

Chapter 13

Developing Gen Y Competencies for the New Work Environment: Comparing and Contrasting Four Work–Integrated Learning Approaches Across National Contexts

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ABSTRACT

While higher education institutions are increasingly interested in preparing a new generation of students to meet the demands of the workplace, there is still limited research on how work-integrated learning (WIL) strategies can specifically benefit Gen Y's learning, competency development, and employability. In this chapter, the authors aim to extend the knowledge of WIL in three key respects: (1) examine the rationale for considering WIL as part of curriculum development, (2) compare different WIL strategies through four cases studies, and (3) analyze the impact and benefits of those WIL approaches for Gen Y's learning and employability. By comparing and contrasting different approaches to WIL, the chapter contributes to shed more light on some important benefits of WIL such as Gen Y's development of self-identity, reflective capacity, and critical skills. Although different, the cases demonstrate the importance of making space for reflection and integrating collective and individual practices in WIL designs.

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INTRODUCTION

Preparing a new generation of students to meet the demands of the workplace has become an increasing concern for higher education faculty. But how to approach curriculum development in a way that both appeals to Generation Y (Gen Y) students' learning styles and equips them with the competencies required by the new work environment? Gen Y students expect to be prepared for a complex workplace, which challenges academics to continuously revise their curriculum (Barnett & Coate, 2005) and find learning strategies which respond to their students' evolving needs (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). In this context, we believe WIL is a critical component for future curriculum development. Work integrated learning (WIL) deliberately integrates theory with practice (Patrick et al., 2009). WIL embeds a broad range of learning practices including (1) systematic training (e.g. apprenticeship), (2) structured work experience (e.g. field experience, internships), and (3) institutional partnerships (e.g. service learning) (Sattler, 2011; Stirling et al., 2016). All those learning practices are designed to provide students with exposure to "real-world" work experience (Jackson, 2015). Integrating curricula with workplace experience presents several benefits such as deepening students' knowledge of a real-world setting, gaining a better understanding of the roles and expectations in relation to their future profession (Jackson, 2015), enhancing students' work-related capabilities, developing a sense of their professional identity (Cooper et al., 2010) and developing self-awareness (Barnett et al., 2001).

The purpose of this chapter is to extend the knowledge of WIL in three areas: (1) examine the rationale for considering WIL as part of curriculum development; (2) show different WIL strategies and perspectives through four cases studies presenting WIL-based designs in four higher education institutions based in different countries and (3) analyze the impact and benefits of WIL approaches for Gen Y's learning, competency development and employability. The chapter will address these issues through an exploratory multiple case study approach, allowing both a micro-level analysis and greater academic reflection on the value of integrating project-based learning, traineeship and active learning in curriculum design. Similarities and differences across cases will be examined and lead to recommendations for practice and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Generation Y

The cases we present later in this chapter all feature WIL programs designed for students who can be characterized as "Generation Y". Howe and Strauss (2000) define the Millennials generation (also known as Gen Y) as comprising those born between 1982 to 2004. This generation has grown up with the new technologies and the Internet, and is digitally and globally connected (Bencsik et al., 2016). Bencsik et al. (2016) argue that Gen Y students have a preference for working in teams as they see the advantage of combining skills and resources offered by other team members. They also expect to have a meaningful work environment and receive feedback in order to improve their performance.

Twenge (2017) does not see Gen Y as a homogenous group and makes the distinction between "Millennials" born between 1980 and 1994 and their successors born between 1995 and 2004. The latter, she calls iGen or the "Internet generation". Twenge (2017) suggests that iGens are more cautious and pragmatic, far from the emblematic maxims adopted by the Millennials, such as: "you can be what

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