

# Work Integrated Learning in Higher Education: partnerships: a continuing evolution.

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the use of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) in higher education and identify the role industry plays in the need for educated workers and citizens who can meet the challenges of a new world economy. WIL allows students to acquire essential practical skills through exposure to the real world. Industry has always been the strong link in this necessary and appropriate instructional component of higher education. A qualitative approach was used in this study on a sample of second level students who participated in a WIL programme at one specific service provider. WIL education in the context of this paper is defined as a unique form of education, which integrates classroom study with, planned, and supervised WIL in the private and public sector (Arnold and Nicholson, 1991; Andrisari and Nestle, 1976). This study was conducted by second year students, (n=37) finishing a 6 months WIL component in industry. The implications of these findings for career development are discussed.

In recent years, there has been an increase in research that examines careers and career development in the hospitality industry (Guerrier, 1987; Riley and Turam, 1989; Baum, 1989; Williams and Hunter, 1992; Antil, 1984; Ross, 1995). Some of this research has focused on issues relating to career paths and career development (Riley and Ladkin, 1984; Ladkin and Riley, 1996). A key issue in this research has been to attempt to determine the various factors which influence length and development. This research aims to build on this and explore the student perceptions

**Keywords:** Work experience, students, WIL, career development, training, education

## The current debate

Any initial exploration into the literature regarding the training and education for careers in hospitality reveals a lively debate effect of vocational education and hospitality experience on career development. Career development refers to the career outcomes for individuals and organizations, and encompasses

important issues such as economics, job transitions, mobility, career withdrawal, career compromise and career stages (Riley and Ladkin, 1994). It has been suggested that a paradigm shift is occurring in higher education in response to the realization that traditional teaching approaches are not adequately equipping students with the range of theoretical and technical skills required

for the workforce. Saunders (1997) describes the shift in terms of a move from an 'instruction paradigm' to a 'learning paradigm, or a teaching to learning approach. The instruction paradigm views lecturers as deliverers of content knowledge and students as passive recipients of knowledge, while the learning paradigm suggests that instructors in industry should be designers of a learning environment in which students are active participants in the learning process.

This paradigm shift is particularly evident with the increasing popularity and application of WIL theory in vocationally orientated tertiary courses (Bobbitt et al, 2000). At its most simplistic, it can be described as learning with hoops to jump through and which to avoid (Lundberg and Young, 1997). Richard Koonce once made the following statement, 'Jobs do have life spans. And what attracted you to a job in the past may not light your fire today.' There is little doubt that careers are subject worthy of research. Career patterns vary between individuals, occupations and societies, and are a function of structural opportunity and individual choice (Arthur, et al., 1989). One of the areas of career theory most widely researched is that relating to career development (Arnold et al. 1991; Chartrand and Camp, 1991).

### **Work Integrated Learning Theory**

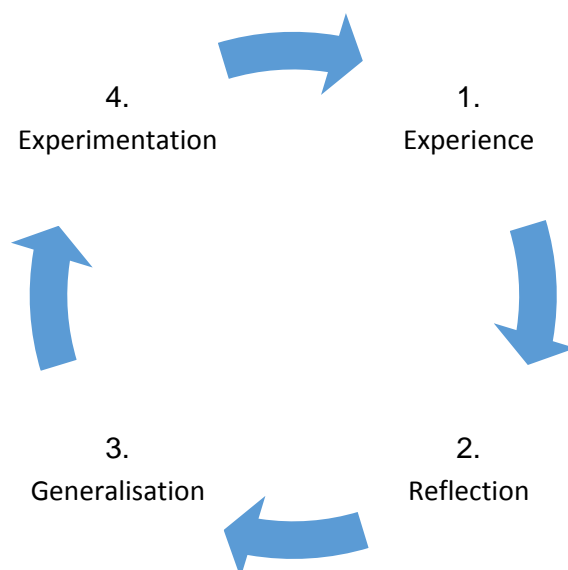
Before we consider some of the experiences of students who participated in the WIL education programme we consider briefly the function of WIL education.

WIL, often referred to as real world or reality learning, is a participatory method that involves a variety of a person's mental capabilities and exists when a student processes information in an active and immersive learning environment (Feinstein, Mann &

Corsun, 2002). Based on the seminal work of Dewey and Piaget (Frontczak & Kelly, 2000), WIL theory is defined as a learning process "whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p.81). Hoover and Whitehead (1976) claim that WIL occurs when a person 'cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement" (p.25). Under WIL theory, learning is considered to be a continuous process in which knowledge is created by transforming experience into existing cognitive frameworks, thus changing the way a person thinks and behaves (Sewchuk, 2005). It influences students to take action, observe this action, and then conclude on general principles related to the particular action (Xie, 2004). Kolb's (1984) model of WIL cycle contains four steps describe the process of learning under an WIL approach (Figure One). The first is termed '**concrete experience**' and refers to an event or occurrence that serves as a basis for later steps in the model. The second step, '**reflective observation**' requires the student to reflect on and assess the importance of the experience.

At the third step '**abstract conceptualisation**', the student begins to create theories or generalizations from the experience that may be applied and tested in new and different situations and in the fourth step, '**active experimentation**' (Kolb, 1984). A secret to the process, however, is that for effective learning to take place, all four stages of this learning cycle must be completed (Hill, McGowan & Maclaran, 1998; Hirsch, 2005)

**Figure One: Kolb's Learning Cycle**



Previous research has shown or directed the outcomes of a WIL component as that of a work out in the gym. Our research with our 37 students will clearly show that if Kolb's learning cycle is not completed learning will not take place. Clearly this is where we as WIL Co ordinator must enforce this concept with industry?

Our research has clearly shown that if something goes wrong in the students WIL component, one can refer this back to Kolb's Learning Cycle.

The application of WIL theory introduces an element of 'realism' into teaching that has been found to bolster learning effectiveness (Elam & Spotts, 2004). In describing the need for more realistic and hands-on-approaches, Karns (2005) uses the analogy that watching someone work out in the gym will not make you more fit. Passive learning styles (such as lecturers) are based on the assumption that lecturing equals learning and that students learn by being told what they should know (Hamer, 2000). Karns' (2005) gym analogy suggests that educators should position themselves as

personal trainers who by having students engage in a carefully designed workout plan, including projects, cases and internships, for example, are adding value to the students, giving them opportunities to express themselves, to make decisions, and to improve their employability. Carefully designed workout plan (in most cases the Learning Guide from the educational institute), could then be part of the winning recipe. Normally this workout plan will be executed in the gym? The venue will add value to the outcomes of the trainer. We therefore have to ensure that our venue for the training of our students should also be adding value.

This could only be achieved by working very closely with our partners in industry to achieve this. Elam and Spotts (2004) in their discussion of WIL refer to the Confucius statement of 'I hear and I forget. I see and I remember, I do and I understand' (p.51).

### **Objective**

WIL has been a major component of hospitality education for some time.

Xie (2004) notes that virtually all undergraduate hospitality programs incorporate some form of experience based learning, although Kiser and Partlow (1999) claim that most WIL applications in hospitality education involve internships.

At the School of Tourism and Hospitality, University Of Johannesburg our WIL components were structured in second and third year. This changes as from 2010, and WIL will only be offered in second half of a third year component. For that reason this research was undertaken to get the results at the end of this component. Walo (1998) claims that practical work experience or vocational skill development is a vital part of hospitality programs, providing students with opportunities to relate theory to work place practices. WIL in hospitality is also considered valuable in providing students with realistic job previews, as well as helping to make them more marketable to perspective employers (Collins, 2002; Kiser & Partlow, 1999).

This then brings us to the next question. What are perspective employers then looking for to employ our students? Have we, the educators helped industry to have given our students those skills? The same industry that took our student for the WIL component is now sitting in a chair and is asking questions of the different nature. There is a modest body of literature that focuses on the value of WIL education to the student. All of this literature tends to report employer perspectives. Five outcomes are generally highlighted:

1. Enhanced student self-confidence, self-concept and improved skills.
2. Enhancement of practical knowledge and skills.
3. Enhanced employment opportunities.

4. Attainment of necessary skills to supplement theoretical training.
5. Enhancement of the induction process when the student joins the labour market

A limited amount of literature focuses on the student perspective. This again gave us the opportunity to explore this more in-depth.

Five studies in particular focus on student perceptions, and this is what we measured our research and outcomes on. Casado (1992) focused on the expectations of students on entering employment. He found in general that students were quite realistic about the realities of the organization. Charles (1992) focused on graduating students. They reported a range of expectations, however the main focus was on opportunities for professional growth. They had a number of idealized notions about the nature of work that they would perform. Specific attributes identified include, excitement, stimulation, creativity and flexibility. Barron and Maxwell (1993) specifically focused on WIL returning from their WIL education placements in addition to first year and graduating students. Second year students in general held positive views of their future hospitality career paths. Students returning from their WIL education placements reported more negative perceptions of the work experience, in particular attitudes in respect of training, financial rewards, if any, and career opportunities. Pucell and Quinn (1995) focused on graduating students. The findings were very negative and focused on perceptions that graduates had little opportunity to develop managerial skills.

Waryszak (1999) focused on four groups of WIL education students in different organizations. The study reveals major differences in perceptions, in respect of issues such as peer cohesion, cash orientation, work pressures, the extent of control in

the workplace. He also found that the social climate and induction processes used by the organization were significant in explaining student perceptions.

These findings in general point to the need to place greater emphasis on the types of expectations students have prior to the placement and more specifically on the impact this would have on future expectations of the industry.

## Methods

### The general research questions and themes explored

The general research question can be stated thus:

*What kind of experiences and processes do students experience as part of a WIL education programme and how are their perceptions of the value of the WIL programme of learning influenced by these experiences?*

In order to further explore this general question a number of themes were investigated:

- Have you received the required training as per your Learning Guide?
- Have you gained skills training?
- Strengths of training venue
- Weaknesses of training venue
- Physical setting/ is the venue conducive for training?

### The sample selected

In order to make the initial study manageable a group of 37 students were chosen from the Hospitality management discipline. These students finished a 24 week WIL period in industry ending in January 2010.

## The data collection method

The study was exploratory, therefore structured details were supplied in the students Learning Guide. This was in the form of a survey the student had to hand in at the end of the 24 week period. It was important that the researcher assume the role of the study participant. During the WIL workshop held before students went on the 24 week period full instructions were given regarding the way the survey should be done. These surveys were not to be given to industry as the researcher wanted to get the students reflection without any pressure or influence from industry. Although two people may experience a similar objective event, their subjective interpretations of the event in terms of effect and beliefs about the organization may differ (Lundberg and Young, 1997), therefore each study participant was asked to do his/her study individually.

The desire was to formulate a preliminary explicit conceptual (direct questions to be answered) framework, which would allow the researcher to make tentative, but explicit theoretical statements. The process of moving from describing to explaining outlined by Rein and Schon (1977) is a natural progression from telling a story (in this case the students' story) about a specific situation, to constructing a map consisting of some formalisation of the elements of the story and indicating the location of key variables in the process, to building a conceptual framework showing how these variables may inter-connected.

All data were then captured on a sheet, numbering the students as the study cases were dealt with. (Table 1)

The use of the critical incident technique, the telling of specific stories and the identification of themes within student descriptions, was considered to be appropriate to achieve the objective as indicated in table 2.

### **Students' perceptions of the WIL process.**

Analysis of responses (table 1), revealed that the data could be grouped around three phases of the WIL process, as it relates to the WIL education experience:

- getting into the hospitality organization
- breaking into that organization and
- settling into the organization

In order to facilitate a logical and coherent description of the experience of WIL, these 3 experiences should briefly be explained.

#### **Getting into the hospitality organization.**

The WIL process begins prior to the individual joining the NEW ORGANISATION. Feldman and Arnold (1983, p. 81) point out that before joining an organization and individual will form expectations, and evaluate information about the organization.

Porter *et al.* (1975, p. 163) argue that people do not come to an organization as a completely 'blank slate' but will acquire information about an organization from friends, past experiences, peers in industry, employment agencies etc. and will therefore have 'an existing perceptual picture about an organization and (in many cases) about the job'. At school level the student will be expected to have interviews with related company's and a full report will be given back to the school.

Students are guided by giving them the opportunity to attend workshops on CV writing, interview skills, dress code for the professional, presentations to company's and research of company's. Matching the correct student profile to the company is done at school level.

### **Breaking into the organization**

Although the socialization of a new entrant is a gradual and on-going process, the initial entry into any organization is not, and there is no real way "to do it a little at a time" (Lundberg and Young, 1997). Thus the organizational entry process tends to be disorientating and sometimes excessively stressful for newcomers. The literature suggests that four important processes ensure when the student joins the organization to be of help to the student. *A new self image, New relationships, New values and New modes of behaviour.*

These topics are discussed and covered by our department called Cycad.

The school encourages industry to put the student through a full induction programme. Not only will this help to get the student settled in, but this would guide the student in this new field of receiving training away from the familiar school surroundings. Students are encouraged to ask questions and to make sure that know exactly what is expected of them.

#### **Settling into the organization**

Here students are guided by staff that comes out of industry, to very quickly get into the motion of being a professional and an "all rounder", at all times. Students should make use of every opportunity to 'learn', not only in structured ways, but by observing all related matters. Paying attention to every days activities, should enable them to settle in very quickly.

### **Findings**

**Table 1:** 37 Student's Critique Of Training Received AT One Specific Training Venue

Student no.	Have you received the required training?	Have you gained skills training?	Strengths of training venue	Weaknesses of training venue	Physical setting/ is the venue conducive to training
1	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Properties are appealing to guests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentors are not trained in the food and beverage sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great setting</li> <li>No to training</li> </ul>
2	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assistance of some mentors are greatly appreciated by the students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non compliance with Health and safety in some areas</li> <li>The lack of assistance of certain mentors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very appealing to guests</li> <li>No, it is all about how many we get through the place and we have to make money</li> </ul>
3	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The main kitchen are well equipped and big</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are not allowed to be creative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
4	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The training sessions with Prof van Lill were very uplifting and interesting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication amongst staff</li> <li>Repetition in the kitchen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venue for visitors</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
5	No, not at all	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coffee training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Favouritism from staff towards some students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
6	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free labour from students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students make mistakes and the STH gets a bad name</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great location</li> <li>No to training</li> </ul>
7	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moving around from kitchen to kitchen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No a la Carte training was received</li> <li>Equipment are not maintained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern facility</li> <li>No to training</li> </ul>
8	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers only work with students and because of this they are understanding and patient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The training offered is not a true reflection of the Hospitality industry due to problems with the bar, customers and kitchen processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern venue</li> <li>No, new improvements needs to be investigated and possible changes need to be considered</li> </ul>
9	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spacious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fails as walk-in facility</li> <li>Poor aesthetics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Venue poorly managed by un educated senior staff members</li> <li>Management should be looked at and only then this could be addressed</li> </ul>
10	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solved problems without management being involved</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The building itself is not situated in a high populated/centralized area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building not well planned</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
11	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great environment to work in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is never enough equipment to work with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great setting</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
12	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More relaxed than industry, therefore students are introduced into the operation with more ease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marketing of facilities not up to standard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being situated in JHB, this is not utilized to the fullest</li> <li>No</li> </ul>

13	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops were very beneficial to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers do not set a example, therefore students are always kept in the dark.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide variety offered to the public</li> <li>No, training is actually planned</li> </ul>
14	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Total and overall rounding of the student is experienced here.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation and team efforts are disoriented due to favouritism and lack of consistency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venue</li> <li>Yes, enjoyed the training</li> </ul>
15	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a individual I received compliments during my training period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to many disputes, the pessimism made it impossible to always stay positive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Venue's set the possibility for great creativity in satisfying the guest</li> <li>Yes I did</li> </ul>
16	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of the food are prepared on site, therefore students are exposed to this skill</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Venues are always over booked.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venue</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
17	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different venues allows the student to operate under different situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rostering is a BIG problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Venues have great potential</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
18	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to repetition, I am able to handle problems in the operation better</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheduling of students are unfair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very good structured</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
19	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interacting with guests made me confident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
20	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met very important people</li> <li>Learnt how to communicate better with clients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not enough time spend in all departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
21	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As an individual it helped me to grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of tolerance for people who do not respect others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
22	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exposed to a wide variety of functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to no controls theft is a big problem in the operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
23	Yes	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very well situated in business area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Did not get what was promised in training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
24	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different venues exposed the student to different types of situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are not treated professionally</li> <li>No managerial structures from permanent staff members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Venues need maintenance</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
25	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A great experience!!!!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
26	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are well trained and always corrected by staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of communication between managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
27	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are the main strengths in this operation, as they are the ones that will always work together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers are 'slave drivers'</li> <li>More interests from managers would have been appreciated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>



28	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing new bonds with peers and being able to work as a team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication between various departments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venues</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
29	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers always available when needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
30	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being exposed to many outlets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scheduling of the rosters</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
31	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning takes place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managers have different standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
32	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Great venues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
33	No	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different areas to work in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
34	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My confidence improved a lot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No management skills were learnt in a Management course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
35	No	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintaining my own punctuality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food and Beverage elective only allows you to be a glorified waiter/waitress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
36	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grown with in myself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>
37	Yes	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Met many different people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication between managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> </ul>

**Table 2**

Question asked	Yes	%	No	%	Remarks
Have you received the required trained?	23	58%	16	41%	Most students felt they gained the required training.
Have you gained skills training?	18	46%	21	53%	Skills were not on the priority list of training received from industry.
Physical setting/ is the venue conducive to training?	26	65%	13	33%	The venue did not live up to the expectations of the students' needs
Weaknesses of training venue?	11	28%	28	72%	Clearly this is a huge problem area

## Discussion

Of those surveys, student no. 30 experienced the more systematic orientation process. After her first day at the WIL venue, she said that she felt that "I made the right choice". If one looks at the answers student no. 30 provided, it is thus clear, that from a student perspective, the systematic orientation which they received, has a

significant impact on the WIL process and hence may affect the outcome of the WIL education experience as a whole. For student no. 27 the WIL was not a major sources of learning unless, as she suggested "you would consider boring, repetitive every day work a learning experience". She found herself feeling quite frustrated due to the fact that she was not given any opportunity to show her ability to show

initiative. Student no. 27 clearly specifies that managers were seen as “slave drivers”, and that the help they received from them were not to mention at all.

One of the features of a good initial concept in the hospitality industry is that any situation should not be seen as a “link or swim” type of situation. For 14 student’s this was not the case. Had these student’s not had a very high standard of understanding the needs of an operation and an ability to “fashion it out”, they believe the problem of no communication from mentors may have had had drastic consequences for the remainder of their WIL period. As it transpired, these students succeeded very quickly and proceeded to be assigned other tasks, which involved significant responsibility’s such as managing some functions for the company.

Student no.13 found the advice she received from her supervisor and their poor relationship very troubling. She felt that it thus detracted from the benefits, which may have accrued from the WIL experience. My self-esteem suffered as a result. Also my self-confidence dropped. The responses in general indicate that the supervisor played a negative role with the student somewhat demotivated and lacking in self-confidence.

Systematic training is an important strategy available to organisations to facilitate the effective utilisation of the WIL student. Klein and Weaver (2000) suggest that it enables the new entrant to better understand their role, the people they are going to work with and the larger organisation.

Table 2 shows how the end result looks after all the data was tabled. 72% of the students found that the **venue** they were send to was not conducive to the WIL training programme. Clearly it came out in the surveys that the venues had good possibilities as to accommodate guests and functions, but that the

training within these facilities was not up to the standard that the students expected. Why such a high percentage?

Sacks (1996) found that the “amount of training received by newcomers was significantly related to job satisfaction, commitment, intention to quit, ability to cope and several measures of job performance”. He argues that because entry training is usually the most formal of the socialisation procedures used by organisations it can play a pivotal role in influencing newcomers’ impressions and attitudes toward the organisation (hotel group) and assist them in their adjustment”.

### Group approaches to training

Feldman (1989) distinguished between the outcomes of adopting individual or group approaches to training. The more recruits and organisation attempts to recruit at the same time the more formal the training becomes, leading to less innovative behaviour among the new recruits. Although the students are there to partake in daily activities in the operation, one must always remember that these young people are there for a different purpose that the permanent staff on the floor. However, training in groups does generate greater cohesion among new recruits. An “individualised training strategy produces more innovative behaviour in new recruits but it also generates the most uncertainty and role confusion for newcomers”. The findings as per table one suggest that training programmes should be tailored to the characteristics of the group or individual to be socialised and the training to be done, i.e. group activities may be suitable for professional cookery students, but individual training would be more suitable for Accommodation Management students. Support for tailored training programmes come from Reichers *et al.* (1994) who argue that training programmes should be designed based on individuals past experience

and the relevance of that experience. A WIL student will need a greater degree of support to alleviate anxiety, while the experienced employee may need a degree of “unfreezing” before adapting to a new culture and value systems.

### **Industry’s role**

WIL students like direction but do not like to feel they are being constantly checked on (Schwartz, 1988). At University level we “train”, students to have self discipline and to be in control of one’s own life. Schwartz advocates “where-do-we-stand” briefings at the end of each day and highlights the importance of feedback from the student to their supervisor in order that any issues or difficulties can be addressed.

Some academics talk about the apprenticeship/mentoring dimensions of the supervisory role. Porter *et al.* (1975, p. 168) describe this approach as one where “the organisation delegates to one of its members the responsibility for socialisation of specific newcomers. The organisation member thus is to serve as a model to be emulated by the new arrival”. The evidence suggests that this approach to socialisation may be formal or accidental and that it is impractical where a large number of newcomers are to be socialised – “its use in many organisations tends to be restricted to particular situations involving unique or highly crucial jobs” (Porter *et al.*, p.169)

Clutterbuck and Devinee (1987) argue that a mentor’s key function is to act as a role model to his protégé; “The senior Manager shows his new student how to assert himself, how to express his ideas and how to socialise with clients and supervisors”. Mentorship can be an extremely effective tool in the introducing of WIL students to the operation.

Clutterbuck and Devinee found the following to be the most commonly cited advantages of having a mentor:

- Improved self-confidence and self-image;
- The mentor helped the protégé to focus on career aspirations;
- The mentor made the protégé more visible within the organisation;
- The mentor acted as a role model for the protégé

Clutterbuck (1994) also reports more effective introduction of new recruits and a more stable corporate culture to key advantages of mentoring programmes. However, it must be noted that mentoring programmes can have negative outcomes. (Refer to table 1 for negative comments from students). Shea (1994) found the “Fagin Factor” (where mentors give bad advice) to be a key area of concern. Feldman and Arnold (1983, p. 85) focus on the importance of designing a relaxed programme which focuses on two-way communication (table 1 clearly indicates to us that this is a major problem) and which avoids trying to ‘sell the company’. Feldman and Arnold (1983) found that recruits who participated in more informal training programmes ‘reached pre-established levels of competence a month earlier than expected, and their anxiety was reduced more quickly’. It should be pointed out, however that the results of several studies on WIL have found that the effects of training on newcomers’ expectations are modest compared to more informal ways. Therefore the amount of time and effort an organisation spend on informal training may need to be reviewed and greater effort concentrated on less formal techniques, pay more attention to skills to be introduced.

### **Conclusions and research implications.**

The following statement was made by one of our students:

*“Relationships with and support from supervisors and peers within the workplace (industry) appear to influence student perceptions of the WIL education process. Student’s reports and surveys suggest that a supportive supervisory relationship is related to effective mutual respect. Peer relationships, likewise, play a valuable role in this context, as do strong mentor type relationships”.*

As stated before in this paper, not many results are available on the student’s reflection after a WIL component. Industry could only react on this, if we as the educators take this to them. It is also very easy to point the fingers to industry and blame them for a component not working. I think we in education should also understand the role that industry is playing out. The task at hand for ALL WIL educators is to work close with industry on the outcomes that we all desire for our students.

This article reported the key findings of an exploratory qualitative study on the WIL process experienced by students. The aim of the study was to explore in an in-depth, descriptive fashion, the experiences of second level students who participated in a WIL education programme. The qualitative methodology used allowed the voices of the students to be heard and it is argued that participants in the process they are best situated to provide insights into how the process influences them.

It also clearly indicated to us the important role that industry plays in this process. Remarkable was the great gratitude that our students have for the mentors in industry that helped them to achieve what was needed for that specific WIL component.

The data analysis reveals that the WIL education process is a complex one, highly individualistic and is influenced by a range of variables, within the organisational setting to a range of cognitive and effective issues.

In an attempt to bridge the knowledge-practice gap of a vocationally oriented university degree program, WIL situations, where students are required to apply theory to actual real world learning experiences can be particularly useful. There is considerable pressure on educational institutions to balance the theory base that necessitates a university degree program with the practical skills desired by the industry that will ultimately employ the students on graduation.

While there are challenges, and these were evident in the hospitality management cases of WIL discussed in this paper, the considerable body of knowledge and applications derived from other disciplines highlights the value of such an approach for hospitality management.

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