Stories from the field…

Research and Grants for building staff capacity for inclusive WIL

| University/Institution: Macquarie University |
| Name/title of example of inclusive WIL practice: Pedagogy Research Workshops and their use for building staff capacity for inclusive WIL |
| Key contact: Dr Anna Rowe |
| Key Words: Community of Practice; professional development; research capacity; collaboration; grants |

**General information:**
Macquarie University have been running the PACE (Professional and Community Engagement) Pedagogy Research Workshops since 2013. The workshop series aims to bring together people who are interested in learning and teaching research related to PACE (a form of work-integrated learning).

The PACE Pedagogy Research Workshops are attended by people from across the institution, including: academics, professional staff and doctoral candidates. There is a core group of people who regularly attend these workshops, generally those who are actively researching in the area. Other people attend based on the topic being presented and the relevance of this to their own work needs and interests.

The workshops are offered in face to face mode and run 3 times per year for approximately 90 minutes per session. Session materials are emailed to attendees and others registered on the group email list and made publically available on the LTC website. This allows those who were unable to attend access to some of the key concepts etc presented.

The group facilitators, Dr Theresa Winchester-Seeto (Head Curriculum and Academic Practice Group) and Dr Anna Rowe (Program Research and Development Officer), invite members to contribute suggestions to the calendar of topics to be covered by the workshops. This approach helps ensure the topics covered serve the members interests and needs.

Workshops have a key theme and often involve subject matter experts from across the University. For example, academics with expertise in quantitative and statistical analysis contribute as guest presenters. Every session has a practical component where participants have an opportunity to undertake hands-on activities, usually in the form of group work. Time for questions and answers is also built into the workshop.

Note: the workshop format was piloted at Macquarie University’s Learning and Teaching week in 2012. Based on positive feedback received, it was decided to add the workshop series to the suite of regular professional development workshops the Learning and Teaching Centre offer.

**Building staff capacity:**
The PACE Pedagogy Workshop series serves multiple purposes, which include:

- promoting research in the area of work-integrated learning
- fostering collaborative research opportunities across disciplinary areas
broadening perceptions regarding research topics and methodological approaches

- developing knowledge and skills with respect to research methods and strategies
- advertising internal and external grant opportunities

While the workshops are not designed to specifically address issues of inclusive practice in WIL, they directly help build the capacity of staff to undertake research in the area, which in turn provides evidence to inform and improve WIL practice. The workshops also help those who may be “working alone” to grow a network they can call on for support and advice. This is particularly useful to those who are new to this pedagogical approach.

**Key to success:**

A frequently cited benefit of the PACE Pedagogy Research workshops relates to the opportunity these workshops provide for people to share their experiences and ideas, and learn from one another. This in turn promotes opportunities to develop future collaborations. Critical to this is the hands-on activities and Q&A features included in the design of the workshops.

The workshops are also appreciated for their coverage of a broad range of topics, providing an introduction to a specific research topic from which participants can follow up further. Topics covered include: thematic analysis; coding qualitative data; sampling, developing interview questions, survey design, Qualitative analysis using QSR NVivo software, conducting interviews, case study research, and evaluation. Attendees gain access to the central concepts, the main thinkers in the area, key readings, examples in practice, as well as resources developed by the LTC/PACE.

Those undertaking PACE research are invited to present their research projects to the PACE Community of Practice (CoP). This provides an effective way to showcase what people are doing to, to disseminate findings, and to possibly encourage others to undertake research.

Importantly, Macquarie University offers a number of PACE research grants each year. These grants provide researchers with the funds to undertake research in the first place. The PACE Research Pedagogy Workshops help develop staff capacity to undertake the research the university has funded.

**Challenges:**

Finding opportunities for staff to collaborate on research projects is one challenge. Workload demands may be partly to blame, however some of the challenge possibly relates to current research priorities. Unfortunately education based research, such as that done in the area of PACE and work-integrated learning, is sometimes seen as secondary to discipline specific research, which means staff often prioritise research where their efforts are recognised and rewarded.

**Advice for those looking to start a Pedagogy Research Workshop series:**

Based on her experiences at Macquarie University, Anna Rowe suggests the following to those interested in starting a Pedagogy Research Workshop series:

1) Determine the purpose of your Workshops and establish some guidelines for how they will operate.

2) Involve research subject matter experts from across the university and invite them as guest presenters/facilitators.

3) Develop a communication strategy and find ways to showcase research being undertaken across your institution.