



# 7

## Designing and Supporting Extraordinary Work Experience

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### Introduction

A definition of work-based learning would posit that it situates the application of what students have learnt in the classroom, both academic and ‘theoretical’ learning, with practical skills within the real world environment of work.

Traditionally, it’s an ancient way of learning whereby an apprentice works with a master and dates back, in Europe, to Hellenic Greece and the writings of Plato in the fifth century. Work-based learning (WBL) gained its current propensity in the Middle Ages through medieval craft guilds where apprenticeships were viewed as an appropriate training (More, 1980).

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The apprenticeship system allowed for artisans to learn their craft in a similar fashion and facilitated their own ‘personal epistemologies’ by learning through practice (Billett, 2012). This latter aspect is key to understanding the, often tense, relationship between traditional university education supporting a didactic, behaviourist tradition, against the vocational or apprenticeship model transferred through mimesis which relies on observing, copying and mimicking (Billett, 2012).

Subsequently, with the notable exception of medicine and law which have long established histories of workplace training in conjunction with university education, the vast majority of modern subjects and occupations have seen a paradigm shift towards utilising work-based learning—through the sandwich year, practicum, work experience, placement or degree apprenticeship—in order to facilitate the ‘personal epistemology’ (Billett, 2012) afforded through unique engagements in real world settings and tasks with key industry partners. This has highlighted the disparity between the cultural value of an occupation versus a vocation; the former is associated with the professions and, ergo, has more ‘worth’ to society, while the latter simply provides paid employment (Billett, 2009). This may also be a factor in the denigration of certain subjects, such as media and the arts, which form some of the case studies within this chapter and strive to make explicit their academic validity and adherence to higher-level learning in the context of non-traditional industries.

Central to work-based learning is that both the university and the industry should enjoy mutual benefit from the arrangement. The student gains through exposure to work and furthers skills, attributes and identities useful to their future employability, whilst giving a future employer reassurance that the student has already been ‘tested’ within the workplace.

Importantly for the university, as the operation of work-based learning is resource intensive, it contributes significantly to measurable outcomes and impacts important in a sector where metrics have gained greater significance. Within the UK, the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE), the National Student Survey (NSS), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the forthcoming Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) provide examples of this trend. These statistics are all influenced, directly or indirectly, by the operation of a WBL strategy that speaks to and fulfils the needs of students and industry alike. However, the success of

designing and supporting extraordinary work experience lies not with just adding a placement to theoretical learning but a deep integration of the two so that students are able to connect their learning and evolving identities across the different contexts of university and work. For the purposes of this chapter, the authors argue that WBL is an integral part of real world learning as its very success depends on its connectiveness with a wider and more integrated approach to student learning.

With courses that are more occupationally focused, there is an expectation that graduates will have a smoother transition to their chosen careers (Billett, 2009). This is gained in greater part through work-based experiences which are considered ‘authentic’ and allow students opportunities to engage in real world situations which simulate or provide professional practice. In many ways this replicates the master and apprentice scheme of old but with new challenges such as applying the course theory and assessment in a non-traditional higher learning environment with different expectations and support networks.

Before writing this chapter, three authors participated in a facilitated concept mapping activity in order to envision how a WBL experience could transcend the ordinary and become extraordinary (Fig. 7.1).

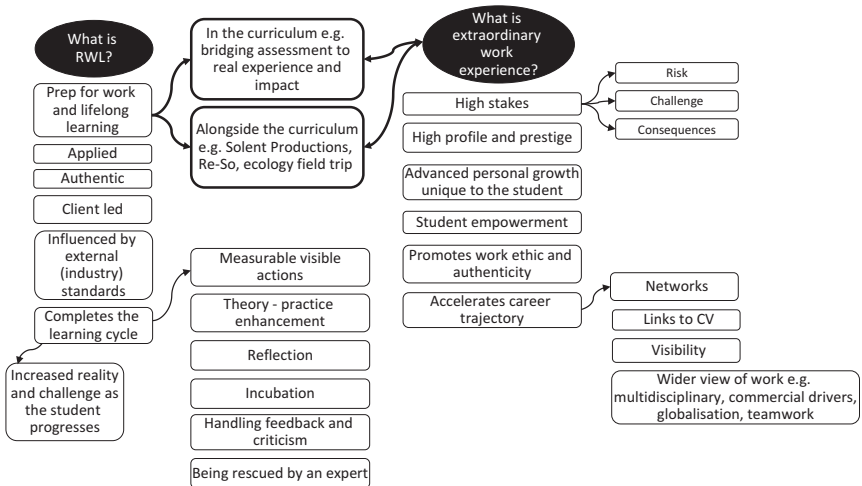


Fig. 7.1 Concept map from the authors

For a work experience to be extraordinary it needs to extend the students' practice learning beyond the commonplace. Generally, extraordinary work experiences provide 'high stakes' learning that add to the piquancy and stretch of students' work experience by, for example, increasing the perceived risk or immediacy of the learning. Fuller interactions between the student, university and external agent can also take the students beyond standard 'occupational knowledge' (Billett, 2009) to one where they were more likely to adopt increased agency and graduate skills pertinent to the workplace. As such the students' interactions and engagement with their experience would come with a level of autonomy and empowerment so there is a potential to make their own judgements—the case studies within the chapter demonstrate this in the increased creativity for the filmmaker and the product choice for the retailer and designer. In turn this allows advanced personal growth unique to the student and accelerates their own personalised career trajectory (Billett, 2009). Where work-based experiences in all their forms have become relatively ubiquitous, the four case studies included within the chapter have taken the student's position within that experience and extended the student's own autonomy and control within its operation.

The concept map also identified an extraordinary work experience as not only authentic but carrying high profile and prestige. Three case studies, included in the chapter, have a visual presence—in broadcasting, as a high street retailer and on an ecology field trip—where all give the students high cultural exchange value. This allows students to work within the ultimate authentic real world environments as they have real and very measurable consequences. In all examples, and especially that of an assessment brief on a nursing module, the higher education institutions have faced the challenge of bridging the theory to practice gap in their own unique ways.

In order for courses to provide work experiences such as these, it is recognised that academics may have to work flexibly and unconventionally in order to circumnavigate the restrictions of traditional university structures and processes. Two case studies provide work experience as an extracurricular opportunity to catch the timeframes of real world

learning that sit outside of university semesters. Students may also have to be supported through a spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960) to support an evolution of their real world learning from a ‘safe’ environment, of an incubator or simulator situation, to one where there is an increasing element of student mistakability and possibility of failure. Here the importance of preparation, research and planning becomes invaluable and integral to the gaining of the quantity and quality of placement hours. In the example of Case Study 1, media students are working with real clients broadcasting from the Glastonbury music festival; ultimately for the BBC, it is imperative that their work is exemplary and comes at the pinnacle of their learning trajectory. Courses may explicitly build on the skills recognised for their own students’ professional trajectory and mitigate against the established difficulties of placement learning—the theory-practice divide and inappropriate assessment.

Four case studies have been integrated into the three overarching themes of extraordinary work experience: **accelerating professional confidence through immersive, high stakes learning, adding high value to aspects of practice pedagogy** and **recognising the negative aspects of practice learning and promoting the interdependence of theory and practice**. The case studies are not exclusive to their sections but provide best practice examples under their themes.

## Accelerating Professional Confidence Through Immersive, High Stakes Learning

An extraordinary work experience not only builds professional confidence but accelerates it to such an extent that it is obvious to both internal and external parties as well as to the student themselves (Morley et al., 2017). This confidence goes beyond the sole attainment of technical competencies (Kinsella, 2009, 2010) but is a presentation of a greater, actionable knowledge within the work setting. Aristotle (trans 2009) developed the twin concepts of praxis and phronesis whereby the apprentice developed a reasoning influential to reflexive and informed action as

well as a moral responsibility for what they did. Kemmis (2012) believes that these attributes are still pertinent to the development of a well-rounded professional even today.

Polanyi's demonstration of professional knowledge, through what he termed 'the tacit dimension' (1966), was traditionally learnt through the intimate learning relationship between the master and apprentice. The quandary exists today as to how students in higher education can experience an immersive and high stakes learning experience which is scalable and appropriate to contemporary expectations of study and employment. One of the many challenges of work experience is when the work is so immersive that students are unable to extricate their learning from what they are doing (Eraut, 2000, 2004).

Klein (1998) believes that the focus of learning should deliberately identify what can be used for future use. Experts "engage in deliberate practice, so that each opportunity for practice has a goal and evaluation criteria, they compile an extensive experience bank, they obtain feedback that is accurate, diagnostic and reasonably timely, they enrich their experiences by reviewing prior experiences to derive new insights and lessons from mistakes" (Klein, 1998, p. 104). Strategies, such as reflection, discussed in Chapter 13, are other possible learning mechanisms to achieve this.

Schön (1983) argued that the complexity of professional decision making also needed to accommodate for the unplanned circumstances of practice. A restriction to taught theory does not allow students to arrive at unconventional solutions which are often required in the realities of complex, real world practice.

Adding to new knowledge proves empowering for students (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook, & Irvine, 2011) and students learnt best through an appropriate mix of challenge and support (Grealish & Ranse, 2009). Eraut (2000) found that a significant triangular relationship existed between challenge, support and confidence of students. The consequence of one of the points of the triangle being missed was a loss in student confidence and the motivation to learn. Based on several research studies that examined workplace learning, Eraut (2004) found that novices' work needed to be challenging enough for their level of expertise without it becoming daunting or students developed ineffective coping mechanisms. Appropriate allocation of work and supervision was crucial to

promoting students' confidence so they could gain exposure to learning opportunities while simultaneously being supported through the negative aspects of learning in real life settings. Wenger (2012) recommended that students gained a deep insight into their future professions if they were immersed, even for a short period of time, into their full future roles. Morley (2015) found that first-year student nurses were incentivised after their unplanned participation in a cardiac resuscitation for they not only had performed successfully in highly regarded, high stakes learning but had participated and been supported well above their expected stage of education.

The structuring of practice learning was influential to students' progress (Eraut, 2004). Allocation to activities removed from practice, rather than peripheral to it, eroded the potential for situated learning to occur (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Gherardi, Nicolini and Odella (1998) introduced the concept of 'situated curriculum' in an ethnographic study of Italian construction site managers and the importance of context and design to realise learners' potential. Case Study 1 provides a novel example of how work experience on an undergraduate media course was developed to provide greater authenticity and certainty to the student work experience with subsequent deep impact on learning and the university's reputation within the media sector.

### **Case Study 1**

**Launching a Successful In-house Company to Deliver Real World Clients  
(Tony Steyger, Associate Professor, Television and Media Production, Solent  
University, UK)**

When Southampton Institute became Southampton Solent University in 2005, there was a strategic commitment to grow its small but relatively successful undergraduate media provision, particularly in television production. A new programme of courses was validated, teaching staff from industry were recruited and investment was secured to build a TV studio and fully equipped outside broadcast vehicle and buy sufficient high-definition video equipment and editing software.

Media education at the time was becoming a crowded marketplace. The south coast was already well served by HE providers, including Bournemouth and Portsmouth, whilst Brighton and Chichester were entering the tussle for new students with their own infrastructure investment.

One tactic for Solent to compete in the sector for new students was to secure valuable curriculum accreditation for the programme of courses from Skillset, the industry-led skills body, thus providing a Kitemark of quality. A significant pre-requisite for Skillset accreditation was for undergraduate courses to embed into the curriculum 120 hours of guaranteed work experience for each student on professional projects. This was a particular challenge for Solent as the television industry in Southampton was tiny and the majority of broadcast companies were based in and around London, some 75 miles away. The challenge was how the Television Production programme at Solent could guarantee work experience to its expanding cohorts and provide the 'industry-ready' graduates Skillset demanded.

In 2007 a solution to this dilemma emerged as the university decided to pledge financial support for an in-house media production company, Solent Productions, designed as a mechanism to develop professional experience for students on a range of projects. This institutional commitment took into account the rapid maturing of the internet's video capabilities, exemplified by YouTube's recent launch and exponential growth. It seemed that everyone at the time wanted video content for their company or organisation and Solent's media staff were inundated with requests, many coming with budgets to match.

In addition to this unsolicited demand for content that helped kick-start Solent Productions, academic staff and others tapped into their own external networks to lever interesting production projects. One of these was to provide high-definition video content at the Glastonbury Festival from performance areas not covered by the BBC. In these early years, other partnerships were also forged with the National Health Service (NHS), Philips, Sony, Cowes Week, British University and Colleges Sports and Bestival, amongst others.

In 2008 the first application for Skillset accreditation was not successful, but in the following year the Television Production programme



secured the coveted ‘Tick’. Skillset acknowledged that a key part of the bid documentation had been the innovation of launching Solent Productions and its role in professionalising the students. In particular, the work experience engine created had impressed the assessors with its tally of 5000+ hours of professional student work per year.

Nicole Hay was the Senior Accreditation Manager at Skillset at the time. “Solent Productions played a healthy role during accreditation—replication of professional practice within HE is crucial to giving students that experience of work-readiness. You’ve got real-life external clients. Actually, it’s not replicating industry practice, it is industry practice.”

Since then, work experience opportunities for students have grown threefold. The impressive scale of these opportunities is helped by the fact that many projects involve longer events, outside broadcasting operations and consequently significant crewing numbers.

To coordinate these ongoing production activities, especially during the summer months, involves dedicated staffing. Solent Productions is subsidised by the University and is able to hire recent graduates on fixed-term contracts, providing them with a staging post between education and industry. These graduate staff organise a deepening pool of students eager for paid work. Commissioned work that comes with funding offsets the level of subsidy required and varies year on year.

The core pedagogy underpinning Solent Productions is ‘learning by doing’ (Savin-Baden, 2000), creating ‘real world learning’ experiences alongside the curriculum. For students, the career advantages and personal gains are multiple. There are higher than average graduate employment numbers (DLHE) for TV graduates. The list of the alumni working in industry is remarkable and countless student testimonials cite the value of working with professionals on live projects, experiencing the real pressures of delivery, clients and briefs.

For many students, there is a real appetite to put themselves under these pressures, whether or not they are mandatory as part of a degree programme. Recruitment of students by the Solent Productions team involves a formal application process, shortlisting and interviews. Students often become fully immersed in the projects, working and camping together for days at a time during the summer months at

festivals and events. Confidence and self-belief are often increased and students realise they are working in the world they aspire to. They are notching up first-hand experience of effective teamwork and responsible communication, taking feedback and responding to constructive critiques. They form strong relationships with others and their professionalism off-site bleeds into their education.

It's often noted by staff that students working off-site often return transformed. Others seem ready for deeper engagement once the next semester starts. And the effect on career aspiration is clear to see. Jake Atkins, now a successful videographer, reflected recently on his time as a final year student in 2011. He says, "One of the best experiences of my career so far was going to the Glastonbury Festival with Solent Uni, the perfect start to my career in the TV and Video Industry!"

Many teaching and technical staff are also keen to stay abreast of new technologies and workflows offered as part of professional real world projects. Solent Productions is able to offer these individuals continuing professional development opportunities, on-site, on projects that are prestigious and reputation-building, testing and stretching whole production teams. More recently there have also been some direct broadcast commissions from the BBC and Showcase Cinemas that have added to the collective *cache* of working with Solent Productions.

But it has not all been plain sailing. The promise to clients by Solent Productions is to produce professional, and even broadcast standard output, created largely by students under supervision in a not-for-profit environment. This subsidised business model clearly would not survive outside HE, but there has been a concern that Solent Productions might be competing unfairly with local media start-ups, perhaps even those set up by Solent graduates.

To obviate this, the company collaborates where possible with graduates and fledgling operations, contributing to a wider economic development. Furthermore, many of the projects are large scale and simply wouldn't otherwise happen. If an outside broadcast project or live-stream event was tendered for at commercial rates, the costs would be so prohibitive that the opportunity would probably evaporate.

Another difficulty Solent Productions has is delivering quality content, on time, whilst meeting the client brief and expectations. To overcome

the obvious risks involved, Solent's in-house teaching and technical staff are vital in providing quality assurance and delivery guarantees. Students alone are not enough as they are still learning professional practice and are not contracted employees. There is much encouragement by management for staff to take important supervisory roles with student crews, graduate staff and professional alumni, in order to minimise the risk. Staff involvement usually creates a complete and robust 'skills chain' dedicated to delivering the required media content to a professional standard.

In a teaching university such as Solent where currently only limited academic research takes place amongst the staff, the reframing by management of these supervisory roles as scholarly or enterprise activity, and perhaps as a precursor to more traditional research outputs, is the way in which the 'skills chain' can remain strong and for Solent Productions to continue to innovate for the benefit of staff and students alike.

Over a decade later, Solent Productions is an established model for best practice in media education amongst academics and industry alike. It has won awards, gained national recognition and features in institutional submissions for the Teaching Excellence Framework. It has levered valuable civic partnerships across the city and plays a key role in selling the university to prospective applicants and their parents. And at its heart is the essence of 'learning by doing', providing students with personal and professional experiences for life.

## **Adding High Value to Aspects of Practice Pedagogy**

Ellstrom (2011) explains that a learning environment can be categorised as enabling or constraining dependent on how smoothly a student can transition between adaptive (the acquisition of skills or the aforementioned, technical competencies) and developmental (professional critique or the aforementioned actionable knowledge) learning. The difference can be viewed as the nuances that exist between students undertaking training, where they may be competent to a high level, and education

where students are, from the outset, encouraged to think more broadly, alternatively and with an in-built sense of critique and reasoning.

Case Study 1, already presented, showcases developmental learning where students' immersion into high stakes learning through authentic TV production gives students an edge to their work experience—thus making it extraordinary—that would not have the same impact if the learning was not contributing to a commercial product.

Although students often experience a balance of adaptive or developmental learning through their work experience, developmental learning can be augmented if learning, as argued by Klein (1998), is given due attention and this can be achieved in the curriculum design, the practice pedagogy or both. Holbery, Morley and Mitchell (2019, p. 56), in their examination of the coaching of student nurses on placement, found ways students were best supported to expansive learning (Fuller & Unwin, 2003) that “encouraged a supportive environment for students to learn higher level skills such as dialogue, problem solving and reflexive forms of expertise”. This was achieved through three distinct phases of students connecting with their colleagues, establishing their prior knowledge and expanding this expertise through a social model of learning where students worked with a diversity of staff.

An extraordinary work experience may further isolate skills, or work conditions, that are deemed particularly important to professional development within a discipline. Peer learning, as a means of encouraging collaboration and team building at both university and the workplace, is gaining traction in higher education (Hilsdon, 2014; Keenan, 2014). In practice, peer learning can enhance belonging, promote cooperation and support enhanced employability skills (Wilson, Cooper, & Baron, 2019) when due attention is given to the stage and application of learning. Case Study 2, like Case Study 1, creates an innovative situated context for learning yet explicitly enhances learning through the promotion of peer

### Case Study 2

**Employability Benefits from Embracing Challenge as Teams: The Purbeck Wildlife Student Environment Research Team Placement (Dr Anita Diaz, Professor in Conservation Ecology, Bournemouth University, UK)**

learning and support in the authentic real world context of research on an ecology field trip.

Student Environment Research Teams (SERTs) <http://www.cocreate4science.org/serts/> are a Bournemouth University initiative founded on the principle of creating team-learning opportunities for students that also simultaneously create new knowledge in partnership with academics and professional practitioners. The Purbeck Wildlife SERT is funded and mentored as a close collaboration between Bournemouth University and the National Trust and also involves a range of other conservation organisations. It was founded in 2016 and runs annually. It is based around a two-week camp-based residential project where students and staff work together to conduct wildlife surveys that address conservation ecology science questions. Students also help with planning before the SERT and outreach communication of the work afterwards. Mentoring from staff scaffolds students' learning and fosters a strong work ethic. It also encourages students to find ways of demonstrating their skills and competencies so that they can communicate these to future employers.

Through SERTs students gain key employability skills in wildlife conservation and environmental science. Successful careers in these areas demand self-responsibility, resilience, commitment and communication skills as well as strong subject-specific skills. These 'soft' employability skills are often forged in crucibles of challenge where people are stretched beyond their comfort zones. However, challenging placements are risky, particularly in a HE climate dominated by student satisfaction, as their full value may not become apparent to the students until after they graduate. Consequently, such placements are rare and yet much needed to support student development into effective graduate citizens for the twenty-first century.

The Purbeck Wildlife SERT work placement aims to address this need by providing students with an authentically challenging work placement environment in which they can both gain subject-specific skills in ecology and advance their personal growth of soft employability skills. The authenticity of challenge opportunities provided by the Purbeck Wildlife SERT is achieved by students entering as partners into communities of practice (CoP) of researchers and practitioners committed to conserving species (Morley et al., 2018). This means that the work the students do

has practical consequences for conservation. This fosters engagement and enhances the overall learning experience. The placement is advertised together with other placements on the internal university system 'Careerhub' and students apply in the same way as they do for other work placements by sending a curriculum vitae and covering letter. Students are then interviewed informally to discuss if the placement is right for them. Up to 15 students have been accepted on the placement per year to date. All placements are technically co-curricular on the degree course, that is, they must be passed but are not credit bearing. This gives students and placement hosts scope to try something innovative which may not work without risking it impacting on a student's marks.

During the placement students also analyse their data in the evenings so they can present their findings to the National Trust. The presentation is a formal PowerPoint session delivered by the students on the last day of fieldwork. This puts the students under real world pressures of time and exposure. Furthermore, students are immersed in a field camp context for the two weeks of fieldwork and are expected to also lead the management of their team camp needs such as cooking rotas. Students hone their abilities to communicate constructively with other members of the CoP through their roles as both student leader and team members. All of this combines to create a high stakes environment that purposefully place students in exposed positions of accountability as team leaders.

Key subject-specific skills gained on the placement include species identification, fieldwork management and data analysis. Wider competencies include communication, resilience, problem-solving and being able to demonstrate sustained responsibility. These skills and competencies are highly applicable to a range of careers as well as specifically to the very competitive careers in wildlife conservation. They map strongly onto the degree programme learning outcomes: "have critical understanding of the scientific, technical, and regulatory bases of conservation ecology and wider environmental issues" and "apply these skills to specific environmental problems, and also communicate effectively". Students can tailor the balance of skills and competencies they develop depending on which leadership roles they select. Consequently, the aspiration is that this placement empowers all students to accelerate their individual career trajectories.

The most profound growth in student learning is around their gaining of an integrated sense of empowerment and responsibility as a result of being part of a team. This fosters strong engagement with learning new skills and a willingness to overcome barriers. Fieldwork conditions and the very rustic field camp arrangements are new challenges for many of the students as is the reality of long working days and expectations of consistently accurate work. The duality of support and expectation arising from students being accountable members of the team promotes a strong work ethic. This directly drives students to work hard to develop and share their subject-specific skills in, for example, species identification or data analysis, so that they contribute to the success of the team. Students also develop a strong appreciation of the need for give-and-take flexibility, personal responsibility and peer support. There have been occasions where staff provided mentoring support at specifically intense moments of conflict and challenge. However, the focus for mentors has remained on supporting students to take the opportunity to practice and demonstrate their emotional intelligence rather than on stepping in as arbitrators.

The Purbeck Wildlife SERT has wider impacts beyond benefits to the individual students involved. Fundamentally, it has cemented a strong partnership between Bournemouth University and the National Trust which is building forward to create new research and knowledge exchange opportunities. This will support the co-creation of an innovative monitoring programme for conservation management of the Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve that aims to provide a model for landscape-scale monitoring that can be adopted across other landscapes that are important for wildlife and people's well-being. Becoming thought leaders in this field will benefit wider society and raise the profile and prestige of both the university and National Trust.

Overall the student experience on the Purbeck Wildlife SERT embodies the core purpose of Bournemouth University which is "to inspire learning, advance knowledge and enrich society". Student learning is inspired through co-creating new research knowledge in partnership with academics and practitioners which has special value because it enriches society by benefiting nature. An extraordinary work experience arises

from authentic fused engagement by all stakeholders; the core fuel for that fusion is trust.

## Recognising the Negative Aspects of Practice Learning and Promoting the Interdependence of Theory and Practice

Reoccurring areas in practice pedagogy have the potential to undermine student learning and dilute the ability of work experience to reach an extraordinary level. Factors such as poor induction (Quinlaven, Sookraj-Bahal, Moody, Levington, & Taylor, 2019), the use of exclusive professional language (Gherardi et al., 1998; Wenger, 1998), poorly designed assessment and lack of support systems (Morley, 2015) were all found to have an effect. From an institutional point of view, the number of students seeking work placements as part of their programmes of study puts a strain on any ambition for students to only be exposed to exceptional learning situations. In the drive to find an increasing number of placements for an increasing number of students, universities enter a numbers game, often against other institutions of higher education, to address the programme requirements.

Although new higher degree apprenticeship schemes, explored in Chapter 11, meticulously address many of the recognised negativities of practice learning in their curriculum design, other innovative examples exist where universities create their own extraordinary work experience. Case Study 3, from Solent University, provides an example of a work experience hub where many of the university programmes capitalise on an externally facing retail space created by the university itself by its integration into its curriculum design.

### Case Study 3

**The Student Led Retail Store: Flexible and Creative Embedded Learning**  
(Lesley Taylor, Senior Lecturer—Academic Lead Re:So, Solent University, UK)



Re:So (The Retail Solent Initiative) was founded as a pop up in 2012 by the Solent University's Head of Faculty of Creative Industries to give students a showcase to test and sell their own products, on a commission basis, in a real retail environment. Equally it was designed with work-based learning in mind, allowing students to take responsibility for running an off-campus retail store whilst accruing a large amount of work placement hours. Typically, Re:So provides 2000–3000 hours per year across its associated programmes.

The products range from fashion and accessories to art, homewares and publications and are promoted by the store team as part of their job roles. The store also trades at external events such as the student Fresher's Fair, music festivals and themed daytime events in a local nightclub.

The store model does not have a traditional product supply chain so the student team must work to promote and refresh the product offer and presentations as part of their learning. Re:So's upstairs location is also a challenge and those working on social media placement have this as their focus to make the store visible online to as many potential customers as possible.

Twenty-five taught modules from two Schools (i.e. Art, Design and Fashion, and Business, Law and Communication) are linked to the store. Outcomes vary from products to events, analytical business reports, marketing proposals and instore spatial and decorative designs. This gives the brief a live client and the outcomes from a real world perspective. Students can apply for roles at the store or submit their own proposals.

Not all students can afford to take a placement in London so Re:So provides accessible, local and high impact work experience where the store provides work similar to retail head offices and design studios, just on a smaller scale. Social media input, marketing plans and event organisation would be unusual in a larger retailer's store, so this gives a point of difference.

Placement students are able to come to the store to discuss what they wish to learn, and a job can be drawn up in a bespoke fashion to suit these requirements. The hours are flexible, the staff rota being drawn up according to their availability. Hence a placement can be three full weeks or spread across a few months if they prefer and allows the student to continue with paid work they may already have.

One course, BA (Hons) Product Design, runs a module entitled 'Design for Manufacture' whereby the student must understand the store and its customer profile, interview the staff and the Academic Lead proposes a product that can retail under £15. Two are selected by the Academic Lead and Course Leader and the production process involves a small budget from the School to allow for purchase of materials. The products are created in the University's workshop. They are promoted by the course and the store on social media with the student receiving a portion of the sale price, after commission.

The Product Design students are briefed in the store by their Course Leader and the Academic Lead is introduced, who gives an overview of the store. They see how the store operates and have the opportunity to ask questions as they examine the store themselves. The two staff members are then both present to give feedback at approximately a six-week (mid-module) presentation whereby the students show their designs and thought processes to that point. The feedback enables them to edit or to rethink at this stage so that they stay close to the brief and to ensure they are aiming for a commercially viable product. The final selection is made at that hand-in point where prototypes and product proposals are again reviewed by the two staff members. Two items are nominated, and the students go into a production process with the Course Leader to create 5–10 of their design for pre-Christmas launch in the store.

Mostly the links between placement and academia occur as the result of a 2000-word reflective, theory-based assignment. Those that undertake the work-based learning unit are asked to reflect upon what they learned about themselves, rather than the skills they learned. They apply reflective theory and include diary extracts to support their findings.

When working on linked modules, students also learn from the student staff at the store as they are often the point of contact for when a student visits to ask questions about the business. Internally a work placement student will learn from a more established paid member of the team, most of whom have come through that system themselves. Training and day-to-day running of the store is student-led and is advertised as such to make Re:So unique.

The highest paid student role of sales manager is one that works closely with the Academic Lead and stays in post for up to 2.5 years and can

really make the role their own. They grow in confidence in this time and become quite autonomous in their working style, which prepares students for industry. Each year there has been a paid graduate intern role giving them the responsibility of being the store manager on a 12-month contract. The interns can ‘model’ the store procedures as they see fit and streamline ways the team are recruited, trained and work.

The graduate interns have mostly gone into management roles straight from their contracts, hence fast-tracking their employability.

In particular, the interdependency between the theory and practice in a students’ programme of study is significant to the curriculum design and pedagogy of an extraordinary work experience. Bjorck and Johansson (2018), in their investigation of the terminology used by students, found that the traditional polarised view of the dualism of theory and practice was unhelpful to a more seamless view of theory and practice conjoined and as “harmonious points of departure for learning” (p. 9). The often-geographical divide between the academic course component at university and practice on work experience can underlie further micro divisions in delivery, assessment and the support that students receive. This can create opposing forces within the same course that only students are aware of as they move between the different learning environments of their programmes of study.

The fragmentation of learning that can occur between university and work is a well-recognised phenomenon in many professional courses and the resultant schism leads to deep-seated problems for students’ immediate and long-term development. Theory is embedded in and is inseparable from practice (Schön, 1983), yet students often fail to make the connection between their academic learning and how this can be translated into the world of work (Dibben & Morley, 2019). Real world learning replicates, or as closely as is reasonably possible, the authentic world of work where practice and theory are rarely separated, and one constantly stimulates the other. The theory-practice divide is often positioned as extremes on an education-training continuum which is counter-intuitive to a continual and explicit articulation of applied pedagogy to the students’ learning.

Trede and McEwen (2012) found that critical awareness is a graduate skill of a developing professional and one where awareness of the source

of knowledge is essential to differentiate between that which is objective and that based on professional socialisation and tradition (Eraut, 2000). Roberts (2006) argues that this lack of awareness can impede the absorption and sharing of new skills and risks socialisation to one way of thinking.

Argyris and Schön (1974) and Smith (2012) identify a difference between practitioners' intentions in practice and ideal course of action: *espoused theories* against a privileging of what is already used in practice—*theories in use*. Allen (2009, p. 653) found that this was the case with prospective teachers who articulated their “in-field experience as practical, real and immediate and on-campus work as theoretical and remote”.

Furthermore, acquiescence by the student, and an inability to exercise their voice due to political and power structures on work experience, can distort students' ability to question, connect and critique the learning they are experiencing (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2011). Working in a supported environment can ease this process (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2011) as well as encouraging students' engagement with this powerful para curriculum as part of their development (Allan, Smith, & O'Driscoll, 2011).

Awareness and strategies to explicitly integrate theory and practice vary according to programmes of study. Provision, through recalibrating the curriculum, is one such strategy where the use of authentic assessment can assess the application of theory to practice, another is attending to the redesign of the balance and integration between academic study and work experience as showcased in a nursing module in Case Study 4. In particular, the case study explicitly demonstrates the mutual benefit of knowledge exchange between the theoretical and practical elements of a course.

#### Case Study 4

**Assessment That Has Helped Bridge the Theory to Practice Gap (Dr Pauline Calleja, Senior Lecturer, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Griffith University, Australia)**

At master's level 'Emerging issues in disaster and pandemic planning, response and management' in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, students experience a scaffolded series of assessment items that has helped bridge theory to practice.

Students report wide-scale changes to existing health service policy. In some cases, there was no policy in place or only work guidelines existed and students' recommendations provided an impetus for change. Mostly students were involved in working parties or became clinician stakeholders in the portfolios that related to disaster or pandemic preparedness in their hospital or health service. This then created opportunities for applied leadership that was in addition to their clinical work with patients.

The online course deliberately requires students to directly apply legislation, theory and best practice guidelines to their local context to influence practice. Assessment, learning outcomes, threshold concepts and learning activities were explicitly linked for students in this course. For each learning activity the student was explicitly told how it helped them prepare for assessment or challenge practice or perceptions.

**Assessment 1** 2000 w, 35% weighted, critical analysis essay

Students critically evaluate how well prepared the student's local workplace is to respond to a disaster or pandemic activation using legislation and literature. Students choose an event type and review the local policy or guidelines and make recommendations to improve local policy/guidelines. Students often engage with managers in their workplace in order to identify which policy or guidelines to evaluate and are often encouraged to discuss possible recommendations with their line managers once they have evaluated the strengths and gaps to ensure recommendations are practicable and not just theoretical. Students are required to make an argument for priority of recommendations as well, and they often find that their clinical supports can assist them to make this argument by debating the pros and cons of their recommendations. Students can include workplace feedback about their recommendations to lend credibility to their recommendation's prioritisation.

**Assessment 2** Twelve-minute presentation, and discussion board management, response to other students' discussion board, 40% weighting (20% presentation, 10% discussion management, 10% response to other students' presentations).

Students choose real world events that have publications about them (e.g. 9/11 in 2001, Ebola virus disease breakout and London train bombing). Students research the management and outcomes of the event and apply lessons learned from this to their local context to create and deliver a recorded presentation on an online discussion board thread. Students then manage their discussion thread related to their presentation and participate in online discussion boards about three other students' presentations. This approach also exposes students to both disaster and pandemic events and policy variations that they would not be able to achieve in traditional essay-only assessments.

This assessment leverages knowledge students gain about their local policies in assessment 1 and then, using critical evaluation skills, apply a real event to their local workplace and policy and make recommendations for improvement of preparedness and management. Students also gain other skills such as managing an online asynchronous conversation through clear guidelines on what students should comment on when watching others' presentations which has increased the depth and quality of the discussion. The context of the authentic event engages students deeply in the assessment, and this is one of the most highly evaluated aspects of the course. Most students also share this presentation with their colleagues and managers before submitting for feedback and in this way directly influences policy and awareness in their own workplace.

**Assessment 3** Reflective assessment, weighting 25%, 1000–1500 w.

Students review their presentation and the discussion board. They reflect on the presentation and the peer feedback and responses in the discussion thread. Students share their presentation's strengths and shortfalls and the quality of the peer discussion before proposing refinements or give a defence of the recommendations made in the presentation for local management of the chosen topic with reference to the literature and feedback.

This final assessment focuses on students' ability to reflect on and critically review discussion, their recommendations and the quality of their presentation. This is an essential skill for healthcare professionals when selecting interventions and evidence to support practice. We are currently redeveloping this final assessment to encompass an evaluation of students' learning across the whole course and therefore close the loop on their learning and intention to apply their learnings to practice.

Student feedback outlines the incidental impact that the first two assessments have on their wider development. Most students report that this has given them confidence to develop educational resources for asynchronous learning with colleagues who work across shifts and off-site. Students also report that as a result of their recommendations being locally applicable, they were invited onto more committees or into leadership roles because their managers saw their potential to continue to improve practice in other areas of need.

For some students this change in how they were seen as leaders was profound; one student reported that her work on these assessments led to her ability to present her recommendations for improvement of a work practice very well in an interview and attributes this to her successful promotion.

Evans, Guile, and Harris (2009) and Evans, Guile, Harris, and Allan (2010) highlight how theoretical knowledge acquired at university needs to be carefully 're-contextualised' to make it available to students, first, in their university learning and then to enable them to transfer their learning to a practice context. Thus, the theory of academic learning (content re-contextualisation) needs to 'travel and alter' through the curriculum development of the simulation (pedagogic re-contextualisation), be applied to clinical practice within the work-based setting (workplace re-contextualisation) and then made accessible and usable by the student whilst in practice (learner re-contextualisation).

Using Evan's theory of re-contextualisation, Morley, Bettles and Derham (2019) found that assumptions that certain pedagogies, such as simulation, naturally carried learning into the practice context were often incorrect. Multiple barriers, such as the students' confidence to admit to their learning needs with their new practice supervisor, were highlighted and demonstrated the importance that attention was given to theoretical connections and university learning in the different context of practice.

This can be achieved through a variety of routes and the theory-practice divide can be bridged by students working with specialists who naturally broker the academic and practice elements by their wide-reaching professional experience (Morley, 2018) or particular roles that focus on ensuring the university experience continues to be supported on placement (Eccles & Renaud, 2018) through the coaching of graduate skills.

## Conclusion

The case studies that provide the applied examples within this chapter showcase the attributes of an extraordinary work experience originally mapped by the authors. The case study authors' creative pedagogies, with their ability to work imaginatively with university structures and processes, have provided students with immediate and longitudinal opportunity to accelerate both their learning and work readiness. This all takes place in an environment different in every way to the traditional university setting and the extraordinary work experience will use this authenticity to its advantage by providing learning that is accelerated and connects powerfully with students' affective engagement. Each case study role models an attention to the detail of learning, so students' work experience is reinforced, and it's worth made explicit to them. Once complete, students have the opportunity to tap into ongoing professional networks—acknowledged by the number of alumni who support the university initiatives long after they have graduated.

Collectively, the case studies have become market leaders outside of their universities as their work experience has extended the students' impact into wider industry and community involvement, thus building the university reputation as a result. Innovative and well thought through work experience has an impact not only on students' learning but also on the motivation of staff, their pride in their pedagogy and product which feeds back into the student experience. In an extraordinary work experience, immersion is mutual for both academic and student.

Increasingly, however, due in greater part to the growing numbers of students on vocational degrees with an expectation on an integral placement experience, universities are having to source these opportunities in an ever-increasingly crowded marketplace. Subsequently, many establishments have



had to form a new paradigm and find new and imaginative methods by which to concurrently give the student what they want and the industry what they need. As such, universities have had to ‘think outside the box’ and find ways in which to manage large cohorts, and their expectations, with the resource limitations of, often, local businesses or services.

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