

Learning & Teaching through PACE: Changing roles and environments

**Funded by the
Australian Collaborative Education Network
(ACEN)**

**Dr María Amigó
Dr Justine Lloyd
Nanditha Hettitantri
Carina Hart**

**Department of Sociology
Macquarie University**

March 2016



**MACQUARIE
University**

Table of Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	2
Key Findings	3
Risk	3
Rewards	3
Structured experience	4
Workload	4
Altruism	4
Productive connections	4
Time constraints	5
Liminality	5
<i>Brief Overview:</i>	5
<i>Relevance of the project to ACEN's vision, mission and aims</i>	5
<i>Background, aims, outcomes, and alignment with ACEN's research theme "Building Partnerships"</i>	5
<i>Background</i>	6
<i>Key Questions</i>	8
<i>Project aims</i>	9
<i>Methods</i>	9
Findings	12
Group A- Unit convenors and teachers	12
Versatility	13
Uncertainty	14
Changes to workload	14
Change of attitudes from the institution towards academic work	14
Rewards	15
Group B- Workplace supervisors	15
Workload changes	16
Risk	16
Mitigating factors on workload: mentoring culture	16
Cost-benefit considerations	17
Benefits	18
Group C- Students	19
Pressures of professionalism	19
Benefits	20

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

Implications.....21
Future research21
References..... 22
Appendix: Interview Schedule.....24

List of Tables

- Table 1: Number and profile of participants, p. 11**
- Table 2: Enumeration of roles identified by Group A: Unit Convenors, p. 12**
- Table 3: Challenges identified by Group B: Workplace Supervisors, p. 18**

Key Findings

This study explored the implications of new roles generated within WIL-activities through the interrelationships and interconnections of university teachers with other stakeholders. We identify important elements of the context within which participants perform unfamiliar roles and experience within the hitherto unknown environments of WIL. We also make recommendations for improvement in supporting all stakeholders to maximize the potential benefits of undertaking new and unfamiliar roles.

Key findings from the project are:

Risk

1. The concept of **risk** is prevalent in the data. For all involved, there are risks each time a student goes on placement.
 - For the unit convenor, the risks relate to placements not going smoothly, either due to a mismatch, student or supervisor personal issues, or miscommunication, which can greatly increase their workload, as well as affect the relationship between the university and partner organisations.
 - For the host supervisor, the risk is of a similar nature: every time a student is placed there is the risk that he or she will need more support than expected, may find challenging balancing student and professional life, or may not fit in with the culture of an organisation.
 - For the student, a series of risks are also present when they take up a placement; they may struggle to manage both student and workplace workloads, they may not have the skills or knowledge expected by their supervisors, or they may be allocated to a team of students that does not operate cooperatively.

Rewards

2. Because there are risks involved in moving into these new environments for all parties, but students especially, there is also potential for great **rewards**.
 - For the unit convenor, the rewards relate to seeing their students apply and extend their existing knowledge, and undertake projects that are moving them closer to their potential careers; creating opportunities for organisations to reach their goals; and expanding their networks. In addition, unit convenors take pleasure in seeing how their disciplines are realised in practice.

- For the host supervisor, the benefits stem from the potentially innovative ideas and energy as well as the enhanced research capacity that students bring to their organisations and the possibility that the partnership with the university may lead to further collaborations.
- For the student, the benefits are the development of a combination of both tangible and tacit skills that are unique to the workplace, the realisation that the knowledge learned can be applied to a practical situation, and a sense of confidence in achieving their work within the context of the organisation's own goals.

Structured experience

3. It is a combination of these first two themes that provides the **distinctive construction of knowledge** that creates WIL as “real world with training wheels” for students in particular. Students are able to access an “experience with limited negative consequences”, while still having the pedagogical structure of a University course to enable them to work on integrating the experience into their identity as a student.

Workload

4. Increased or unexpected **workload** is an issue for all involved and mitigation of this is often marred by a lack of recognition of the value of the work undertaken by academics involved in WIL-type teaching and learning activities, and by the unpredictable nature of the work.

Altruism

5. There is an **altruistic tone** in the narratives of convenors and supervisors. While the sampling method of the research may have targeted a cohort who are particularly interested in reflection on the personal satisfaction that they get from supervision, there is an evident preparedness by both these cohorts to engage in the risks involved (i.e. to increased workload, and to their ability to control projects and their own and the organisation's reputation).

Productive connections

6. The **productive links** between university and external organisations is appreciated by both convenors and supervisors but the potential of this hasn't been realised.

Time constraints

7. **Compressed nature of placements** is an issue, as all stakeholders have to fit into the timing of the academic study periods.

Liminality

8. **Ambiguous spaces/environments** (liminality) are experienced by all cohorts, but this liminality is a constant for convenors and supervisors, whereas students are expected to move into and out of a liminal status.

Brief Overview:

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) projects require radical and far-reaching transformations in routine roles and working environments of academics, students and workplace supervisors. This study sought to investigate the challenges, opportunities, and practicalities entailed in this dynamic, in order to better understand how to brief and support the three groups of stakeholders involved.

Relevance of the project to ACEN's vision, mission and aims

This project was closely aligned with ACEN's vision to provide strategic leadership for work-integrated learning research, scholarship and practice, and to generate a broader understanding of the dynamics of interchangeable professional roles of those involved in WIL practices. We sought to inform better ways of delivering and supporting WIL programs across Australia, which serves ACEN's mission of improving through collaboration WIL practices in tertiary institutions, industry, public sector and the wider community.

Background, aims, outcomes, and alignment with ACEN's research theme "Building Partnerships"

Professional and Community Engagement (PACE) is a key component of Macquarie University's strategic direction. The PACE program provides opportunities for students to develop valuable career skills while undertaking WIL and WIL-type activities working with partner organisations. Students enroll in a PACE-accredited unit convened by an academic, and into which a PACE activity is incorporated. The academic framework of the unit helps students prepare for the activity, enhances

their skill and knowledge development as they undertake it, and equips them to reflect on the experience and what they have learnt. It also ensures they receive academic credit for their experience.

Although PACE was implemented officially in 2011, for many years several courses at Macquarie University already had WIL-type teaching and learning activities. The introduction of PACE as a University-wide policy changed the institutional awareness of experiential learning. Since 2012 PACE units have also shared common learning modules on topics such as reflection and research ethics that prepare students for their professional lives. From 2016, all commencing Macquarie University students will be required to complete a PACE unit within their degree.

In 2013 the applicants undertook a pilot study on collaboration technologies which was funded by a Macquarie University's PACE Development Grant. This project found that students, partners at organisations, and unit convenors and teachers were highly reflexive about the ways that they undertook on new roles when they engaged in a PACE unit. Participants spoke at length on the ways that these shifts and transformations in roles were constitutive of new learning and teaching opportunities: for example, for students when acting as professionals, for convenors when undertaking new tasks of workplace recruitment, networking and mediation, and for workplace supervisors when becoming mentors of university students. These transitions into new roles generated new kinds of tasks, responsibilities and ways of behaviour in diverse (and unfamiliar) working environments.

This study followed up on these early findings of the previous project and fleshes out the practical implications of the differing roles and environments experienced by PACE stakeholders; students, academics and partner organisations. It was expected that the data collected would not only reveal how roles and settings for PACE participants radically differ from traditional professional and teaching modes, but would help inform the development of innovative ways of delivering WIL units and support learning outcomes.

Background

This study explores the new roles generated within WIL-activities through the interrelationships and interconnections between students, university teachers and university partners at external organisations. These new and diverse connections prompted by WIL are the context within which participants perform unfamiliar roles and experience hitherto unknown environments.

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

The concept of *liminality* is deployed in this study to explore the “in between” spaces that all those involved in WIL occupy. This concept was emergent from the interview and focus group material, where it became useful to capture the transitional and uncertain nature of the movement between familiar and unfamiliar sites and roles of learning and teaching associated with WIL. The notion of liminality has been widely used in the anthropological and sociological literature since the early twentieth century (van Gennep 2004; Turner 2001), and increasingly in management and organisation studies literature during the early twenty-first (see for example Ibarra 2007), to shed light on the ambiguity of the identities of individuals transitioning between stable social roles.

The concept of liminality has proved apposite to explore the processes of role transition in WIL. Students, when undertaking a placement, for example, are neither fully ‘professional’ nor fully ‘student-like’. And similarly university teachers and supervisors at external organisations play out a set of alternate identities that differ from their official job descriptions. Both cohorts are neither fully supported in nor securely ascribed those roles, and this is both a key benefit and challenge of WIL, as discussed in the following sections.

The concept of liminality has been explored within organisational studies in two key ways:

- firstly, to account for the experiences of individuals who find themselves in a transitory state (e.g. Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012); and
- secondly, to explore the ways in which work transitions and changes in occupational identity require “identity work” which lead individuals out of a state of ambiguity or in-betweenness into new realizations via reflective practices (Beech, 2011).

It is this second understanding that is relevant to our study and findings, as the three groups of participants are all *learning* through participation in unfamiliar environments, at the same time as they are working within a structured framework that is supported by the University’s PACE framework. While the three cohorts experience these changes in identity in very different ways (in contrast to the somewhat linear trajectory of student to ‘worker’, the academic and workplace supervisor cohorts in particular are not in a unidirectional transition from a particular state or role to another but constantly play out alternate roles and identities), there is a clear need for each cohort to process these experiences in a way that leads to new and profound insights into their primary identity. We therefore acknowledge the existence of uneven power relations within these settings, but we also draw on the work of those that have argued that despite the obvious challenges, controlled states of liminality open up the potential for creativity, flexibility and risk-

taking (e.g. Tempest & Starkey, 2004; Sturdy, Clark, Fincham, & Handley 2009; Swan, Scarbrough, & Ziebro, 2015).

The differing roles adopted by those involved in WIL have become a theme within Learning and Teaching literature. Rowe, Mackaway, and Winchester-Seeto (2012), for example, have offered a comprehensive review of the roles and responsibilities of host supervisors. Their work discusses issues arising from the steps that workplace supervisors in areas such as education, nursing and business undertake when hosting students, and the factors that could lead to mismatched expectations of stakeholders. The authors identified a conceptual framework that outlines the four key roles commonly expected of host supervisors: *support, education, administration/managerial* and *guardian*. They also present an *Analysis and Reflection Tool* designed to assist academics and workplace supervisors design and engage in processes that work towards a better articulation of the roles, responsibilities and activities of work supervisors. This resource encapsulates a single framework to conceptualise and understand the roles of workplace supervisors in various disciplines and participation modalities, and suggests further investigation in relation to the challenges of playing out those roles, and to how those roles intersect with their usual responsibilities.

Understandably, the undertaking of certain roles relates to the expression of specific identities. In the case of students in particular, for whom experiential learning is part of their transition into professional life, this process can be particularly challenging (Lupton, 1977). As Nyström (2008) has shown, professional identity is a dynamic relationship between different life spheres rather than an isolated phenomenon only taking place at the university or in the work context. Trede (2012) also focuses on professional identity formation in students and discusses how student participation in professional roles through WIL-type experiences is an opportunity for transformative learning that can shape professional identity formation and a sense of professionalism.

Key Questions

Despite these valuable insights into the roles, responsibilities and identity formation processes of host supervisors and students, this research pointed to the need for greater awareness about the transformative roles that *academic staff* undertake when teaching academic units based on learning through participation in order to answer three key questions:

- What are the implications of assuming new roles for all parties involved?
- How do these new roles interfere–or complement—usual responsibilities?

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

- How do the different teaching and learning environments of *all stakeholders* involved in experiential learning affect established routines and practices?

This study delved into the practical issues of the 'out of the ordinary' or unacknowledged (usually transitional and sporadic) roles and environments which students, workplace supervisors, and academic staff all engage in while involved in WIL, in order to inform improved delivery of WIL-type units. Empirical data collected on WIL-specific learning and teaching roles and environments sheds light on an array of adjustments and changes in students, partners and convenors, as well as their organisations. The research also indicated that important changes to primary roles are effected when the new roles become routine, for example, when unit convenors or host supervisors are part of WIL for an extended period of time.

Project aims

The project's aims were

- To understand the different professional roles and working environments that stakeholders in PACE units engage in, and how these affect all parties and their practices.
- To assess the challenges, opportunities and practicalities involved in experiencing these new roles and environments, and appraise them from three intersecting perspectives: academics, students and workplace supervisors from partner organisations
- To generate an analysis that can be used to inform improved delivery of PACE units in particular, and WIL projects in general.
- To provide an evidence base for future planning and research work in this area through a high-quality publication in a leading research journal.

Methods

As with our previous study, this project was based on a constructivist grounded theory approach to develop a robust set of analytic categories from the focus group data (Lloyd, Amigo, & Hettitantri, forthcoming 2016). A grounded theory approach allows for ongoing reflection on the interpretive categories that have been used to develop research questions at the scoping and planning phase. A constructivist standpoint allows for interrogation of fundamental meaning-making categories in the research (such what is meant in this project by key terms as 'professional role', 'work environment', 'learning experience') and asks the respondents to describe and

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

flesh out these abstract frameworks from their own knowledges, rather than imposing the researchers' assumptions. Fundamentally, grounded theory is a powerful critical tool which enables researchers to "build [successive] level[s of] abstraction directly from the data and, subsequently, gather additional data to check and refine our emerging analytic categories" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). The primary research and data analysis phases were therefore contiguous in this project, and the Research Assistants were involved in debriefing from interviews via memo-writing immediately after each focus group and throughout iterative coding. For this reason, the final report and publications were co-authored, with the RAs as third and fourth named authors.

We gathered data from the three different groups involved in participation units at Macquarie: students, teachers and workplace supervisors.

The Research Assistant invited each group of stakeholders to participate in the study via email. Each group of participants was invited to be part of two separate focus groups (the first focusing on learning and teaching roles during a PACE placement, and the second on learning and teaching environments). However recruitment proved to be more difficult than expected and three rounds of email invitations had to be sent in order to gather a minimum of participants, and in the end, the research assistant conducted four focus groups (two with students and two with unit conveners) and a series of individual interviews with partners at host organisations (face to face, over the phone and over email) as it was not possible for all of them to coincide in terms of their availability for a focus group. Also, due to the unavailability of participants to attend two focus groups, both topics – new roles and new environments – were explored in each session, but with different individuals each time. The focus group approach was chosen as the desired technique for data collection, in order to bring out the commonalities of issues of changing roles and environments for all PACE stakeholders (as indicated in our 2013 PACE research project) and to allow the researchers to understand the roles and environments that placements imply for each of these groups. Interviews with host supervisors, however, proved to be an adequate alternative tool as well. The questionnaire used was the same for the focus group sessions and for the individual interviews with host supervisors. Questions revolved around the practicalities and professional implications of embracing these diverse roles and environments (See Appendix). Ethics approval was gained for the 2013 project, and we requested an amendment to cover this new tranche of research.

The table below specifies the number and organisational profile of participants and the type of methodology used to gather data.

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

Table 1: Number and profile of participants

	Number of Participants	Discipline of Participants	Method used
Group A: Unit Convenors and teachers	7	Faculty of Arts (4) Faculty of Business and Economics (1) Faculty of Science (1) Faculty of Human Science (1)	2 two-hour long focus groups (the first one with 3 and the second one with 4 participants), both based on the same semi-structured questionnaire.
Group B: Workplace Supervisors	12	Not-for-profit/Community Organisations (9) Government (3)	12 one to one interviews (4 face to face, 4 over the phone, 4 over email), all based on the same semi-structured questionnaire.
Group C: Students	9	Faculty of Arts (4) Faculty of Business and Economics (3) Faculty of Human Sciences (2)	2 two-hour long focus groups (the first one with 4 and the second one with 5 participants), both based on the same semi-structured questionnaire.

The data was gathered over a period of two months (May-July 2015) and once gathered the researchers discussed with the research assistant salient themes to guide the analysis. It was agreed NVivo would be used to organise the information, identify codes and work collaboratively in the analysis of the transcripts. The analysis has not been finalized yet but below we present the main findings to date.

Findings

Group A- Unit convenors and teachers

Previous research found that PACE convenors and teachers engage in roles that differ from their usual ones when they teach a PACE unit (Lloyd et al., forthcoming 2016). For example they have to

- discuss projects for their students with organisations outside the university,
- find ways to oversee the work their students do at external organisations,
- make sure that the activities students engage in comply with ethical and work, health and safety requirements.

Academic staff also find their conventional teaching settings altered, as face-to-face teaching becomes sporadic, yet their “duty of care” for their students remains. Teaching also becomes more personalised, so that it fits with the individual projects that students undertake. Also, new work environments may be present when convenors visit partners or follow up their students *in situ*.

The present study validated the literature cited above but also identified a broader spectrum of tasks which university teachers undertake. The table below provides an overview of these roles, as self-identified by unit convenors.

Table 2: Enumeration of roles identified by Group A: Unit Convenors

Roles / responsibilities undertaken when convening a PACE subject	Number of participants alluding to the role/responsibility (total number of participants 7)
Administrator	4
Agent/Broker	5
Facilitator of industry innovation	1
Manager/referee/enforcer	4
Marketer/media advisor	3
Networker	5
Supporter of host supervisor	4

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

Supporter of activity development/planning	1
Administrator/paperwork support	1
Advisor and explainer of university protocols (ethics)	1
Supporter of Student	4
Career counsellor	3
Coach/mentor	5
Teacher	5
Developer of 'soft skills'	5
Encourager of networking	4
Identifier of opportunities	4
Facilitator of student autonomy/learning on the job	5

Versatility

The list of responsibilities university teachers see themselves involved in is, as shown above, quite comprehensive and is generated by an awareness of the increasing versatility that teaching a WIL-type unit engenders within their nominal, primary and stable role of 'academic'. Convenors of PACE units find themselves

- acting as recruitment agents,
- marketing the university, as well as
- guiding and encouraging individual students to get them to the end of their placements successfully, and in turn
- maintaining the reputation of the university, partly so that organisations are willing to take on subsequent students.

A crucial aspect of their mentoring role in particular is the teaching of the "soft skills" students will need to navigate the placement successfully. Professional skills such as how to give a good impression in the first interview, how to develop communication skills or how to network were all mentioned by teachers as important abilities that they wanted their students to develop.

I say I am the CEO of the consultancy company and you are going out to deal with other organisations and run a consultant report... teaching them... about meeting protocols and e-mails, instead of "hey there do you miss this or whatever" it is and losing that casual and understanding what business environments are like in respect to dress, behaviours, etcetera and I think PACE allows us to do that. - Unit Convenor 5, 02.07.2015.

I think that our role is helping them in that transition from being a student to become eventually a professional. It's a very tough transition for many of them and they have to get used to get notions of you need to have initiative, you need to be self-sufficient in the

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

workplace, you need to be creative, be resilient and these are the things that they don't learn in other units and we have more or less that responsibility of helping them through that transition. – Unit Convenor 6, 02.07.2015.

Uncertainty

The diversity of responsibilities unit convenors undertake is a challenge in itself, but so are the risks and uncertainties entailed. The very nature of the environment within which WIL takes place means that a different range of students will work on a different range of projects with a different range of organisations every semester. Thus whether the semester will be successful or not is unpredictable, and if taken to extreme, can be detrimental to the effectiveness of the teacher and students.

To be honest it does fluctuate really dramatically and convening a PACE unit is in a sense gambling with your time because if the unit runs very smoothly, the team at PACE office and I can deliver, the calibre of the placement is fantastic, the brands that they were placing the students with were fantastic and it's really working well... then next semester it will be quite the opposite, students won't be self-starting... there'll be problems with placements, personally clashes with hosts... more mental health problems among the students and they meet with you and people with English as a second language issues... - Unit Convenor 3, 16.05.2015.

Changes to workload

The workload in particular was a salient concern mentioned during focus groups. Understandably, the various roles university teachers engage in makes the convening of a PACE unit a very different undertaking compared to teaching a non-placement unit. University teachers most frequently mentioned increased workload as a problem: for example, that there are particular challenges to teaching a PACE unit such as

- managing students' expectations in relation to accessing the unit convenor for individual guidance,
- the challenges of marking assignments that are unique, and
- the restriction of the semester timeframes that often times are inadequate for the timing of students' placements.

Change of attitudes from the institution towards academic work

Participants also mentioned a qualitative change in their work, which related to perceptions that their work in PACE, versus traditional, class-based learning and teaching activities, was regarded as less prestigious by their colleagues and the wider University. University teachers mentioned

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

- a marked lack of support from colleagues and
- struggles to get recognition of the workload involved in teaching a PACE subject from their supervisors and departments.

Interestingly this was the second most frequently mentioned problem, occurring just behind the challenges relating to the workload outlined above.

Rewards

But in spite of all these challenges, unit convenors mentioned a series of rewarding aspects related to their supervisory role which to some extent counter-balanced the institutional under-recognition mentioned above. Amongst these, teachers mentioned satisfaction when

- seeing what students were able to produce,
- helping students realize their potential and how they themselves made a difference, recognising students' unique engagement in an undertaking that is connected with their potential careers,
- receiving positive feedback from organisations,
- widening their networks and
- seeing how their disciplinary knowledge is realised in a practical situation

...just the work that they've done, the feedback I get from the organization has been very positive... it's not just been a process for the organization to do a favour to Macquarie Uni or to myself, it's been something that they benefit from as well and so at the end I think that probably the biggest mark of success is that most of the organizations have proactively talked with me [about] whether they are going to get further students in their programs, so I think that those aspects have been very rewarding. - Unit Convenor 7, 02.07.2015.

Group B- Workplace supervisors

Although there is sound research on the roles of workplace supervisors already, it is mostly centred around their responsibilities when hosting students (Rowe et al., 2012), without due attention to the challenges that juggling this role with their usual professional one may entail. As reported by Rowe et al. (2012), the focus has been on the supportive, educational, managerial, and guardian roles of host supervisors, but more research is needed on how these responsibilities may interfere with the ones that define their job description, or on how their changing work environments when hosting a student can affect the everyday dynamics of the workplace.

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

Supervisors have mentioned, both anecdotally in the past and in our 2013 interviews, how new ideas, new faces, and 'younger' energy in the workplace are all an important feature of the PACE program. Other, less welcome, experiences have been in relation to the short-term nature of the placements, and the constant renewal of students. Focus group questions for this group aimed at expanding on the challenges and potentialities of the roles and changing environments that affect workplace supervisors.

Workload changes

Similarly to unit convenors, when prompted, host supervisors were also able to identify a series of tasks and responsibilities they engage in when hosting a student. Besides the ones that had already been identified in the literature as explained above (Rowe et al. 2012), participants pointed at the work involved of relationship building with the university. And although host supervisors didn't believe that hosting a student radically changes their routines or work environments, they did acknowledge the increased workload in providing assistance and direction to them.

It requires that you take time out of what you normally do, regular meetings, regular sort of briefings, I wouldn't say that it changed my day by fifty per cent but there is a significant impact to what you are normally doing. – Workplace supervisor 9, 10.06.2015.

Risk

The idea of risk was also present in their narratives in that the impact to a supervisor's workload when taking a student was more or less directly related to the type of student (whether undergraduate or postgraduate) and their varied abilities.

Sometimes if you do a cost-benefit analysis, it may be easier to actually do some of the work yourself (laughs)... I guess what happens is it depends on the student, sometimes it is really intensive at the beginning and then eased towards the end, but if they are having difficulties in completing the task then there is a whole lot of resources on the supervisor. – Workplace supervisor 9, 10.06.2015.

Mitigating factors on workload: mentoring culture

But the impact on their working environment and workload was of course also dependent on the nature of the supervisor's usual role. In cases where their role was managing teams of volunteers the impact of hosting a student was much lesser than for those host supervisors who were not responsible for managing personnel as part of their usual roles. When supervisors were used to working as the head of a team or with volunteers they tended to explain away their increased workload not as a notable change to their working environment but as a duty in line with others that

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

they are already performing and would expect to perform for any junior member of their team.

I don't think it really changed that much, it was just a matter of adding an extra meeting to my week, but I didn't worry about the day that she will be coming in and if I wasn't here once she got started, so I don't really think it had a big impact... I supervise volunteers doing projects for us, so I wouldn't say it's a new role, or new job or new skills... - Workplace Supervisor 6, 25.05.2015.

Cost-benefit considerations

What was interesting in host supervisors' narrative, however, was the cost-benefit rationale of hosting a student. Although some expressed it in these exact terms and others only suggested it using other wording, many of them expressed that there are costs and benefits involved when undertaking a supervisory role and that although many times the benefits surpass the costs, in a few instances the other way holds true. In this sense, the concept of risk was also prevalent in their answers as the eventual result of student projects was seen to depend greatly on

- students' competencies,
- students' investments in the success of the placement,
- successful group dynamics when working in teams, and other factors such as
- students' personal circumstances (bearing in mind that students are committed to completing professional work for an organization which in the vast majority of cases does not entail any monetary compensation).

... obviously sometimes they are full time students, sometimes they are students that work part time, or they travel a long way and you have to think about, you know not every PACE student is the same, you have to look at their circumstances, think about their lives, think about what's going on their workload and then look at how many hours they've got, look at what they are trying to achieve and then you strive to put all that together in a way so it works for them but it also works for the organization. So I think it is being a little bit of a problem solver and also a bit of a time manager - Workplace supervisor 10, 12.06.2015.

The information shared by host supervisors suggests that rather than adding new roles to their schedule when hosting a student, what they perceive as different are the particular challenges of working with students that they encounter within their already established roles. As the table below shows, these challenges are varied (and several correspond with those also identified by university teachers).

Table 3: Challenges identified by Group B: Workplace supervisors

Challenges	Number of host supervisors who identified these challenges
Risk (so much variability in students and projects that it is hard to plan for their needs during placements).	6
Variable commitment levels	3
Variable competency	1
Variable 'success' of groups	2
Developing student professionalism "stepping up"	5
Communication	3
Sourcing resources including time to supervise unexperienced workers	4
Working with the semester schedule and students' other commitments during that period	2
Variability in expectations of different PACE subjects	2

Benefits

But naturally the reasons why organisations undertake the responsibility to host students counterbalance the challenges and costs involved. Many supervisors mentioned that despite the extra workload it entails, there were identifiable benefits, with many participants mentioning that:

- students bring "extra hands" to complete various tasks and increase capacity to undertake projects, as well as innovative ideas and energy;
- supervising students was an expression of their commitment to building capacity in the new generation of professionals; and finally
- an enhanced connection with the university was an important outcome of their participation in the program.

I think that you get that richness of new placement... new ideas that have come with changes to the things that we do for the better... because you are kind of stuck in a way you do things and so bringing in and inspiring yourself through the PACE project you bring new ideas, new insights and new people that has been really valuable for our organization network. – Workplace supervisor 10, 12.06.2015

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

I really enjoyed it because as I said is an opportunity for us to think about things and focus on areas that perhaps we don't have the capacity to look at without the students... sometimes. – Workplace supervisor 8, 12.05.2015.

Group C- Students

As a distinctive group, we expected that students would have much to say as well about their changing roles during placements. For this group in particular, the role undertaken as professionals may have a significant impact on their identity. For them, more than for the other groups, the constant switch of roles (student-professional), and the liminality of both roles is more pronounced. The role of student is already a role between youth and adult, or between one career and another.

Pressures of professionalism

Although they didn't express these adjustments in the sense of role switching, student participants frequently referred to the ways in which participating in PACE meant adopting a *professional* attitude. Students mentioned that they face a series of pressures while on placement which align more with the pressures professionals have rather than those which students have. All student participants mentioned aspects of PACE placements that they had to deal with, such as the pressure to

- be seen as “experts” in a particular field,
- be autonomous,
- be flexible,
- communicate in a professional way,
- have initiative and
- manage time efficiently.

Many students found these new aspects of their learning confronting.

At the internship itself having people yelling at me on the phone was a big challenge, specially it can take a toll on you specially if it is constant so that was a bit and then you get home and you are a bit emotionally exhausted and you have to sit down and study, so it's pretty hard and tiring. – Student 8, 04.06.2015.

Most participants, however, found this change of environment exciting and worthwhile. Yet the ambiguous space these students occupy during their placements can be trying indeed. The fear of the unknown and being thrown “into the deep end” was mentioned by many of the students for whom the placement was their first professional experience and were rather anxious in relation to

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

- understanding the job,
- meeting their organisations' expectations and
- being able to cope with their student workload while undertaking WIL activities.

(the) truth is also you get into the deep end... I had to speak about the project on my third day, so I was as a marketing intern I had, you know I didn't have any strategies, I was just getting my head around the whole project... so I think you have to really have the flexibility you know and to adapt to people's ideas to be ready for change... - Student 1, 29.05.2015.

Again, time management was a challenge for me you know doing five subjects, just trying to organize all my workload around assessments, it was good that my intern supervisor and my other two were quite flexible around that so I was able to do that, but it was very tight most of the time, exhausted and also it was challenging the expectations of what was required from us, making sure that they were realistic from our point of view and from the organization's point of view as well. - Student 10, 04.06.2015

Benefits

In any case, despite the challenges and the "in betweenness" of their situation at the workplace which is neither being fully a student or fully a professional, the new roles and environments experienced by students while undertaking a PACE unit were seen to offer

- opportunities for self-development,
- for opening up career prospects and
- for using their skills and knowledge to make a contribution to society.

... for me working in the Human Rights Commission itself was just the most rewarding thing, since the Commission has come in was pretty cool because you read all about them and I saw Gillian Triggs a few times, that was amazing and just getting the chance to interact with real life clients and providers, like you are a sort of advice to them it was pretty cool, you feel like you actually make a difference. - Student 9, 04.06.2015.

For students, as for the other groups of participants, the benefits outweighed the cost. They emphasised

- how much they appreciated experiencing a real work environment and applying their skills,
- how important the experience was for informing their career paths and accessing networking opportunities, and
- how the experience contributed to a realisation of self-worth by making a valuable impact in their placements.

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

Well one of the benefits that I found from the PACE environment was that... I am able to get hands on experience... it helped shape my view whether I want to continue working with refugees in the future or maybe I want to take a different career path and work in family law, property law or whatever it is, so I think it definitely helped to form your view and what you want to do. – Student 4, 29.05.2015.

Implications

WIL participants' deep knowledge of transformative roles and environments highlights the challenges and opportunities entailed in WIL projects. This knowledge is crucial to develop strategies to not only address the barriers experienced when WIL stakeholders undertake new roles and work in new environments, but also take advantage of the potentialities involved. For example, a supervisor within an organisation undertaking the role of mentor when taking a student intern can experience challenges to his working schedule and environment, but can also experience an enhancement of his personal skills, including mentoring experience, and expose him and the organisation to new ideas and people. By highlighting these dynamics, this project is directly useful in the planning of more efficient WIL activities.

Future research

The applicants envisage a follow-up project (separately funded by a an internal or external grant) to transpose the findings into teaching and learning resources appropriate to the University, industry and community sectors involved in hosting and supporting WIL-activities.

These resources will aim to embed the findings in practical resources that can make explicit the identity work that takes place during WIL for students, teachers and supervisors alike.

The findings of this project suggest that WIL engenders

- Transformative moments of letting go of one identity and embracing another
- Risky identities and uncertain benefits that are not stable and are difficult to control

The project calls for greater attention in curriculum design to the importance of recognising these factors in ways that

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

- provide ways to discuss and explore these identities (including clear milestones that signal to students they are prepared for the WIL activity, and give them avenues to express what they have learned when returning from it; and provide professional development to staff to allow them to realise the rewards of stepping outside their 'ordinary' roles and capitalise the transformations that WIL engenders);
- recognise that it is impossible to anticipate all the risks that arise and further that the benefits of WIL derive directly from these risks.

References

- Beech, N. (2011). Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction. *Human Relations*, 64(2), 285–302.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London, Sage.
- Ladge J., Clair, J. & Greenberg, D. (2012). Cross-domain identity transition during liminal periods: Constructing multiple selves as 'professional and mother' during pregnancy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(6), 1449–1471.
- Lloyd, J., Amigo, M., & Hettitantri, N. (forthcoming 2016). Learning through participation as a mass collaboration. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*.
- Ibarra, H. (2006). *Identity Transitions: Possible Selves, Liminality and the Dynamics of Voluntary Career Change*. Faculty & Research Working Paper 2007/31/OB, Fontainebleau: INSEAD. Available from:
https://www.insead.edu/facultyresearch/research/details_papers.cfm?id=17427
- Lupton, D. K. (1977). Collision or Collaboration? *Journal of Cooperative Education*, XIII, 72-84.
- Nyström, S. (2009). The Dynamics of Professional Identity Formation: Graduates' Transitions from Higher Education to Working Life. *Vocations and Learning*, 2, 1-18.
- Rowe, A., Mackaway, J., & Winchester-Seeto, T. (2012). 'But I thought you were doing that' - Clarifying the role of the host supervisor in experience based learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 13(2), 115-134.
- Sturdy, A., Clark, T., Fincham, R., & Handley, K. (2009). Between innovation and legitimation – boundaries and knowledge flow in management consultancy. *Organization*, 16(5), 627–653.
- Swan, J., Scarbrough, H. & Ziebro, M. (2015). Liminal roles as a source of creative agency in management: The case of knowledge-sharing communities. *Human Relations*, 69(3), 781-811.
- Tempest, S. & Starkey, K. (2004). The effects of liminality on individual and organizational learning. *Organization Studies*, 25(4), 507–527.

Final report for ACEN
L&T through PACE: Changing roles and environments

- Trede, F. (2012). Role of work-integrated learning in developing professionalism and professional identity. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 13(3), 159-167.
- Turner, V. W. (2001) [originally published 1964]. Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*. In A. C. Lehmann & J. E. Myers (Eds), *Magic, witchcraft, and religion: an anthropological study of the supernatural*. Mountain View: Mayfield (pp. 46-55).
- van Gennep, A. (2004) [originally published 1909]. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge.

APPENDIX: Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for PACE unit convenors, hosting supervisors and students

This questionnaire focuses on your experiences as a student/host supervisor/unit convenor. In particular, we are interested in the new responsibilities, new environments and work patterns you experience when supervising a PACE student. For example, how your usual working patterns/roles and environment change as a result of working with a student.

1. [opening question] can you tell me why you chose to be involved in PACE?
2. What responsibilities do you have to assume while being involved in PACE? (After respondent has answered the question: How do you feel about these responsibilities?)
3. How does your usual routine change as a consequence of hosting a PACE student?
4. Think about how your workload has changed as a consequence of being involved in PACE. What can you say about it? What jobs are new to you?
5. What does your usual work environment look like when you are not involved in PACE? Prompts: Think of places you work, physical resources, human resources.
6. How does your work environment change when you are involved in a PACE activity?
7. What have been the most rewarding aspects of these changes in roles and environments?
8. What have been the most challenging aspects of these changes?
9. Would you like the dynamics and structure of the placement to be different in terms of the new roles and working environments that you have to be exposed to? If so, why? how?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to how being involved in PACE has affected your work –roles and environment?

Thank you for your time.