Training Industry Mentors as a Means to Move toward Global Competency and Work-Integrated Learning Success

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a component of Co-operative Education and an essential module in qualifications as presented by Universities of Technology's (UoT's) in South Africa (SA), and many other institutions across the world. This type of learning component requires time spent at a quality organization related to a student's field of study where theoretical learning can be translated into "real life" skills. However, regardless of the status of the placement venue, the lack of mentorship leads to a negative view of the company and the students' experience as a whole. In addition to this, it has been observed that the term "mentor" is assumed to be the students' departmental supervisor. Contributing to these factors is the reality that staff selected as student mentors are not trained for the role. Due to an increased interest among researchers to develop best practice guidelines for the success of WIL programmes, the need for a mentorship training programme for industry staff has become apparent. The study reviewed literature highlighting the definition of work-integrated learning (WIL) under the umbrella of co-operative education as well as defining the role and expectations of mentors. Surveys were conducted with final year students who have experienced a 6-month WIL placement as part of a Hospitality Management diploma at a particular institution, thereby gaining insight to their experiences with industry mentors. On the basis of the investigation, recommendations are made for the development of topics in a mentor training programme. The researcher aims to use the analysed data in the development of a mentor training programme, which will assist educational institutions in the movement toward global competency in their WIL programmes through effective and consistent student mentoring.

Key words: work integrated learning, mentoring programme; mentor; hospitality

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION AND WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING

The importance and essentiality of co-operative education needs to be identified before the concept of mentorship within a work-integrated learning (WIL) programme can be approached. Pratt (1996), states that Co-operative Education is an educational philosophy where the formal integration of work experience into the theoretical curriculum is imperative. Similarly, Groenewald (2004, p. 17) concurs with Cates and Jones (1999), that Co-operative Education is a structured educational strategy that progressively integrates academic study with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals. It is important that the WIL programme takes place in the most effective way. Authors such as Abeysekera (2006, p. 7-15), Groenewald (2004, p. 17), Sovilla and Varty (2004, p. 3), and Lebold, Pullin and Wilson (1990, p. 7), agree that WIL is a key component of the Co-operative Education paradigm, which is a form of education where the school and the occupational field cooperate in order to provide a joint educational programme. Reeders (2000, p. 205), proposes that the term WIL was coined to encompass the increasing diversity in the modes of vocational learning. Spowat (2009), states that the vocational nature of hospitality management is ideal to utilize WIL as a method of transferring classroom activities to the workplace.

Sovilla and Varty (2004, p. 3), mentioned in *The International Handbook for Co-operative Education* that the primary mission of Co-operative Education is to enhance student learning, i.e. the quality of teaching. A further definition by Jones and Quick (2007, p. 30), states that WIL is considered an educational strategy where learning in the classroom alternates with learning in the workplace and allows for the competencies of students to be developed and nurtured by the mentors. These viewpoints are supported in higher education institutions in South Africa. These institutions are obliged, by the South African Higher Education

Qualifications Framework (HEQF), Department of Education Government Notice No 928, gazetted (No. 30353) 5 October 2007 as policy in terms of the Higher Education Act, to place students for prerequisite work-integrated learning (Department of Education [DoE], 2007). They state that it is the responsibility of institutions that offer programmes requiring WIL credits to place students into WIL programmes. Such programmes must be appropriately structured, properly supervised and assessed (p. 9).

Tovey (2001, p. 225), and Warysazak (1999, p. 33), indicate that the time spent in real life situations give students the opportunity to apply abstract concepts learnt in the classroom. The soft skills are handled in a realistic manner rather than trying to simulate opportunities by carrying out role-play or similar teaching methods in a classroom experience. Essentially, co-operative education is then a partnership between education and industry, in which enhancement of student learning is a key outcome. Many researchers in the field of WIL have referred to this connection as a triangular relationship between the student (learner), the educational institution and the employer. The relationship is represented by Nuninger and Châtelet (2011, p. 93) in the figure below as the wining-trio, with its three circles of relationships intertwined to reveal the professional profile of the WIL experience.

FIGURE 1

The winning-trio of Work Integrated Learning (WIL)
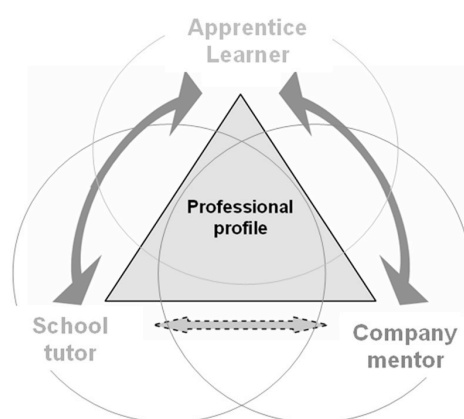
Source: Nuninger and Châtelet (2011, p. 93)

The knowledge and skill acquisition of the student (apprentice/learner), depicted at the top corner of the triangle in the figure above, is facilitated by both the academic institution (school) tutor and the workplace (company/industry) mentor. It is evident from this diagram that the mentor forms an integral part of the WIL experience.

Alderman and Milne (2005) relate the triangular relationship of the WIL stakeholders, to suggest three 'worlds' of learning which is experienced by the student. These are:

- **(Student):** The world of student experience which includes the knowledge, skills and attributes that a student already possesses, as well as their own personal perspectives, values and fundamental understandings.

- **(School):** The world of tertiary professional education, which includes the academic processes that have shaped, and continued to shape, the student. In this model, this world is represented by the academic, and

- **(Industry):** Finally the world of the WIL experience which provides the physical context for the learning. A significant element in this world is the mentor who collaborates with the academic and the student to design a plan of learning and to facilitate the reflective process. The three worlds are linked by the relationships formed through interactions between academics, students and mentors (p.1).

Mentoring and Work Integrated Learning

There is a responsibility attached to accepting a student for a WIL placement. According to Hinrichs (2001, p. 3) mentoring involves an equal partnership where the point is to share and transfer knowledge, expertise and skills. It must be a strategic intervention with the aim of building capacity to meet future leadership challenges and demands. Meyer and Fourie (2004, p. 17), report that mentoring has many benefits for businesses and in work integrated learning programmes, as it is crucial because it assists young minds to develop and gain valuable knowledge while putting theory into practice as it accelerates skills development and

helps an organisation to achieve its business objectives. In the same study, Meyer and Fourie (2004), state that:

> Mentoring is both value- and career-oriented. Value-oriented in that the character and values of the mentee are developed and career-oriented because the mentee is taught the skills and given information that is relevant to his/her career. These skills should help mentees to develop the skills they need in order to achieve their career objectives (p.3).

Myall, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2008, p. 1834-1835), emphasize that mentorship is an integral part of students' placement experiences and that the topic has attracted increasing interest among researchers. They further suggest the implementation of a formalized method of mentoring. This prompted debates around the definition of the concept, nature and practice of the mentoring role.

Despite a plethora of studies focusing on mentoring and its nature and application within the practice setting, limited attention has been paid to the extent to which mentors are trained and the provision of suitable guidelines. The significance of student mentorship and the impact thereof must be understood by all parties involved, and seen as a priority when accepting these students.

Mentor defined

A starting point to developing a mentor training programme would be to define what a mentor is, and eliminate the misconceptions and assumptions around this term with specific reference to WIL programmes.

Many great historical figures were considered as "mentors" following its first mention as a character in the Greek classic, *The Odyssey*, written by the poet Homer in the 8th century. The term "mentor" can be defined as a verb and a noun. The Concise Oxford Dictionary

(1999, p. 727) defines mentor (noun) as an experienced and trusted advisor and mentor as a verb, is to advise or train someone, especially a younger colleague. Following its earliest mention, the term resurfaced in the late 1970's and has since evolved into a business context in which a mentor is now defined as a teacher, guide, counsellor, sponsor or facilitator (Mentoring Overview, 2004). It is now a key feature of initial training in public service professions, for example in the fields of teaching (Kerry and Shelton Mayes, 1995, McIntyre and Wilkin, 1993), nursing (DeMarco, 1993, Standing, 1999), and career guidance (Wiggans, 1998), as well as in the development of business managers (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 1995).

Role and expectations of a mentor

A very close relationship exists between mentoring, coaching and training. Carrell, Elbert, Hatfield, Grobler, Marx, and Van der Schyf (2000, p. 308), mention that the term training has been used to designate the acquisition of technically orientated skills by non-management personnel. Mentoring is often confused with other development functions, and most commonly with that of coaching (Gentry, 2009; Sparrow, 2005; Watt, 2004). The primary role of coaching is skills training, while the focus of mentorship is on the mentor's shared experiences and wisdom enabling the mentee to develop competencies (Stone, 1999). It is easy to see how this role can be confused by both employer and student. Caruso (1992, p. 1) concludes that the connection aspect of mentoring, is primarily a relationship, not a process. Students often refer to the person in charge of the department they are placed in as the mentor, and industry refer to the mentor as the company representative that organizes the placement with the academic institution. A number of authors identify the various roles of mentors in different ways. The most suitable descriptions of these roles are offered by Coetzee & Stone (2004), who broadly define the role of a mentor as: (a) a counselor: A person who is close to the learner, who the learner trusts and to whom the learner confides personal

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issues and concerns on a more confidential level, (b) an advisor: gives an opinion about what to do or how to handle a specific situation, (c) an encourager: recommends actions or gives advice, (d) A subject matter expert: gives courage, hope or confidence to another; helps and gives support; and celebrates successes, (e) a friend: supporter or ally; a person at the other end of the journey, (f) guardian: watches over, protects, cares for and defends, (g) leader: directs or guides, (h) a motivator: excites or moves another to action, (i) a role model: a person in a specific role to be followed or imitated owing to the excellence or worth of that role, (j) a knowledge developer: shares knowledge or insight, and (k) an instructor who shows or guides another to do something (p.21).

Nicolaides (2006, p. 7), quotes Moody (1997) who maintains that the best type of placement programme is one which involves the hosting business from the outset and where it demonstrates a genuine commitment to student learning. Students should not be regarded as cheap sources of labour (Keating; 2011, p. 47).

Mentor training

Educators and students have an opinion of how they expect a mentor to offer guidance during a WIL programme but it is probable that industry mentors have a completely different opinion of this function. It is therefore important to develop a model which all parties can refer to, and use as a guideline to ensure effective mentorship, therefore eliminating possible misunderstandings. The benefit of a mentoring programme has been discussed for decades. Cervero and Wilson (1994, p. 13), maintain twenty years ago that the question of "who should benefit" is central to planning, managing, and participating in formal mentoring programmes. As the mentoring of socially excluded youth expands rapidly to unprecedented proportions, with concerns being raised about the allocation of resources to match this ex-

pansion (Institute of Careers Guidance, n.d.), non-professional staff, with less qualifications and training and lower pay, are increasingly being used for this work.

Hansman (2001, p. 7), suggests that mentors in formal mentoring programmes, and the adult educators who help plan these programmes, can plan responsibly and act ethically while enhancing the personal workplace and professional development of all involved.

The importance of mentorship has been clearly established. However, it would be unjust to expect industry mentors to carry out this important function without themselves having had structured guidance in the correct process of mentoring. In a previous study by Keating (2011, p. 85), over 50 percent of industry respondents admitted to not having any training in the role of mentor, with 81.8 percent of industry members wanting to attend a mentoring training programme.

METHOD

A survey was conducted using WIL co-ordinators of the Faculty of Business Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and 3rd year students at the Cape Town Hotel School (CTHS) a department of this faculty as population groups for the survey. Due to the small size of the population groups, the researcher did not select a sampling strategy for the survey but rather invited all parties involved. Qualitative menthods were adopted to gather insight from these two groups. An online questionnaire using Google Forms (Google Forms, 2015), was used as data collection tool, with questions aimed at highlighting what students expect from mentors in industry, areas in which they would like to see industry mentors trained and how WIL co-ordinators in the faculty experienced industry mentors from an institutional perspective. The questions were predominently closed-ended where the respondent was asked to select the most suitable answer from a list of possibilities. In some cases the respondent was able to select more than one answer. The percentage respondents are indicated in the table below.

TABLE 1

Cape Town Hotel School (CTHS) Student and Faculty WIL Coordinator respondents

	Description	Population (N)	Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Population 1 (WIL Co-ordinators)	Faculty of Business and Management Sciences	14	13	92.8
Population 2 (Students per Course)	Accommodation Management 3	26	22	84.6
	Food & Beverage Management 3	28	17	60.1
	Professional Cookery 3	18	16	88.8

Although all 3rd year students (N=72) for the three courses offered at the CTHS were approached, 76.3 percent (n=55) of students responded. It was apparent that only 60.1 percent of the Food & Beverage Management students responsed to the survey. It can be deduced that this was due to students being busy with practicals at the time of the survey, during which time they do not access the internet as often as on-campus students. The researcher hoped to achieve a 100 percent response rate from the faculty WIL Co-ordinators, but a satisfactory 92.8 percent completed the survey.

RESULTS

The survey results will be interpreted and discussed in two separate sections: the students' survey and the WIL Co-ordinators' survey.

Student views

The student questionnaire was directed at all final year (3rd year) students at the CTHS studying Accommodation Management, Food & Beverage Management and Professional

Cookery. The majority of students who completed the survey were young adults aged between 17-24 years of age (94.4%). Students who were not allocated mentors totalled 32.1 percent, which correlates with the responses from WIL Co-ordinators to be discussed in the next section.

Students (73.6%) would prefer one mentor throughout the entire placement timeframe, of which 84 percent were of the opinion that the mentor must have regular meetings with the students. Although the majority require an industry mentor, 85 percent of students indicated the need for mentors to have a good understanding of the course requirements that they are studying at the academic institution. A similar percentage of students (81.2%) do not want the academic institutions to be involved in the mentorship offered by industry members.

The majority of students (79.2%) indicated that they expect mentors to be in a senior position at their placement venue, with an overwhelming majority (92.4%) expecting the mentor to have relevant industry experience. This corresponds with Mullen (1998, p. 319) who describes mentoring as a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced member (mentor) and a less experienced member (student) of an organization or profession. A further 77.3 percent expect their mentors to be trained in the role, with special focus on topics such as building confidence and self-esteem in the workplace (81.1%), assisting with setting training goals (67.9%) and how to build rapport (58.5%) with industry members. Only 3.8 percent of students indicated that the mentor should be involved in the actual training of work skills. This outcome shows that students understand the concept of mentoring, and do not confuse it with coaching as discussed earlier in the research (*see Stone, 1999*).

WIL Co-coordinator Views

It was noticeable that the respondents were well experienced in the field of student placement within the Business and Management Sciences Faculty at the CPUT since the majority (53.9%), have been in this field for more than 7 years. Over 75 percent of the coordinators place students at least once during the 3 year Diploma studies for a 6-month WIL period. All courses offered have a structured preparation subject that primes students for the world of work. The focus of the preparation is on CV/Resume Writing, placement application and professional grooming. Other topics relate to the academic outcomes and assessment of the course. It is alarming to note that only 46.2 percent of the WIL coordinators agreed that their students are provided with industry mentors, of which only 38.5 percent are confident that those mentors are trained in the role. An interesting result reveals that coordinators experience few students (23.1%) complaining to them that they do not receive support from their mentors. It can therefore be assumed that the balance of students (76.9%) either did not complain to their respective WIL coordinators or were satisfied with their mentors. Common complaints (61.5%) experienced were students feeling that they were being treated as permanent staff and misused in that manner. This correlates with the number of students (61.5%) who feel that they weren't paid enough during WIL. A logical interpretation of this result can be that low pay leads to a feeling of exploitation amongst students. During the 6-month placement, coordinators had at least 38.5 percent of their students wanting to terminate their placement. This is a serious concern as failure to complete the WIL programme can result in an equal number of students not completing the subject, thus delaying graduation. Almost all coordinators (96.4%) were of the opinion that trained mentors will lead to WIL success, but a large percentage (69.3%) of those respondents feel that they do not have the authority to insist industry provide trained mentors to students.

The coordinators views indicated they were not very confident that the industry placements would accept the formal mentor requirement, and the insistence of mentors being trained in that role. However, contradictory to this opinion, in a similar study by the researcher (Keating, 2011:88), an overwhelming 88.1 percent of industry participants indicated that they wanted staff to be trained as mentors, indicating confidence in the concept.

CONCLUSION

Literature has shown that, under the umbrella of Co-operative education, a tri-angular relationship exists between industry partners, students and academic institutions. Many authors have indicated that mentoring is an essential component when grooming students towards a successful WIL experience for students.

In the survey conducted, students indicated that they understand what is expected of mentors, and would like to see that mentors are trained and well informed of what their academic courses require of them. Highest on their list of mentoring needs while on WIL placement, is to be assisted in building confidence in the workplace and in so doing, the development of self-esteem.

Through this study, it has become apparent that investigation into industry's perception of the related terms of mentoring and coaching should be defined, to minimize their assumption that departmental training equates to the mentoring of students. Making use of the correct mentoring methods, the risk of being labeled as exploiters, and using students as permanent staff at little or no pay, will be minimized.

Based on the outcome of this study, it is recommended that academic institutions assist in educating industry mentors through a mentor training programme. The development of such a programme will enable the tri-angular partnership to move toward a successful WIL experience.

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