Theory and practice of why to evaluate WIL: A context-sensitive approach

Karen Young
Deakin University
k.young@deakin.edu.au (corresponding author)
ORCID: 0000-0002-2764-4418

Anne-Louise Semple
anne-louise.semple@mq.edu.au
ORCID: 0000-0001-9840-609X

Michelle Harvey
Deakin University
michelle.harvey@deakin.edu.au
ORCID: 0000-0002-4047-7845

Sophie McKenzie
Deakin University
sophie.mckenzie@deakin.edu.au
ORCID: 0000-0001-5803-640X

Research-in-Progress — Key Contributions
This article contributes to the nascent theory and practice of WIL evaluation and can be used to inform institution-wide endeavours when designing a WIL evaluation framework.

- The work presented outlines a set of WIL Evaluation (WE) guiding questions, referred to as the *6W's of WE*.
- The theory to practice case study presents a detailed exploration of the first of the guiding questions, the 'why' of WIL evaluation.
- We argue that the 'why' is fundamental for addressing and enabling context-sensitive approaches to WIL evaluation, and suggest that when a program or

institution is embarking on a process for evaluating WIL, it too should prioritise consideration of the why as a fundamental first step of any WE.

- It is our intention to examine and share the theory and practice of the remaining 5W's guiding evaluation via forthcoming publications so that others can learn from, use, and adapt our novel approach.
- Our research aims to provide insight for those beginning the complex and challenging domain of WIL evaluation.
- This work also contributes to the growing interest and need for universal measures of the impact of WIL for graduates globally.

Abstract

Higher Education (HE) institutions recognise that Work Integrated Learning (WIL) activities make important contributions to student employability. Despite the growing appetite for understanding the extent and nature of WIL's impact, there are limited reviews of WIL evaluation (WE) theory and a there is a paucity of clear guidance on the practical steps involved in sector-wide, or even institution-specific, evaluations of WIL. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of how a Faculty at an Australian University embarked upon an action-research project to design a fit-for-purpose Faculty-wide WIL Evaluation Framework (WEF). An outline of the set of six guiding questions, referred to as the 6W's of WE – the 'Why', 'Who', 'Where', 'What', 'When' and 'hoW' – is provided. A detailed examination of the first of the 6W's – the why evaluate WIL question – enlivens our theory-to-practice approach of WE. This research proposes that unpacking the 'why' of WIL evaluation (enabled by an action-research approach) is a fundamental first step for probing what is valued and what then should be evaluated. The paper concludes with recommendations for those contemplating designing an institutional-specific WIL evaluation, particularly so that context-specific whys of WIL and WIL evaluation can be galvanised, thus enriching our collective understandings of sector-wide impact.

Background

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of how a Faculty at an Australian University embarked upon an action-research project to design a context-specific evaluation of Work Integrated Learning (WIL). A two-year WIL Evaluation project (WEP), undertaken at Deakin University's Faculty of Science, Engineering and Built Environment (SEBE), was tasked with designing a bespoke WIL Evaluation Framework (WEF). Aligned to the Faculty's employability strategy, the data and findings needed to monitor, report on, and make informed decisions about the aspects

of WIL that were functioning effectively, what stakeholders deemed valuable, the types of interventions that were indicating enhancements to student employability, and any aspects of WIL that might require review and revision.

The first task of the WEP was to establish the collective primary purpose of the evaluation and overarching questions that need answering (Davidson, 2005). Once the project commenced, the aim was posited as a question: 'Why is evaluating WIL important to the Faculty?' The 'why' question became fundamental to the WEP; this study proposes that the 'why' is likely to be fundamental for any WIL evaluation. The article introduces the 6W's of WE: the Why, Who, Where, What, When, and hoW of evaluating WIL. It then focuses on the first of these guiding questions – the 'why' - to illustrate a context-specific approach to evaluating WIL. An action-research approach guarantees that the theory of evaluation and WIL can be fortified with the lived experiences of WIL practice, enriching evaluations of context-specific impacts of WIL. This approach is not only useful for institutions but promises to make a significant contribution to evolving and emerging theory and practice of WE across the sector. The paper concludes with recommendations for others contemplating how to translate the theory, and *our* practice, into their own fit for purpose evaluation framework.

Literature review

Studies that point to the importance and value of WIL agree in principle that WIL is often employed as an educational approach for enhancing student employability (Oliver, 2015; Sachs et al., 2016), integrating theory and practice learning (Orrell, 2011) with quality assessment design (Boud et al., 2020; Ferns, 2014). Ideally, a breadth of WIL offerings (Kaider et al., 2017; Oliver, 2015; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017) contribute to the application of real-world capabilities, knowledge, and skills (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2018; Kaider et al., 2017) for students.

Subsequently, there is an emergent calling for evidence-based approaches to support policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking insight into the effectiveness and impact of WIL and a concrete detection of employability-related processes and outcomes. This includes guidance on established and proposed practices for measuring the effectiveness, benefits, and impact of WIL programs for all stakeholders from both the institutional and sector perspectives.

This paper consolidates findings from studies focusing on commonly accepted purposes and benefits of broader definitions of WIL (beyond placement-based WIL),

emerging studies on WIL evaluation, and evaluation theory studies. Given that certain motivations to evaluate WIL might be unique to national circumstances, papers with an Australian focus were of particular value for their references to emerging theory, practice, and evidence of influences of WIL on employability, job readiness, and graduate outcomes (see TEQSA and JRG).

The small amount of literature on WIL evaluation, however, necessitated inclusion of publications from further afield, which ensured related work was not overlooked and our own practices were as well-informed as possible. The action-research approach called for a cascading identification of relevant literature. We began with the obvious domain of 'WIL', narrowing the search via keyword phrases such as 'WIL evaluation', 'measuring employability', and 'WIL impact'. Studies with a national focus were prioritised – functioning as a discovery of influences of WIL on employability, on job readiness, and graduate outcomes. Once the WIL and WE literature was exhausted, supplementary investigations to evaluate theory more generally proved useful for gaining insight into the emerging area of WIL evaluation.

In 2005, changes to the Administration Guidelines for Australia's Higher Education Support Act (2003) triggered universities to dedicate focus to the quality and standards, coordination, and management of WIL, while also aligning to new funding criteria set by the then Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST) (Patrick et al., 2008). TEQSA stipulates that in addition to WIL programs being well-conceived and educationally sound (based on type) and involving adequate guidance and support for WIL stakeholders, programs must also be quality assured and monitored by the provider. Updates to policy also spurred a wide range of WIL-related strategies and targets at universities across the country (Orrell, 2011), including a National WIL Strategy (ACEN, 2015). Many of these strategies continue to take shape as some institutions and disciplines have mobilised efforts more quickly than others. Such mandates, which incorporate demonstration of the nature and value of educational offerings, including WIL-related initiatives, make WE timely for HE for all Australian universities.

We note that some of these drivers may not occur globally. Despite this, the study has a broader appeal given the importance of theory and practice of evaluations relating to WIL, and therefore provides a comprehensive exploration of emerging educational insights that scholars, policy makers, and practitioners may need when pioneering toward their own context-specific frameworks, but also possibly towards transferable

WE practice and universal evaluation frameworks that might be shared across contexts. In keeping with the iterative review of the literature necessary for action-research, our research posited that the paucity of WIL evaluation studies and indeed the problematic nature of evaluating WIL, is a conundrum for many that necessitates a sector-wide solution.

WIL purpose, benefits, and definitions

The literature shows that the nomenclature of WIL is not always agreed upon. Slipperiness of WIL definitions makes evaluation difficult. While HE institutions recognise WIL as a vehicle for employability, how to measure the sector wide, institution-specific, and discipline-centric impacts of WIL remains largely unresolved (Palmer et al., 2018). Indeed, the impact of WIL at a Faculty or institutional level is not yet proven (Campbell et al., 2020). However, the growing importance of WE evaluation across the sector means that while the practicalities of WE have yet to be explored comprehensively, evaluation scholarship more broadly offers valuable guidance. The aim of this study is to harness the limited literature currently available to lead to a more concrete detection of employability-related processes and outcomes, and subsequently, a more holistic understanding of the impact of WIL. Such an approach highlights the challenges and limitations of WIL evaluation theory and the need to learn more from its practice.

Some WIL evaluation studies point to a relationship with student employability (e.g., Harvey, 2001), while others focus on graduate employment outcomes (Kirchmajer & Rowley, 2012). While WIL has come to be seen as a vehicle through which these distinct outcomes are enhanced, there remain many questions about the nature of their correlation, especially from an evaluation perspective (Palmer et al., 2018). Addressing such uncertainties is important if universities will be expected to demonstrate how their degree programs prepare graduates for the sorts of 'jobs and industries [that are] emerg[ing]' and the 'new mix knowledge, skills, and capabilities' seen as necessary for success in those and life more broadly (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2021).

Efforts to understand the impact of the wealth of WIL experiences are complicated by the sheer diversity of work-integrated learning (Ferns et al., 2014; Rowe et al., 2012); notwithstanding the disagreements over definitions of WIL and types of WIL. A national WIL survey carried out by Universities Australia (2019) highlighted this scale and breadth. Indeed, national WIL standards do not 'prescribe any particular type or model

of WIL', so long as quality and standards are sound, assured, and monitored (TEQSA, 2017, p.1-2).

Any WE needs to begin with a uniform definition of work-integrated learning and WIL types, before the strengths and weaknesses of the various programs/WIL types can be examined (Business Higher Education Roundtable, 2016, p. 8). Universities can learn from validated examples and should adopt a WIL nomenclature and definition that resonates with their organisational culture, stakeholders, operations, and academic offerings. WIL that is fit for purpose allows for the addressing of opportunities, challenges, and the key ingredients for success as appropriate for the setting (Cook, 2021; Sachs & Clark, 2017).

A further complication of WE is that the very conditions allowing the evolution of diverse and meaningful WIL approaches within institutions can also make uniform benchmarks for evaluation purposes problematic. Studies to date have therefore been simplified to investigate specific WIL types, single stakeholder viewpoints, discrete discipline areas, and outcomes (over process) (Deves, 2011). To inform decision-making, articulation of stakeholder needs (Bryson et al., 2011; Glenaffric, 2007), which includes all stakeholders both involved in the program and its evaluation (Yarbrough et al., 2010), is a consideration starting to appear in WIL-related publications, including nascent yet increasingly important contributions focused on WE. For example, there is recognition that the perspectives and experiences of all WIL's diverse stakeholders should be accounted for (Campbell et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2018; Smith, 2014).

WIL evaluation and evaluation theory studies
It is important to have a clear understanding of the context, purpose, and value of the evaluation (Rowe et al., 2018). Bowen (in Stirling et al., 2016) suggests that WIL evaluators should also consider why the identified purpose is significant – especially from the perspective of how findings might have application and value for others and their practices. Over a decade ago, Smith (2012) researched student experiences of Australian-based WIL curricula, from which he proposed a framework for the evaluation of WIL curriculum. Centred on measures of authenticity, integrated learning supports, alignment, supervisor access, and induction/preparation processes (Smith, 2012), measurement was found to be relevant for different types of WIL; however, it was limited to student perspectives and did not demonstrate the relationship between processes and outcomes (McRae et al., 2018).

As discourse about employability, WIL, and the potential relationship between the two continues, the need to find reliable means for evaluating the latter is increasingly apparent. While theory based in the evaluation discipline and a growing branch specific to WIL is a useful starting point, there is scope to better understand how this works in practice. For example, the concept of determining what needs to be measured is well-known; however, equal attention should be given to what will happen once measurement is underway. Who will own the data collected for measurement? Where will it be stored and in what format? When and on what grounds might access be provided to that? How might analysis be carried out and findings reported, etc.?

In addition to its requirements that programs are quality assured and monitored by the provider, TEQSA stipulates that WIL programs must be well-conceived and educationally sound (based on type) and involve adequate guidance and support for WIL stakeholders. With the increasing recognition of value and positive impact of WIL on student experience and outcomes increasing, quality assurance in all facets of WIL has become a national priority focus. Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) has initiated a CoP focussing on Success Measures in WIL at a national level. Both quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) approaches can enable institutional benchmarking for government funding and policy decision-making (Coates, 2005). In support of QA and QI approaches, Von Treuer et al. (2011) and Rowe & Zegwaard (2017) argue that sustained evaluation is essential for determining the efficacy of WIL programs, including quality assurance and quality improvement concerns. This is because evaluation can assist in 'judgements about [a given] program, improve or further develop [its] effectiveness, inform decisions about future programming and/or increase understanding' (Patton, 2008, p. 39).

There are several other primary motivations for evaluating WIL. WE can guide strategic and operational planning for WIL. It can warrant expenditure in what has become a very resource-constrained sector, and be accountable for it (Clark & Sachs, 2017; Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018; Smith, 2012). WE can 'ensure quality, impact, transparency, accountability, and program improvement' (Rowe et al., 2018, p. 371) – matters which should be addressed in exchange for resourcing. Further motivating factors include demonstrated accountability to WIL stakeholders more generally, which can provide a vehicle through which stakeholders can generate new knowledge and practices together (Chouinard & Cousins, 2021). The viewpoints they impart can offer the opportunity to maintain and/or increase stakeholder satisfaction and the quality of their experience. In complement, a further justification for WE is that it can provide

stakeholders with systematic opportunity for dialogue that can strengthen partnerships and a sense of shared purpose (Wadsworth, 2016), especially as intentions, needs, and expectations can be better understood.

Drawing on Saunders' recommendations for a practical approach to evaluation planning, Cook (2021) argues that WIL evaluators should facilitate adoption of evaluation theory for institution-wide and longitudinal WE (which are rare) (Rowe et al., 2018). Such advances should consider 'exogenous' factors (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017) and the wide range of practicalities involved in operating WE successfully, which vary depending on institutional context. In summary, the literature reveals that while HE institutions understand the broad value of WIL relative to graduate employability and employment, their ability to evidence this and detail the nature of this association remains a work in progress (Palmer et al., 2018).

The Deakin WIL context influencing our faculty approach

Within Deakin University, variations of scale, breadth, types, and standards associated with WIL programs are apparent because they are supported by an institutionally adopted definition of WIL. WIL at Deakin includes a full range of authentic and/or proximal learning opportunities that support graduate employability (Deakin University, 2021; Oliver, 2012; Oliver, 2015). University policy formalises Deakin's pledge to provide all undergraduate students with WIL experiences.

Inspired by the University's strategic plan wherein the Education and Employability pillar talks to empowering learners the future (Deakin University, 2021), WIL became a strategic driver for enhancing student employability in our Faculty. A Faculty-wide plan, the *SEBE Employability Guiding Plan (SEGP)* (2021), laid down the promise for the ongoing commitment to the provision of scaffolded, embedded, multiple, and varied WIL opportunities (multiplicity-WIL) across our entire undergraduate program. Herewith, every SEBE undergraduate course would evidence intentional design and delivery of sustainable, fit-for-purpose WIL models, including offerings which embedded scaffolding of both reflective practice and authentic and career education assessments, as well as a core placement-based discipline-specific WIL unit for every undergraduate course by the start of 2023 (Young et al., 2021).

However, despite the Deakin University WIL policy, the institution-wide strength of scaffolded WIL activities, the *SEGP*, and the longstanding 'good WIL' hunting initiatives in the Faculty (Palmer et al., 2018), it was clear that a context-specific WIL evaluation

framework (to facilitate substantiation or holistic illustration of the WIL policy and associated practices) was needed. The *SEGP* operationalised the planning for a WIL evaluation framework via a specific WIL Evaluation Project (WEP) (one of 12 employability SEGP projects).

The WEP arose as a direct response to regulatory and strategic imperatives and aspiration to evidence graduate success (Deakin University, 2016). It also contributed to institutional reporting on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) as part of the Job-ready Graduates Package by the Australian Government (Australian Government Department of Education 2022). The NPILF allocated funds to universities to enhance engagement with industry and contribute to job-readiness of graduates by supporting WIL opportunities and increasing STEM-skilled graduates ready for employment. This sort of targeted support, prioritised at the university-level, created an opportunity for SEBE to build on our strong WIL foundations while addressing national priorities.

Method

The business need for a WIL evaluation for the Faculty, based upon raised awareness of recent studies and government initiatives (Edwards et al., 2015; Universities Australia, 2019) resulted in both institutional support for the large-scale project and created an aligned research study. The assigned WIL Evaluation Project Leadership (WEPL) group, tasked with the first-ever bespoke evaluation of a Faculty-wide WIL evaluation (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014) for the institution, focused on previously proven successful methodologies for scholarly and collaborative curriculum-based transformation. Examples of curriculum-led WIL projects successfully completed by the Faculty (Hains-Wesson & Young, 2017; Kaider et al., 2017; Pollard et al., 2018; Willems et al., 2016; Young et al., 2017; Young et al., 2019) with an action-research focus (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) informed the WE project and the research study.

The first phase was influenced by both Winchester-Seeto (2019), who recommended a contemplation of the purpose of the WIL evaluation, and Stirling et al. (2016), who recommended framing questions for examination. Lessons from Rowe et al. (2018, p. 280) made it clear that early efforts needed to comprise an understanding of context. Planning phases set out the following project (and subsequent research) aims:

1. To produce a context-specific process for evaluating WIL, informed by existing theory and practice WIL studies, including a bench-marking of existing WIL processes and practices.

2. To design (and test) a sustainable Faculty-centric framework to enable repeatable processes for longitudinally 'measuring what matters' in terms of valued impact of and for SEBE WIL strategies and course-centric practices
3. To develop expertise in WIL evaluation across the institution.
4. To provide good practice recommendations to others regarding the process of designing and the lessons learnt when testing a context-specific framework.
5. To contribute to the nascent theory and practice of WIL evaluation for how a novel context-sensitive approach can contribute to national priorities for measuring the impact of SEBE WIL.

The research leant itself to action-research because both the study and the project needed to determine what was to be prioritised and measured (not just in terms of the 'nature' or the actual outcomes of the programs, but also the perceptions and experiences of the diverse stakeholder groups). Nominations for representatives from our stakeholder groups (employers, staff, and alumni groups) were submitted to the WEPL and final selections were based on the need to obtain a mix of diverse perspectives on curriculum data and reporting, evaluation generally, WIL practice and process, WIL and general teaching and learning policy and strategy.

The methodological inputs of the action-research included:
- WIL and WIL evaluation horizon scanning documentation (trends).
- Literature snapshots sharing the theory and practice of WIL and WE (noting a paucity in the literature for the latter).
- University-wide strategy and policy documentation.
- Set of guiding questions framing the project.
- Time allowances for stakeholder reading and review of documentation prior to stakeholder meetings.
- Formal pause moments for the research teams' critical reflections.
- Sharing of stepped findings.

The series of critical conversations addressing stakeholders' lived practices of WIL and evaluation enabled the iterative process of discovery and sharing. This was enabled via these steps during meetings:
- Setting of the scene: the guiding questions (created by the WEP leads from the literature at the onset of the project) framed the beginning of each meeting.
- Re-capping iterations (from the previous meeting).

- Discovery: presentation of new concepts from the literature supporting possible new versions of the WEF.
- Sharing of ideas with an emphasis on inclusive innovation.

Findings

The significant contribution of this study is in the sharing of a context-specific theory to practice account of how the 'why' of WE and WIL is fundamental to all that follows in an evaluation process of WIL. Our experience of applying WE theory in practice confirms that it is important to use the 6W's as a means for identifying context-specific questions, keeping in mind that all guiding question must circle back to the 'why' of WE. As this paper concentrates on the findings from the planning phase of the WEP, charged with addressing the purpose of discovering the answer to our 'why evaluate?', and includes the iterative learning resulting from the action-research approach, the findings here serve as a 'research in progress' study. The following four key findings inform our ongoing explorations.

The first key finding (influencing all other findings) was that our context was going to be more instrumental to the design of a WEF than first predicted. The context-rich lived experience discussions from stakeholders indicated that an obvious means for simplifying and framing how to evaluate the complexities of WIL was not going to be strikingly apparent. Aptly, WE has been described as a complex reality (Blackmore et al., 2016; Cole & Tibby, 2013; Taylor & Hooley, 2014). Available scholarship makes clear that successful WE is as complex as WIL itself (e.g., Cook, 2021; Deves, 2011; Palmer et al., 2018; Rowe et al., 2018; Stirling et al., 2016). Both the literature and our testing of the WEF outline the very problem in the field – that institutional stakeholders not directly involved in WI but impacted by it – often do not have a shared understanding of WIL, and may not have experience in the evaluation of it. We found that an agreed understanding of the best ways to, and indeed reasons for, evaluating WIL were not always struck.

The second finding saw a need to revise the guiding questions. While the initial guiding questions provided a sensible structure for beginning an evaluation, they prevented the development of a meaningful evaluation of WIL for our Faculty. Table 1 represents guiding question revisions and a reframing to the 6W's. Our original six guiding questions were invaluable for early manoeuvring of scope and focus, in terms of what could and should be included in a bespoke WEF trial. They were referred to frequently

to ensure that plans were achievable and in-keeping with both strategic and project pivots. This entire process speaks to a challenge currently faced, that despite increasing demands for universities to provide evidence of the rationale and quality of their WIL offerings for accreditation, regulatory, strategic, and funding purposes, the process to achieve a body of evidence representative of the whole, is not easily reconciled.

Our lived experience of testing the original guiding questions, to create a context-specific WEF, resulted in the enhancement of the original guiding questions to the 6W's of WE:

Table 1

Set of guiding questions for WIL Evaluation for SEBE

# 6W's	6W's of WE	Original set of guiding questions
1. Why	**1. Why evaluate?** 1.1 Why is evaluation important? 1.2 Why is an evaluation of WIL timely for HE? 1.3 Why did SEBE care about evaluating WIL? 1.4 Why is a WIL evaluation framework (WEF) useful?	Why should SEBE care about evaluating the impact of its WIL initiatives?
2. Who	**2. Who needs to be involved?** Who has the capability (expertise) and capacity (workload) to contribute to key phases of the WEF and who will be accountable for: 2.1 Designing a context-sensitive framework? 2.2 Managing the pilot of the WEF? 2.3 Reviewing, refining the WEF? 2.4 Retrieving and analysing the data? 2.5 Managing ongoing analyses and reporting?	Who needs to be involved in the design, pilot, implementation, and refinement of the WEF?
3. What	**3. What is being evaluated?** 3.1 What is the grounding approach taken to evaluate? 3.2 What are the WIL activity types included in the WEF? 3.2 What are the chosen indicators for success? 3.3 What are the data types/tools used to evaluate the activities?	What are the key underpinnings, considerations, requirements, and deliverables for the WEF?
4. Where	**4. Where can we find the data?**	Where should data (existing and future) be

	4.1 Where is the data relating to this activity coming from (existing and future)? 4.2 Where is (should) the data (raw, cleaned, de-identified and analysed) being stored for use?	collected, stored, analysed, and reported, and by whom?
5. When	**5. When is the best time for measuring** the individual WIL activity and the sum of all (in scope) activities WEF?	When should different components be put in place to align with the SEGP projects and institutional agendas?
6. HoW	**6. How will a WEF be repeatable and therefore sustainable?** How will the indicators that evaluate success… 6.1 Remain a repeatable process (BAU)? 6.2 Become a longitudinal study? 6.3 Contribute to reports of institutional impact?	How can we measure what matters to SEBE in terms of the innovation and impact of WIL across all courses?

A further finding was the need for the WEP to pause and unpack the first 6W – the why. The individual and collective opinions relating to 'why evaluate?' highlighted the necessity of inclusion and negotiation of what was not unanimously agreed upon. Context-sensitive sharing of ideas and experiences encouraged understanding of the complexity of strengthening the 'why of WIL' with the 'why of WIL evaluation'. The pause enabled a bridge from the theory of WE to the practice of WIL. The 'why' was always central, however, many interdependent and some unforeseen findings arose from the why question.

1. Understanding the 'why' was propelled by raising awareness of recent studies and government initiatives (Edwards et al., 2015; Universities Australia, 2019) emphasising to stakeholders the critical need for institutional quality assurance (QA) and quality improvement (QI) processes (Australian Government, 2015; TEQSA, 2017).

2. The need for evidence to substantiate practices and learning experiences, expressed as QA and QI outputs, were connected as a shared purpose Davidson, 2005).

3. When turning the rhetorical question, 'why evaluate?', into a context-specific provocation, 'Why does SEBE care about evaluating WIL', stakeholder-wide engagement was gained.

4. The acceptance that WE had operational and strategic benefit substantiated a further provocation: why did we care enough to instigate and warrant the

complicated and resource-dependent undertaking of a novel faculty-wide approach?

5. Responses tended to land on the need for institutional reporting on the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) as part of the Job-ready Graduates Package by the Australian Government (Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2021).

The final and unpredicted finding was that the most fundamental component to our process and progress revolved around the 'why' question. The why emerged for us as fundamental to the endeavour of WIL evaluation more generally and is likely to be the case for other institutions embarking on a WIL evaluation journey. The entire set of 6W's were intended to enable an application of WE theory, ensure inclusion of stakeholder perceptions and experiences, and build a well-rounded foundation for better understanding the what, why, and the how and when to best evaluate WIL.

Discussion

The reframing of the 6W's (the revised questions and the creation of sub-questions) was aided by the layers intrinsic to our action-research approach. The layering of a). WE theory and practice literature, with b). shareholder's lived experiences of WIL, evaluation generally, and evaluation of WIL, and c). reflective practice (from the project-research leads), spearheaded our agreed definition(s) of WIL, navigated us toward what we valued collectively, and exposed our purpose(s) for WE (Davidson, 2005). The 6W's, as a set of guiding questions, can help stakeholders appreciate the parameters of the intended WE practice, making evaluation *less* difficult. 'Worthwhile' endeavours can be explored and the degree to what is/isn't working (intended and unexpected) whilst delicate, can be powerful.

The provocation, 'Why should SEBE care?' helped the WEPL lean into a WEF that facilitated a growth-mindset toward WIL and WE. This supported institutional operations to learn, grow, and take appropriate action (Torres & Preskill, 2001) for a promising new approach to WE. We considered potential disadvantages of WE and possible areas of undervalued realities of WIL, so that the evaluation would involve incisive and realistic judgements about what we need to know about our past, present, and likely future. Our 'why' was repeatedly raised. It became clear that WE should not be limited to matters of compliance and assurance, or economic rationalisation, but rather opportunities to learn, plan, and re-learn to enhance future WIL efforts.

We propose that this form of iterative process, beginning with an exploration of the 'why', re-visited via 'why' sub-questions and responses, is a critical step for working through the other 5W's. Considerations, problems, and solutions, both apparent and hidden from the outset, need a way to emerge. Where agreed understandings of WIL are not commonly shared, and to ensure inclusivity of stakeholder's sometimes evolving viewpoints are addressed, the nexus of a scholarly and lived practice enrich nascent theory and practice of WIL. When supported by an action-research approach, which allows for a reflexivity during junctures of non-agreement around the complicated interdependences of WIL evaluation, a robust means for testing a WEF that is sensitive to the institutional context, can arise.

In summary, our 'research in progress', represented here as overview of the 6W's and a detailed examination of the importance of the first guiding question – the why – may be useful for others aiming to design, share and deliver their own context sensitive WEF. Findings and discussion pertaining to the entire set of 6W's, including the data and the answers to the practical complexity of WE, including multiple evaluative data points, tools, and analyses, aligned to standards and indicators, and the 'who', are outside the scope of this paper, notwithstanding that the shared appreciation of universal demonstrations of WIL impact is where future investment is being directed. To continue the nascent breadth and depth lived experiences of WE across the sector, we suggest for those beginning a WE project and/or research, to follow a similar set of project protocols to that used in our WEP:

1. Decide on the approach (i.e., action-research).
2. Review both evaluation theory and WE theory.
3. Use the 6W's as a set to frame and inform in-scope parameters.
4. Preface the foundational question, why WE matters in your context.
5. Allocate time and resourcing to facilitate multiple collaborative discussions with a diverse range of stakeholders on the why.
6. Aim for your own unique set of 'why' sub questions to find your pithy 'why' answers.
7. Ensure an iterative process for refining your 'why'.
8. Circle back to the 6W's – with the why' sub-questions and answers at hand, to ensure that considerations for the other 5W's are still relevant and critical.

Conclusion

While a universal WEF may not be currently plausible (Smith, 2012), this study proposes that an inquiry, framed by the 6W's and anchored by the 'why' offers a

rationale and a structure to enable context-specific approaches. The 'why', as a guiding question in any WE, is invaluable for resolving pithy questions around measuring what matters. It ensures that the evaluation process measures that which matters most whilst maintaining alignment to contextual operations (current and proposed) of WIL activities, whilst also providing a lens for addressing WE generally.

By detailing our lived experience of our 'why', we hope to have illuminated both the complexity and the importance of an emergent approach for all institutions to tackle their 'why'. The 'why' can function as a hinge for sector-wide and discipline-centric WE practice(s) and discussions supporting the recommendation that institutions should develop their own, context-specific WE (Palmer et al. 2018). We conclude that the 'why' (supported by the 6W's) is central to facilitating a context sensitive true north for all.

References

Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN). (2015). *National strategy on Work Integrated Learning in university education*. https://acen.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/National-WIL-Strategy-in-university-education-032015.pdf

Australian Government Department of Education Skills and Employment. (2021). *NPILF pilot (2022-24) guidance document*. https://www.education.gov.au/download/11048/npilf-guidance-document/21153/document/pdf

Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Education. (2021). *University-industry collaboration in teaching and learning review*. https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/resources/universityindustry-collaboration-teaching-and-learning-review

Australian Government Department of Education. (2022). *Job-ready graduates package - National priorities and industry linkage fund*. https://www.education.gov.au/job-ready/npilf

Australian Government. (2003). *Higher Education Support Act 2003*. Australian Government. http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/cth/consol_act/hesa2003271/

Australian Government. (2015). *Higher education standards framework (threshold standards) 2015*. https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01639

Billett, S. (2002). Workplace pedagogic practices: Co–participation and learning. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *50*(4), 457–481. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8527.t01-2-00214

Billett, S. (2008). Learning throughout working life: A relational interdependence between personal and social agency. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *56*(1), 39–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2007.00394.x

Blackmore, P., Bulaitis, Z. H., Jackman, A. H., & Tan, E. (2016). *Employability in higher education: A review of practice and strategies around the world*. https://yea.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Employability-in-Higher-Education-a-review-of-practice-and-strategies-around-the-world.pdf

Boud, D., Ajjawi, R., & Tai, J. (2020). *Assessing work-integrated learning programs: A guide to effective assessment design*. https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.12580736.v1

Bryson, J. M., Patton, M. Q., & Bowman, R. A. (2011). Working with evaluation stakeholders: A rationale, step-wise approach and toolkit. *Evaluation and*

Program Planning, *34*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2010.07.001

Business Higher Education Roundtable. (2016). *Taking the pulse of work-integrated learning in Canada.* https://www.bher.ca/publications/research-publications/taking-pulse-work-integrated-learning-canada-full-report

Campbell, M., Russell, L., Mcallister, E. L., Thomson, K., & Barrett, M. (2020). *A framework to support assurance of institution-wide quality in work integrated learning Final report.* https://research.qut.edu.au/wilquality/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2019/12/FINAL-FRAMEWORK-DEC-2019.pdf

Chouinard, J. A., & Cousins, J. B. (2021). Developing an ethical rationale for collaborative approaches to evaluation. *Evaluation, 27*(3), 364–381. https://doi.org/10.1177/1356389020978501

Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education, 11*(1), 25–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320500074915

Cole, D., & Tibby, M. (2013). *Defining and developing your approach to employability: A framework for higher education institutions.* https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/defining-and-developing-your-approach-employability-framework-higher-education

Cook, E. J. (2021). Evaluation of work-integrated learning: A realist synthesis and toolkit to enhance university evaluative practices. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, 22*(3).

Cooper, L., Orrell, J., & Bowden, M. (2010). *Work integrated learning: A guide to effective practice.* Routledge.

Davidson, E. (2005). *Evaluation methodology basics: The nuts and bolts of sound evaluation.* SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230115

Deakin University. (2016). *Higher education courses policy.* Deakin University. https://policy.deakin.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00131

Deakin University. (2021). *Deakin 2020 Ideas to Impact, Strategic Plan.* https://www.deakin.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/2249270/Strategic-Plan-2030.pdf

Deakin University. (2021a). *Academic Board.* Deakin University. https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/leadership-and-governance/academic-board

Deakin University. (2021b). *WIL at Deakin for curriculum design and development (teaching team resource).* Deakin University. https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/wil/

Deves, L. (2011). Program evaluation in co-operative education: A dearth of standards? *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *12*(3), 149–162. https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE_12_3_149_162.pdf

Edwards, D., Perkins, K., Pearce, J., & Hong, J. (2015). *Work integrated learning in STEM in Australian universities: Final report.* https://research.acer.edu.au/higher_education/44/

Ferns, S. (Ed.) (2014). *Work integrated learning in the Curriculum.* Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Ferns, S., Campbell, M., & Zegwaard, K. (2014). Work integrated learning. In *HERDSA guides: Work integrated learning in the curriculum* (pp. 1–6). Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia.

Fitzpatrick, J. L., Sanders, J. R., & Worthen, B. R. (2011). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines* (4th ed.). Pearson.

Fleming, J., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2018). Methodologies, methods and ethical considerations for conducting research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(3), 205–213.

Glenaffric Ltd. (2007). *Six steps to effective evaluation: A handbook for programme and project managers.* https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140613220103/http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/programmes/digitisation/SixStepsHandbook.pdf

Hains-Wesson, R., & Young, K. (2017). A collaborative autoethnography study to inform the teaching of reflective practice in STEM. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *36*(2), 297–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2016.1196653

Harvey, L. (2001). Defining and measuring employability. *Quality in Higher Education*, *7*(2), 97–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320120059990

Harvey, L., Locke, W., & Morey, A. (2002). *Enhancing employability, recognising diversity: Making links between higher education and the world of work.* https://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/esecttools/relatedpubs/enhancingemployabilityrecdiversity.pdf

Jorre de St Jorre, T., & Oliver, B. (2018). Want students to engage? Contextualise graduate learning outcomes and assess for employability. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *37*(1), 44–57. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1339183

Kaider, F., Hains-Wesson, R., & Young, K. (2017). Practical typology of authentic work-integrated learning activities and assessments. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *18*(2), 153–165.

Kirchmajer, L., & Rowley, S. (2012). *Industry engagement and graduate skills: A report on tertiary courses in interactive media and computer games, Interactive Skills Integration Scheme (ISIS)*. https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/handle/10453/34851

Leiber, T., Stensaker, B., & Harvey, L. (2015). Impact evaluation of quality assurance in higher education: Methodology and causal designs. *Quality in Higher Education*, *21*(3), 288–311. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2015.1111007

Mcrae, N., Pretti, T. J., & Church, D. (2018). *Work-Integrated Learning Quality framework AAA★*. https://cewilcanada.ca/common/Uploaded%20files/Public%20Resources/Resource%20Hub/wil_quality_framework_-_aaa_-_for_posting.pdf

Oliver, B. (2012). *Curriculum framework*. Deakin University. https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/vision-and-values/teaching-and-learning/curriculum-framework

Oliver, B. (2015). Redefining graduate employability and work-integrated learning: Proposals for effective higher education in disrupted economies. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *6*(1), 56–65.

Orrell, J. (2011). *Good practice report: Work-integrated learning*. https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A51931

Palmer, S., Young, K., & Campbell, M. (2018). Developing an institutional evaluation of the impact of work-integrated learning on employability and employment. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, *19*(4), 371–383. http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30115993

Patrick, C., Peach, D., Pocknee, C., Webb, F., Fletcher, M., & Pretto, G. (2008). *The WIL (Work Integrated Learning) report: A national scoping study [Final Report]*. https://eprints.qut.edu.au/216185/

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. SAGE.

Pollard, V., Hains-Wesson, R., & Young, K. (2018). Creative teaching in STEM. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(2), 178-193. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1379487

Rowe, A. D., & Zegwaard, K. E. (2017). Developing graduate employability skills and attributes: Curriculum enhancement through work-integrated learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *18*(2), 87–99.

Rowe, A. D., Nay, C., Lloyd, K., Myton, N., & Kraushaar, N. (2018). Telling your story of work-integrated learning: A holistic approach to program evaluation. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, Special Issue*, *19*(3), 273–285.

Rowe, A., Winchester-Seeto, T., & Mackaway, J. (2012). That's not really WIL! — building a typology of WIL and related activities. *The Australian Collaborative*

Education Network National Conference - Collaborative Education: Investing in the Future, 246–252.

Sachs, J., & Clark, L. (2016). The practice of PACE: Lessons learned and imagined futures. In *Learning through community engagement: vision and practice in higher education* (pp. 275–288). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0999-0_18

Smith, C. (2012). Evaluating the quality of work-integrated learning curricula: A comprehensive framework. *Higher Education Research and Development*, *31*(2), 247–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.558072

Smith, C. (2014). Evaluating the quality of WIL. In S. Ferns (Ed.), *HERDSA guide Work Integrated Learning*. HERDSA.

Stirling, A., Kerr, G., Banwell, J., MacPherson, E., & Heron, A. (2016). *A practical guide for work-integrated learning: Effective practices to enhance the educational quality of structured work experiences offered through colleges and universities*. https://heqco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/HEQCO_WIL_Guide_ENG_ACC.pdf

Stufflebeam, D. L., & Coryn, C. L. S. (2014). Evaluation theory, models, and applications. In *Research methods for the social sciences: 50* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass & Pfeiffer Imprints, Wiley.

Taylor, A. R., & Hooley, T. (2014). Evaluating the impact of career management skills module and internship programme within a university business school. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *42*(5), 487–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2014.918934

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). (2017). *Guidance note: Work Integrated Learning*. https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/guidance-notes/guidance-note-work-integrated-learning

Torres, R. T., & Preskill, H. (2001). Evaluation and organizational learning: Past, present, and future. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *22*(3), 387–395. https://doi.org/10.1177/109821400102200316

Universities Australia. (2019). *Work-integrated learning in universities: Final report*. https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WIL-in-universities-final-report-April-2019.pdf

Volkwein, J. F., Lattuca, L. R., Harper, B. J., & Domingo, R. J. (2007). Measuring the impact of professional accreditation on student experiences and learning outcomes. *Research in Higher Education*, *48*(2), 251–282. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25704502

Von Treuer, K., Sturre, V., Keele, S., & McLeod, J. (2011). An integrated model for the evaluation of work placements. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, *12*(3), 196–204. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305063243

Wadsworth, Y. (2016). *Building In Research and Evaluation*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315432571

Westerheijden, D. F., Hulpiau, V., & Waeytens, K. (2007). From design and implementation to impact of quality assurance: An overview of some studies into what impacts improvement. *Tertiary Education and Management*, *13*(4), 295–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/13583880701535430

Willems, J., Young, K., Cardilini, A., & Teychenne, S. (2016). WIL-fully flipping online: a novel pedagogical approach in STEM. In S. Barker, S. Dawson, A. Pardo, & C. Colvin (Eds.), *ASCILITE 2016: Show Me the Learning: Proceedings of the 33rd International Conference on Innovation, Practice and Research in the Use of Educational Technologies in Tertiary Education* (pp. 656-665). Tugun, Qld.: Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education. http://2016conference.ascilite.org/wp-content/uploads/ascilite2016_willems_full.pdf

Winchester-Seeto, T. (2019). *Quality and standards for Work Integrated Learning*. https://www.acds.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Winchester-Seeto-Literature-Review-Quality-and-Standards.pdf

Yarbrough, D. B., Shulha, L. M., Hopson, R. K., & Caruthers, F. A. (2010). *The program evaluation standards: A guide for evaluators and evaluation users*. SAGE. https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/the-program-evaluation-standards/book230597

Young, K., Campbell, M., Coldwell-Neilson, J., & Harvey, M. (2021). *Strong-WILed STEM: from placement-WIL to Faculty-wide multiplicity-WIL*. https://acen.edu.au/resources/strong-wiled-stem-from-placement-wil-to-faculty-wide-multiplicity-wil/

Young, K., Palmer, S., & Campbell, M. (2017). Good WIL hunting: Building capacity for curriculum re-design. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *8*(1), 215. https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2017vol8no1art670

Young, K., Palmer, S., Binek, C., Tolson, M., & Campbell, M. (2019). Assessment-led reform: Creating a sustainable culture for WIL. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, *10*(1), 73–87.