A LoP is a dynamic collection of Communities of Practice (CoP) with “shared practices, boundaries, peripheries, overlaps, connections, and encounters” (Wenger, 1998, p. 130). Constituent CoPs are defined by an internal structure, common purpose, and members who regularly interact and share practice and knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) assert LoPs are characterized by common principles, such as underpinning policies and regulation; bounded communities where boundaries are learning assets that create new knowledge and invoke different responses when crossed (e.g., collaboration or conflict); and all practice within communities being important and bringing meaning to the LoP, albeit influencing and informing other practice in varying ways and to different extents.

Individuals (e.g., students) traverse within and across communities in the LoP, developing knowledge and a sense of professional self through experiencing and reflecting on boundary encounters, relationships and community practices and competence, affording a “social perspective on professional learning” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014), p. 13). Accordingly, Jackson (2016) proposed HE is a LoP whereby students negotiate, engage, and enculturate themselves in diverse, interacting communities such as industry bodies, employers, career services, student support, curriculum, and student societies to develop aspects of their employability. Soltani and Zegwaard (2024) also adopted a LoP lens to explore identity construction and capability development among HE students while Soltani and Donald (2024) purported that students can build career agency and personal capital resources through participating in these various communities as they navigate the HE LoP.

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This article considers how WIL aligns with Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) foundational LoP principles and the communities inherent to the WIL LoP. It emphasizes students' central role as they enact personal agency and mobilize capital resources to negotiate their positions in different communities while securing, preparing for, engaging in, reflecting on, and optimizing WIL experiences. Additionally, the article acknowledges the 'tensions of difference' that can exist across a LoP's diverse communities (Wenger, 1998) and highlights the role of HE institutions in creating and facilitating accessible and inclusive communities to enable positive WIL experiences and outcomes. Accordingly, this paper aims to: (i) rationalize a WIL LoP in the HE context; (ii) explain students' roles within the WIL LoP; and (iii) explore how HE institutions can support a WIL LoP.

While there is a rich array of WIL activities, and students' navigation of the WIL LoP may vary with the type of WIL they are engaged in, we focus on the student's journey during work placement experiences, such as field placements, practicum, internships and cooperative education. Their immersed nature requires greater engagement in and across communities compared to less intensive forms of WIL, such as client projects and consulting that often take place virtually or on campus and with less partner contact, governance, and recruitment requirements. Even when institutions provide support in sourcing suitable opportunities, whether a work placement experience occurs may be contingent on the partner assessment of student suitability (e.g., in an interview) and them allowing the student to negotiate entry into their community.

The article contributes to literature in several ways. First, it considers the novel application of a LoP to the WIL context, exploring the nature and type of constituent communities and students' boundary encounters and learning trajectories across the landscape. Second, it advances knowledge on the role of graduate capitals (e.g., Tomlinson, 2017) by illuminating how these resources are mobilized as students' navigate the communities in the WIL LoP and their role as potential enablers or inhibitors of community engagement. Third, it develops understanding of how personal agency may contribute to engagement with communities and lead to positive WIL learning experiences. Finally, this article serves to identify potential ways that HE institutions can initiate and sustain inclusive WIL-related communities and support all students' learning journey across the WIL LoP.

The article first explores the conceptual foundations of LoP, followed by the notion of WIL as a LoP, clarifying the relevant communities and their interrelationships. Next it considers how WIL students engage with communities and traverse the landscape, including the influence of agency, demographics, and personal capital resources. Following this is discussion of strategies for HE to support WIL students' learning trajectory.

## CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

LoPs are defined by their entirety of communities, practices, boundaries, and interrelationships, and may be considered "a living and emerging body of knowledge" (Pyrko et al., 2019, p. 485). The constituent CoPs are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, in the HE LoP, for example, CoPs include academics, learning support staff, graduate employers, professional accrediting bodies, and industry associations (Jackson, 2016). Wenger posits that communities are characterized by:

- common purpose, interest, commitment, and competence;
- active sharing and support among members; and

- shared practice that can potentially produce case studies, resources, and/or tools for development purposes.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) explain that membership of an individual community is determined by a shared perception of competence where newcomers typically align their personal experiences to the 'regime of competence' in the community. Accordingly, and using the example of a work-based community, Soltani and Zegwaard (2024) purport that "those new to a workplace community need to master the regime of competence in that community in order to be regarded as a legitimate member" (p. 613). The knowledge and practice inherent to a CoP can, however, be contested by newcomers or existing members meaning perceived competence is dynamic and may shift with new knowledge and experiences, meaning members must actively engage with changing practices and the evolving regime of competence (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014).

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) note how LoPs evolve as communities come and go, merge, and compete. The LoP's dynamism is likely amplified by globalization and new technology that affords easier connections across communities. With respect to how communities interact, Pyrko et al. (2019) explain "different CoPs may interact, depend on, and be accountable to one another's practice-based knowing, rather than relying exclusively on their own, local situated practices" (p. 483) while (Pyrko et al., 2017) illuminate how communities 'think together' to develop deep, tacit knowledge on their shared interest. It is a shared practice that defines the LoP. In the HE LoP, Soltani and Zegwaard (2024) describe this as a "unifying space bringing individuals including students together across the landscape" (p. 605), and that encompasses what students know and should be able to do.

Individuals' navigation of LoPs is complex and involves working across the boundaries of interconnecting communities, described by Soltani and Zegwaard (2024) as "sites of struggle and power relations" (p. 613). Pyrko et al. (2019) highlight how members must go through 'acts of transformation' as they absorb and adjust another community's knowledge as they apply it to their own context. Demonstrating competence is important when negotiating boundaries (Nottingham & Mao, 2023) and may lead to members feeling marginalized or welcomed in their efforts at boundary crossing (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). The latter authors assert how their learning journey across communities and their boundaries means they socially construct knowledge relevant to the profession and become socialized into different practices and competence, albeit to different extents. The learner's journey across the LoP involves questioning and reflecting their professional self, enacting identity formation, and shaping who they become (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). This is a challenging process as individuals reconcile their multiple memberships with communities, often creating tension and conflict, but also developing resilience and a greater understanding of themselves (Fenton-O'Creevy, Dimitriadis, & Scobie, 2014).

## WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING AS A LANDSCAPE OF PRACTICE

### *Premise of a Landscape of Practice*

WIL aligns with Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) foundational principles for LoPs. Some aspects of WIL (particularly work placement activities) are governed by regulation and policy, such as guidelines issued by Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (2022) and Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance. Some may specify requirements related to particular groups, such as the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities' requirements for reporting of Indigenous student support structures and learning outcomes. WIL is characterized by a rich array of diverse practice within and across degrees, institutions, regions, and countries globally

(Groenewald et al., 2011; McRae & Johnston, 2016; Rowe et al., 2012; Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). Local practice is widely shared through online resources, events, and professional learning, often facilitated by a network of active national WIL associations and a unifying world association that several developed countries belong to (Kay et al., 2023). There is a growing body of scholarship that explores and showcases pedagogy, governance, and partnerships related to prominent WIL practice (e.g., Ademuyiwa et al., 2024; Josefsson et al., 2024; Rafiq et al., 2024), informing and influencing new practice in different ways. WIL encompasses several CoPs separated by boundaries but interact and engage with each other during the different stages of WIL, often classified as ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ (Campbell & Pretti, 2023; Campbell et al., 2019; Ferns et al., 2024). There are also clear boundaries between these constituent communities and crossing these evokes learning and new knowledge and can be characterized by tension and collaboration, as described in the following section. In their learning journey, WIL students may attempt to transcend the boundary of several communities, seeking peripheral or deeper engagement with members (Soltani & Donald, 2024).

Aligned with this notion of a WIL LoP, WIL has been previously described as an ecosystem where students are viewed as more than individual learners; rather, they are considered to be agents and co-creators within the ecosystem (McRae & Woodside, 2023). WIL has also been described as the intersection and interaction of academia, students, and industry communities (Fenton-O’Creery, Brigham, et al., 2014), a bridge between the academic present and the professional future (Martin et al., 2011), a system of intersection and engagement of theoretical and practice learning that bring together formal learning and productive work (Cooper et al., 2010), a tripartite interaction (Ruskin & Bilous, 2020), and a nodal network of interactions mediated by the student across different stakeholders (Fleming, 2014).

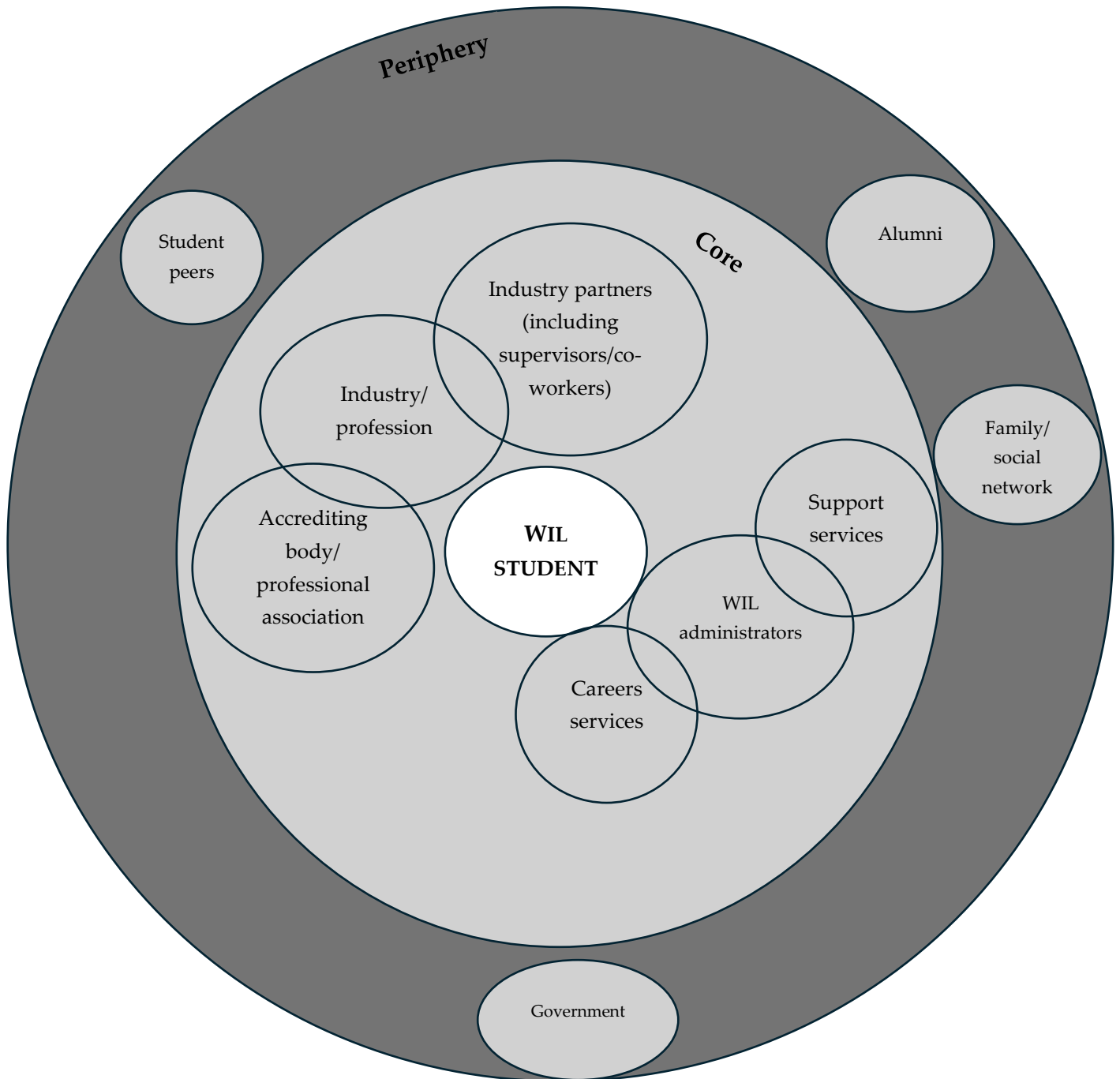
#### *Constituent Communities and their Interactions*

Within a WIL LoP, multiple constituent communities contribute to successful WIL experiences. The communities have a shared perception of competence, albeit dynamic and shifting with new knowledge and experiences, which members align and actively engage with. These include communities of students, industry partners, groups of staff, and, perhaps more peripherally, governments that support WIL ecosystems. Each community influences WIL students’ development. Centrally, WIL students themselves are active participants in the LoP, navigating the complexities of learning in professional contexts and bringing their academic knowledge into real-world practices. WIL students vary in terms of disciplinary background, level of study, and lived experience, including having different equity needs. Their unique perspectives and developmental stages shape how they engage with the WIL LoP’s constituent communities, and how and what they benefit from WIL experiences.

Figure 1 depicts examples of CoPs within a WIL LoP. Communities may feature in the periphery (outer dark circle) or core (inner pale circle) parts of the LoP. This subjective distinction denotes the anticipated role of the different communities and may vary depending on the structure and approach of the placement-based WIL program. The industry partner is a key community, its staff engaging with students as facilitators of activities (e.g., human resource practitioners), supervisors, and co-workers. Partners range from small community-based organizations to large corporations that participate in WIL to access support on projects and shape the education of future professionals (Aprile et al., 2023). Industry partner characteristics such as size and support for learning influence student outcomes in WIL (Fleming & Pretti, 2019). Supervisors working within partner organizations are a subcommunity central to the WIL LoP. They play a critical role in shaping the WIL experience, acting as mentors,

coaches, and guides to students, and their responsibilities often extend beyond task supervision. They serve as boundary-crossing agents, socializing students into various other communities (Fleming et al., 2021; Nottingham & Mao, 2023). Further, when industry partners come together as industry bodies or professional associations, they can affect students by brokering work placement learning opportunities, advocating for the inclusion of students in professional settings, and facilitating access to networking and development events (Jackson, 2017).

FIGURE 1: Examples of community of practice within the WIL landscape of practice.



CoPs closely tied to HE institutions are also essential constituents of the WIL LoP. Curriculum developers and academic staff help students navigate tensions between classroom theories and practical problems. For example, they help to bring theory and practice into alignment through assessment (Ajjawi et al., 2020, 2022), ensuring students are evaluated on their authentic work. Career services staff prepare students for WIL through coaching and advising on application materials and recruitment strategies. Various other WIL staff manage administrative processes ranging from, for example, risk assessment to job applications. These staff enable students to connect with industry. Support services may cover a range of centralized or faculty-based functions designed to support students before, during, and after placement-based WIL, including matters related to access and inclusion, such as dedicated units supporting Indigenous students or students with disabilities.

Alumni also serve as a CoP within the WIL LoP. Alumni can provide WIL opportunities to students who are undertaking studies in the same degree the alumni had completed as a way of ‘giving back’ to the profession (Fleming & Hickey, 2013; Martin et al., 2019), linking their past WIL experiences to future WIL opportunities. These alumni draw from their own experiences and the benefits they gained as a student undertaking a WIL experience to shape their supervision style and approach when supervising a WIL student (Martin et al., 2019). This in turn provides opportunities to develop staff’s management and leadership skills within the workplace through engaging with WIL (Hardie et al., 2018).

Important but often overlooked stakeholders in the WIL LoP include governments and professional accrediting bodies (Ferns & Arsenault, 2023). Government is both a key funder of HE and creator of legislations that govern how a WIL LoP operates, for example, through quality standards frameworks, fair work regulations, and workplace health and safety requirements and responsibilities (Cameron, 2013, 2018; Cameron & Orrell, 2022). Whilst professional accrediting bodies (e.g., engineering associations, nursing councils, teacher education authorities) can improve collaborations between different CoPs within the WIL LoP (Ferns, 2018; Ferns et al., 2022; PhillipsKPA, 2017), they also control access to part of a WIL LoP through “policing the boundaries of the profession and regulating entry into it” (Stokes, 2016, p. 45) through, for example, degree accreditation requirements and professional registration.

These communities have experienced and shared new knowledge and practice related to different aspects of WIL, collectively creating a dynamic regime of competence that is integral to LoPs. There is some evidence of collective thinking (Pyrko et al., 2017), with industry and WIL academia collaborating on initiatives and demonstrating unified approaches and perspectives, such as establishing brokering arrangements for work placement opportunities (Jackson, Ferns, et al., 2017); the development of national strategies that define key priorities and stakeholder responsibilities in WIL (Australian Collaborative Education Network [ACEN], 2015); and the co-creation of research outputs, professional development resources and principles of quality practice (Campbell & Pretti, 2023; Campbell et al., 2019; McRae et al., 2021; WACE, 2024). There is, however, the potential for more ‘thinking together’ across the communities. For instance, students report needing better access to WIL programs (Jackson et al., 2025; Mackaway et al., 2024) and improved support from their host organizations (Drewery et al., 2025); organizations experience difficulties accessing WIL (Jackson, Rowbottom, et al., 2017); and there is a need for more constructive engagement with professional accrediting bodies and government (Ferns et al., 2022).

Importantly, this network of communities is dynamic, fluid, and somewhat subjective. CoPs themselves change over time as members turn over, norms evolve, and practices change. Relationships

between CoPs also evolve, sometimes strengthening and other times dissolving. For instance, CoPs may initially operate independently but may, over time, recognize common challenges or interests. As an example, CoPs involving teachers and public health officers have aligned efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversely, changes in both internal and external conditions could lead CoPs to drift apart. For instance, changes in leadership could create divergence in community goals, weakening network ties in a LoP. These changes in relationships between CoPs could affect how students are exposed to different professions. Links between CoPs may act like conduits for students to traverse a LoP, thereby accessing new opportunities for learning. Carrying on the example above, a teacher education student on placement could benefit from jointly working with teachers and public health officers, potentially learning about both sectors and professions. A further example could be how WIL-related CoPs have evolved to include online engagement and short-term membership through projects Nottingham and Mao (2023).

### *Theoretical Underpinnings*

Several theories explain how interactions between individuals in a CoP within a LoP contribute to student development. Such theories include reflective learning and practice (Schon, 1983), learning through doing (Dewey, 1938; Gibbs, 1988), building of knowledge through scaffolded experiences (Piaget, 1985), the experiential nature of learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984), and transformative learning through new experiences and dilemmas (Mezirow, 1991). Theorists have expanded further to explore the social nature of learning within and across CoPs, including how CoP members interact and how CoPs engage with other communities within the LoP. Examples include early works by Lave and Wenger (1991) on situated learning and how, through legitimate participation, a learner is enculturated into a CoP. The subsequent expanded work by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) explains how a collection of CoPs can form a LoP.

Further theories helpful for understanding interactions within a LoP include socio-culturalism thinking (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Engestrom, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978) that further highlights the social nature of learning, organizational theory (Senge, 2006; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) that recognizes that sense-making and socialization occur within organizational structures, and that recognition of power structures and inequities within social structures and organizations (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2020). Although these theories do not determine how a WIL LoP would or could operate, they do provide frameworks for deeper understanding of how students might navigate the WIL LoP.

## STUDENT NAVIGATION OF THE WIL LANDSCAPE OF PRACTICE

### *Community Engagement*

As the placement-based WIL student journeys through the LoP, they engage with and reflect on boundaries, people, practices, and competence in and across multiple communities, building knowledge on professional culture and ways-of-doing, as well as the broader WIL ecosystem. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2014) identify three modes of identification in the landscape, the first where students practically *engage* with communities through ‘doing’ tasks. Noting the different stages of placement-based WIL (before, during, after), this could be creating recruitment documentation with careers services to source a work-placement opportunity, generating project outputs from agreed-upon deliverables in the workplace, or creating a portfolio of artefacts evidencing their work. Second, individuals *imagine* themselves in the landscape. This could mean a WIL student envisioning themselves as a graduate in industry, triggered by reflective activities that encourage them to connect their work placement learning with future career goals and their ‘place in the profession’. Finally, they

*align* with the profession through following instruction and adhering to accepted codes of conduct. This resonates with Jackson's (2017) discussion on WIL students' progression through the stages of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2007) with students initially following the cues and behaviors of external others while they learn how to behave in the workplace.

Individuals are likely to engage differently with each community in the LoP, deeply immersing themselves in some and experiencing more peripheral connections with others (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). Accordingly, Fletcher (2023) asserts that some placement-based WIL experiences "simply involve a student's temporary 'attachment' to an external, formal organization, which provides certain insights into operations or professions', whilst others reflect true immersion in a CoP where students share goals and interests with members, facilitating learning and development" (p. 1341). Further, a student may be deeply connected with one community yet may struggle to negotiate entry into another. Pyrko et al. (2019) noted that "core membership is more likely to comprise old-timers, more regular members while at the CoP's periphery there are various types of members who either aspire to full membership, or for whom less involved participation is sufficient" (p. 484).

Recognizing that engagement in a community can vary (Wenger, 1998), Fenton-O'Creevy, Brigham, et al. (2014) identified four types of engagement. Each of these engagements relate to whether individuals imagined themselves in the community or envisioned they were just passing through (*imagined trajectory*) and the extent to that they took part in community practices (*participation*). Those imagining themselves as passing through but with low levels of participation were classed as 'tourists' compared to those also passing through but with high participation, termed as 'sojourners'. Students who anticipated full immersion into the community yet engaged little were classed as 'marginal' while 'apprentice' described those with high participation levels.

#### *Reconciliation of Multiple Community Membership*

Fenton-O'Creevy, Dimitriadis, and Scobie (2014) emphasized the challenges individuals can experience when reconciling their different identities from belonging to multiple communities. They drew on examples where transition across the academy-industry boundaries was challenged by disparities between academic theory and workplace practice. Accordingly, Fletcher (2023) emphasized the need for WIL students to question and critically reflect on practice to help balance their dual roles of student learner (as a member of their institution's CoP) and as a worker accruing experience and strengthening knowledge through tasks and projects in their partner community. Kubiak, Cameron, et al. (2014) assert that individuals must reconcile these conflicting demands of different communities within a LoP, potentially deciding to adjust, challenge and negotiate, or exit a particular community to achieve balance across their multiple memberships. Potentially, one might also consider the extent to that individuals can become comfortable in adopting alternative personas within the communities, attuning themselves to successfully wearing 'different hats' depending on the context of their engagement in the LoP.

#### *Boundary Negotiation and Immersion*

Negotiating boundaries can elicit strong emotions, may challenge investment in community engagement and may result in experiences of conflict and failure (Fenton-O'Creevy, Brigham, et al. (2014). During this process, students may question whether their competencies learned in different settings (e.g., classroom or earlier work experience) can be translated into their partner's workplace. They may ask "Does the meaning I make of my practice translate into this setting? Can I make sense of what is going on around me? Do my habitual ways of relating to other people work here?" (p. 33).

In their study on intersections of a discipline-related HE community, workplace and the HE institution, Fenton-O'Creevy, Dimitriadis, and Scobie (2014) found that although students developed resilience through boundary learning, the crossing and re-crossing of boundaries evoked tension, stress, and ambiguity and required juggling identities (e.g., student, worker, peer) and managing community member expectations (e.g., asserting their student identity rather than being an employee in the workplace).

Boundary encounters may be considered akin to the crossroad moments experienced during development phases of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2007). These are situations of ambiguity and tension when students start to reflect on, question and take a position on current professional practice, creating ambiguity and tension as students start to listen to their own internal voice and experiences. Jackson (2017) found that some (albeit not many) placement-based WIL students experienced these moments, their growing familiarity with professional practice giving them the confidence to question perspectives and behaviors, drawing on their internal knowledge (e.g., discipline learning at university) to voice potentially new ways-of-doing. Like any challenge to the existing regime of competence, despite creating conflict and tease, this can help to advance new practices (Fenton-O'Creevy, Dimitriadis, & Scobie, 2014).

Prior work has tended to focus on students 'negotiating' their way into a community from the periphery, being welcomed and undergoing a process of enculturation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, when students are unsuccessful in their negotiation into the community, or are not welcomed, enculturation does not occur and, instead, the student becomes marginalized. Ibarra (1999) affirms that marginalization can occur through active exclusion by the community but may also be through student individual choices.

#### *The Role of Personal Resources*

Tomlinson's (2017) graduate capital model highlights five forms of capital (human, social, cultural, identity, and psychological) that can enhance student employability. Within WIL, these capitals represent vital personal resources that students draw on and develop as they navigate the LoP. Students mobilize their capital resources when negotiating their access into CoPs and in their interaction with community members before, during, and after the WIL experience. Each community requires its members to demonstrate they meet a threshold of capitals, in different ways and to different extents. As students traverse CoPs, they must exercise fluency in various technical competencies and social norms. For example, they might need to showcase certain technical skills, professional capabilities, or cultural awareness to be accepted by the industry partner.

As students navigate the WIL LoP, their capitals are enhanced, reinforcing their capacity to access CoPs across the landscape. As students apply their skills and knowledge, they develop greater human capital (Jackson, 2015). Immersion in multiple communities helps students develop richer social networks and broader cultural awareness (Soltani & Donald, 2024), expanding their social and cultural capitals as they learn from others across the LoP, especially industry insiders such as workplace supervisors. Consistent with the graduate capital model, students can leverage these enriched networks towards improved career outcomes (Soltani & Donald, 2024). Psychological capital grows as students overcome real-world challenges generated through participation in WIL, and they start to realize their professional sense-of-self, build identity capital (Jackson, 2017; Zegwaard et al., 2017), and develop resilience (Drysdales et al., 2022).

The more students invest resources, the better their potential to negotiate social situations across the WIL LoP. Indeed, students remain the principal agents of engagement in the WIL LoP. While institutions and industry partners can support access to various communities, students themselves must develop and activate personal resources required for membership in a CoP. Proactive engagement with communities across the WIL LoP will surely enhance the educational potential of the WIL ecosystem.

## SUPPORTING STUDENT JOURNEYS ACROSS THE WIL LoP

### *The Role of Higher Education*

HE needs to support placement-based WIL students in developing and mobilizing their personal capital resources, particularly social and cultural capital, to help them negotiate industry community boundaries so they can source opportunities and transition from periphery to insiders. As Kubiak, Fenton-O’Creevy, et al. (2014) explain, “boundaries are often places of misunderstanding and confusion. Crossing a boundary can result in feelings of inadequacy, personal failure, or disengagement” (p. 81). Institutions can help ‘broker’ students’ boundary learning by building connection between the different communities and clarifying and preparing students for negotiating into a new CoP (Wenger, 1998). A key example of support would be the institution inducting students into what to expect in the CoP, including information on organizational culture (Winchester-Seeto & Rowe, 2023); risk, health and safety (Cameron et al., 2023; Hay & Fleming, 2021); professional communication; code of conduct; work-life balance (Konstantinou et al., 2023); and diversity, equity and inclusion (Goldman et al., 2023), including seeking adjustments and recognizing and reporting concerns (Mackaway et al., 2024). Institutions should also engage careers services or scaffold career development learning through curriculum to illuminate and foster personal agency, and to build students’ career management competencies, such as upskilling their interview techniques, and inciting understanding and articulation of their professional self.

As encountering unfamiliar regimes of competence can lead to feelings of failure, frustration, and resistance to community engagement (Fenton-O’Creevy, Brigham, et al., 2014), it is critical that HE enables students in their journey of self-exploration and negotiation, challenging who they are through deep reflection and sharing of experiences. There should also be proactive steps in allaying student fears of failure, pivoting this an essential platform for rich learning. Fenton-O’Creevy, Dimitriadis, and Scobie (2014) highlighted students in industry needed to be able to claim a legitimate peripheral role during work placement experiences, allowing them to acquire knowledge and develop competence; they should be afforded space for reflective practice, such as journalling; and be connected with mentors (student peers, industry and WIL academics) for sense-making and connecting workplace practice and academic learning to support boundary crossing.

Kubiak, Fenton-O’Creevy, et al. (2014) emphasize that brokers at the boundary must be considered legitimate by the CoP, “a liminal inside-outsider constantly faced with the challenge of how to make the practice of one community of practice relevant to another” (p. 82). This resonates with the roles of HE staff operating at the boundary of the industry CoP, such as those connecting students with host partners to secure a placement-based WIL opportunity; staff coordinating risk management processes and documentation to ensure students are physically and psychosocially safe at work; and staff providing mentorship, counselling, feedback and pastoral care during the learning experience. The authors explore the role of a tutor who supports placement students and liaises with their workplace supervisors, providing guidance and resolving tension and connecting discipline learning with

workplace practice. They emphasize the need to establish the staff member's credibility in the industry CoP, highlighting their own professional practice, and building trust and legitimacy so not to present "as a naïve out-of-touch visitor" (p. 85). They also highlight the importance of boundary objects that can help connect practices across communities. Examples in placement-based WIL could be goal-setting documentation or training modules for student induction and for workplace supervisors. Collectively, these illuminate the importance of brokers to support students in traversing the challenging boundaries of academy-industry related communities.

Further, institutions must ensure communities are accessible and inclusive (Lasrado et al., 2024; Mackaway et al., 2024). In line with the global focus on social mobility and widening participation in the HE sector (Jackson & Pham, 2022), communities within the WIL LoP should foster a sense-of-belonging and offer the opportunity of engagement for all students. Inclusive and equitable practice is a known challenge in WIL (Goldman et al., 2023), particularly for students with disability who often report barriers to participation (Jackson et al., 2024; Joseph & Winberg, 2024) and challenges with stigma and bias once in the workplace (Boye, 2024). Challenges for other groups include cultural safety; gendered encounters; poor commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion; and marginalization of minority groups (Lasrado et al., 2024). Clearly, there is an urgent need to encourage a strength-based approach in HE practices and educating other stakeholders in addressing these challenges (Jackson et al., 2024).

#### *System Conveners*

System conveners play a critical role in the WIL LoP by bridging the gap between students, universities, and industry partners. They focus on bringing together people from multiple CoPs, ensuring alignment of goals, expectations, and resources (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2014). As McRae and Woodside (2023) note, successful WIL depends on an ecosystem in which parties are connected and aligned. System conveners such as WIL program staff may build such an ecosystem by bridging connections between students and host partners. For example, staff may act as system conveners by educating hosts about students' needs and preparing students to contribute to hosts' goals (Flatt & Drewery, 2023).

System conveners may also operate at higher levels not directly involved in students' day-to-day learning but still essential in supporting the broader WIL system. For example, national and international WIL associations "play an important leadership role in connecting WIL leaders and organizations worldwide" (Kay et al., 2023, p. 582). They operate as system conveners by setting standards, sharing innovations, and encouraging global exchanges (Ferns et al., 2022). There are also industry bodies that help to convene WIL, contributing to the characterization of quality practice and advocating for participation among organization members. An example from Australia is industry bodies' partnership with the national WIL association and the peak body for the HE sector to establish a national strategy on WIL (ACEN, 2015).

#### CONCLUSION

This article offers a new perspective on WIL by proposing it as a LoP within the wider HE ecosystem. It applies the key principles of LoP to placement-based WIL (e.g., internships, cooperative education and practicum) and considers the constituent communities that may be core or peripheral to the landscape. Explanation is given on how students may interact with the various communities as they navigate the LoP before, during, and after their placement-based WIL experience, recognizing that engagement with communities and their boundaries can occur in different ways. This reveals a new

understanding of how agency and personal capital resources may contribute to community engagement, and practical implications for developing and maintaining student-centered communities of practice that constitute a supportive WIL LoP. The article also illuminates the role of HE institutions in addressing tensions of difference between communities to aid students in multiple membership and traversing between communities at different stages of their WIL journey.

The article contributes to employability literature by illustrating how students' navigation of the WIL LoP develops their understanding of professional practice, including expectations of competence, and realization of how fluid and evolving landscape is. It emphasizes how boundary encounters will enhance resilience, and reflection of their interaction within the WIL LoP will prompt students to make sense of their professional selves. It also illuminates the need for HE institutions to recognize that WIL presents as a LoP, and by doing so, will be able to better develop and improve suitable learning structures for students prior, during, and after them engaging with multiple CoP across the WIL LoP. The provision of appropriate preparation and scaffolded experiences will enhance students' learning journey as they increasingly integrate into the WIL LoP. This novel presentation of WIL as a LoP also highlights valuable opportunities for future research. One possible research focus is examining the student perspective on any additional communities that are important and how they perceive their relationship with their partner community (and other communities) before, during, and after their WIL experience. There would also be value in exploring the student journey across the LoP for less immersed forms of WIL, such as client projects and consultancy. Another could be investigating the role of cultural context on the WIL LoP, such the integration of indigeneity into WIL curriculum and local quality frameworks, and how this influences the student journey.

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## About the Journal

The International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning (IJWIL) publishes double-blind peer-reviewed original research and topical issues related to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). IJWIL first published in 2000 under the name of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE).

In this Journal, WIL is defined as:

*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 (Zegwaard et al., 2023, p. 38\*).*

Examples of practice include off-campus workplace immersion activities such as work placements, internships, practicum, service learning, and cooperative education (co-op), and on-campus activities such as work-related projects/competitions, entrepreneurship, student-led enterprise, student consultancies, etc. WIL is related to, and overlaps with, the fields of experiential learning, work-based learning, and vocational education and training.

The Journal's aim is to enable specialists working in WIL to disseminate research findings and share knowledge to the benefit of institutions, students, WIL practitioners, curricular designers, and researchers. The Journal encourages quality research and explorative critical discussion that leads to the advancement of quality practices, development of further understanding of WIL, and promote further research.

The Journal is financially supported by the Work-Integrated Learning New Zealand (WILNZ; [www.wilnz.nz](http://www.wilnz.nz)), and the University of Waikato, New Zealand.

## Types of Manuscripts Sought by the Journal

Types of manuscripts sought by IJWIL is primarily in two forms: 1) *research publications* describing research into aspects of work-integrated learning and, 2) *topical discussion* articles that review relevant literature and provide critical explorative discussion around a topical issue. The journal will, on occasions, consider good practice submissions.

*Research publications* should contain; an introduction that describes relevant literature and sets the context of the inquiry. A detailed description and justification for the methodology employed. A description of the research findings - tabulated as appropriate, a discussion of the importance of the findings including their significance to current established literature, implications for practitioners and researchers, whilst remaining mindful of the limitations of the data, and a conclusion preferably including suggestions for further research.

*Topical discussion articles* should contain a clear statement of the topic or issue under discussion, reference to relevant literature, critical and scholarly discussion on the importance of the issues, critical insights to how to advance the issue further, and implications for other researchers and practitioners.

*Good practice and program description papers.* On occasions, the Journal seeks manuscripts describing a practice of WIL as an example of good practice, however, only if it presents a particularly unique or innovative practice or it was situated in an unusual context. There must be a clear contribution of new knowledge to the established literature. Manuscripts describing what is essentially 'typical', 'common' or 'known' practices will be encouraged to rewrite the focus of the manuscript to a significant educational issue or will be encouraged to publish their work via another avenue that seeks such content.

By negotiation with the Editor-in-Chief, the Journal also accepts a small number of *Book Reviews* of relevant and recently published books.

### Reference

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