

Editorial Introduction of CIWIL

Ulrika Lundh Snis¹, Per Assmo², Iréne Bernhard³

¹School of Business, Economics and IT, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6101-3054>

²School of Business, Economics and IT, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5848-4288>

³School of Business, Economics and IT, University West, Trollhättan, Sweden, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2118-2152>

Corresponding author: Irene.bernhard@hv.se

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a field of study primarily related to the social sciences and humanities and WIL as a research field is growing (e.g. Amarathunga, 2024). The concept of WIL has mostly been used in the Anglo-Saxon academic environment, primarily viewed as an educational phenomenon that integrates work experiences into higher education. Such WIL research and educational projects are predominantly located in North America, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. In research publications, WIL is mostly used as an umbrella term for different pedagogical models related to students' academic learning in relation to working life. A predominant goal of WIL is, in this perspective, to equip graduates with relevant skills to enhance employability.

Within the scope of this journal, there is an inclusive view of WIL, where the uniqueness lies in a mix of an Anglo-Saxon WIL tradition (Jackson, 2015), Work-integrated education (Billett, 2022) and the Workplace learning perspective (Deutscher & Braunstein, 2023). Yet, some recent trends of diversification of WIL research into different directions and contexts can be seen (Josefsson et al., 2024; Rafiq et al., 2024). A more inclusive approach to WIL is today formulated as a multidisciplinary research field, that embraces research and education studies focusing on the relationship between working and learning. WIL is studied as a complex learning phenomenon with many different study perspectives that are based on learning being situated in different social practices (Björck, 2021; Ferns et al., 2022; Gustafsson & Thång, 2017; Pennbrant & Svensson, 2018; Piper et al. 2023). The evolving relationship between education and work underscores a paradigm shift in how we conceive learning and knowledge production. Crucially, this perspective does not confine learning to students alone nor impose rigid formal training contracts between businesses and higher education institutions. Instead, it advocates for a more fluid, integrative approach—one that recognizes the intrinsic links between learning and work environments, integrating these processes into both education and working life. Consequently, this perspective encourages views of learning in a lifelong perspective.

The ultimate focus shifts towards understanding how to effectively weave these diverse experiences together. By doing so, we create richer, more relevant learning journeys—not only for students but also for academia and stakeholders. The inter- and transdisciplinary nature of this paradigm fosters inclusive collaboration, opening the door for non-academic partners to co-create questions and knowledge. This democratization of knowledge creation and learning ensures that diverse perspectives inform research and learning, making outcomes more relevant and applicable to real-world and societal challenges. It acknowledges that knowledge is not static nor confined to formal settings; rather, it is an ongoing, dynamic process that benefits from the various knowledge forms and processes.

Challenges related to different aspects of change and socialization processes are linked to learning, knowledge creation and competence development (Billett, 2004). Organizations are constantly requiring learning new practices, adaptation of new strategies and technologies, but also a readiness to leave behind old ways of organizing and working. New conditions and realities demand restructuring, development, and adjustment of operational strategies, work practice and learning capabilities applicable in the work-life of contemporary society, work systems and the composition of

knowledge, competencies and skills (e.g. Bernhard & Olsson, 2020; Svensson et al., 2023). Continuous development and adaptation to ensure meeting the competences needed in organizations and society necessitates further advancement of WIL as a research field. Shifting learning conditions and emerging challenges at and for work require new initiatives to re-define and re-design both competences and skills needed at work, but also further analysis and development of strategies, methods and processes allowing practitioners to adapt to and work within ever shifting requirements and expectations.

Collaboration and change processes requires that learning is seen as a social process that relies heavily on employee involvement, interaction, and participation in goal-directed activities. Learning is described as socially mediated and contextually embedded, meaning that workplace interactions and collaboration are vital for skill development and knowledge transfer. Hence, both students and professionals in their immediate practices are subjects to learning and both educational and workplace contexts are key environments for learning that is intertwined with different knowledge forms, practices, and cultural norms. Thus, the development of WIL as a transdisciplinary research and educational field is particularly relevant in addressing challenges for contemporary and emerging work life in general, and issues related to co-creation of knowledge, competence development and life-long learning more specifically.

Overall, research infrastructures in social sciences in general, and work-integrated learning in particular, are pivotal in enhancing the quality, scope, and impact of research, addressing complex societal issues, and contributing to both applied research and informed public discourse and policymaking. In collaboration with academic and non-academic actors, University West has strengthened its activities to create and develop WIL as a unique discipline with a research and education field within its own right.

A critical component in this work is the establishment of this international open access, peer-reviewed research journal named CIWIL – Critical Issues in Work-integrated Learning. Hence, one of the aims of CIWIL is to offer current research on work-integrated learning that researchers, practitioners, professionals, students and an interested public can take part. CIWIL formulates WIL as a transdisciplinary research field, defined by issues focusing on the relationship between work and learning. Study objects may include preconditions, organization, implementation, content, forms and implications of integrating work and learning. Thus, as editors we welcome research that gives us new insights, challenge, and develop the concept of WIL.

Ulrika Lundh Snis (Editor-in-chief)

Per Assmo (editor)

Iréne Bernhard (editor)

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