

A national study of the provision of career development learning and work-integrated learning in Australian higher education

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This paper is an exploration of the relationship between career development learning and work-integrated learning. First, it highlights research conducted by the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services on behalf of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council. The research project explored the contribution of career development learning to work-integrated learning in Australian universities. Second, it highlights the conceptual linkages between career development learning and work-integrated learning which are expressed in notions of the career self-management competencies of self-awareness, opportunity awareness, decision learning, and transition learning.

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Learning at work and through work is the core pedagogical function of work-integrated learning. Any work, regardless of its type, where it occurs, and its status in society, is made meaningful to an individual when it is engaged with, or reflected upon, in terms of personal identity and growth; (Billett & Pavlova, 2005; Blustein, 2006). It is this dimension of personalised meaningfulness which makes work such a useful site for higher education. The challenge for higher education is to adapt pedagogical frameworks which best exploit the work-roles in the lives of students. With its emphasis upon the construction of personal identity amidst myriad life roles, the theory and practices of career development learning presents itself as one such pedagogical framework.

Project Overview

The project *Career Development Learning: Maximising the Contribution of Work-Integrated Learning to the Student Experience* (Smith et al., 2009) was an exploration of how career development learning could support and enhance work-integrated learning. It was conducted under the auspices of the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS) with funding from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), and was actively supported by the majority of the Career Services at Australian universities. The project coincided with the Australian Government's review of career development services in tertiary education institutions (Department of Education Employment & Workplace Relations, 2008). Although they were independent of one another, the two projects emphasised the realised and potential contribution of career development learning to higher education was significant, and recommended that there be future exploration of how best to enhance and positively exploit this approach to student learning and development.

Project Methodology

The project took an approach in which knowledge and solutions would be generated by and for the key stakeholders who were involved in the delivery of work-integrated learning (e.g., university staff, students, employers). The project

was conducted over a period of approximately 18 months, commencing in October 2007.

The research process included focus groups and questionnaires administered to stakeholder groups to gather their appraisals of their work-integrated learning programs. At the core of the project was the *National Symposium on Career Development Learning and Work-integrated Learning*, held in Melbourne, June 2008. The National Symposium brought 168 stakeholders together to conduct concentrated discussions around crucial themes derived from the focus groups and online questionnaires. The symposium was soon after followed by the *Student and Employer Forum* in which over 60 participants refined the outcomes of the symposium. Having gleaned a significant body of data from the literature review, questionnaires, and focus groups, and the two large meetings of stakeholders, a series of case study analyses of exemplary programs were conducted.

Project Outcomes

A summary of the project's findings and outcomes is presented in the main report (Smith et al., 2009) and on the official project website, which serves as a public domain repository of resources (e.g., readings, templates for learning agreements, assessment, case studies) for higher education practitioners, employers, and students (www.nagcas.org.au/ALTC).

Principles. A set of principles for the delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning, which were generated by stakeholders, affirmed the realised and potential linkages between career development learning and work-integrated learning: (a) flexible partnerships among stakeholders can support effective career development learning; (b) workplace experiences can provide genuine career development learning opportunities for all students; and multiple experiences and contexts enrich this learning; (c) career development learning is student-centred, and designed to engage actively students in the workplace experience; (d) career development learning supports quality student-centred learning opportunities across all aspects of students' lives; (e) universities should encourage students' career development and workplace learning by supporting their capacity to systematically reflect, record, and

articulate the acquired skills and experience; and (f) quality assurance across the experience contributes to better outcomes. The principles are in need of further development, particularly the quality framework.

Conceptual Framework. The research studies of the project validated a conceptual framework for career development learning: namely the DOTS model (Watts, 2006). The DOTS model posits career development learning as four key dimensions: *self-awareness*, *opportunity awareness*, *decision making*, and *transition learning*. Put succinctly, self-awareness pertains to a student's knowledge of the generic and discipline-specific skills, attributes, and knowledge which constitute his or her personal capital and, moreover, the unique aspirations for growth as a person. Opportunity awareness is knowledge of the world-of-work, such as the present and future labour market into which a student aspires to successfully enter as a graduate. Decision-making involves the process of understanding self and the world-of-work, and the rationally figuring out where one can best be positioned. Transition learning pertains to the pragmatic skills fundamental for transferring from an environment of learning to the world-of-work.

The four dimensions are considered fundamental to a student actively developing the competencies of career self-management for the contemporary world-of-work. Moreover, they may also serve as tools to inform the conceptualisation, design, and evaluation of work-integrated learning. For example, in relation to developing self-awareness through work-integrated learning, coursework learning activities which are intended to prepare students for their work activities and subsequently facilitate their drawing meaningful connections among self, discipline studies, and experiences of work activities, might include the completion of formative or summative assessment tasks such as completing a self-assessment (using psychometric tools or semi-structured questionnaires) and then writing a reflective autobiographical essay based upon those self-assessment data with explicit links to disciplinary theory.

Summary

Despite the breadth and depth of exemplary practices identified in the project, there was evidence that certain elements of the dimensions of decision-making and transition learning were not as well articulated into work-integrated learning programs as would be expected (McIlveen et al., 2009). This finding was derived from a survey of the perspectives of Career Services which contributed to or managed a work-integrated learning program. Future research could explore the perspectives of academic teaching staff and employers. Moreover, future research and development should concentrate upon the conceptualisation and design of work-integrated

learning curriculum which applies the DOTS dimensions.

If work is a site for the construction of personal identity (Blustein, 2006) then the framework for career development learning (Watts, 2006) can be used to personalise higher learning. The aforementioned example of self-assessed, self-directed, or self-managed learning positions the responsibility for learning with the student; yet the DOTS model informs educators on how to construct learning resources, moments, or environments which can contribute to students' personalised engagement with work-integrated learning. Considered more broadly, the nexus between person, work, and learning, brings into scope the role of higher education. Indeed, developmental and constructivist notions of career development would eschew the positioning of higher education as a mere supply of well-informed labour. Instead, career development learning privileges higher learning, and therefore work-integrated learning, as a vehicle for personal growth and development; and with this primacy, it better prepares individuals for their lifelong learning and self-management in the contemporary world-of-work; thus, the learner takes control.

References

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