

Work integrated learning for college lecturers

Editor's Note: *Andre Van der Bijl is a senior lecturer in Further Education and Training in the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and Vanessa Taylor is a project manager for the Swiss South African Cooperation Initiative (SSACI). Her work is focussed on inter alia, developing a system for providing college students with workplace-based experience and building lecturer capacity through industry exposure.*

ANDRE VAN DER BIJL AND
VANESSA TAYLOR

The new DHET framework for professional qualifications for lecturers in technical and vocational education and training includes two work integrated learning (WIL) elements. The one form of WIL, commonly referred to as teaching practice in the college, involves learning about the education workplace, and the other requires learning about the industry for which lecturers' students are prepared.

While there is much knowledge on WIL at college for trainee lecturers and WIL for students being prepared for industry, substantially less is known about what has become locally known as lecturer workplace exposure / experience or industry-based WIL for lecturers and internationally by terms such as Professional Development Placements (PDP) and Teacher Industry Placements (TIP).

Teaching practice or classroom-based WIL is well understood as this has been a longstanding element of teacher development programmes. The difference between classroom and industry-based WIL is also evident. However the precise nature of industry-based WIL for lecturers and how learning is transferred from this back into teaching practice is less well

understood. This is because it is a new component of South African teacher/lecturer qualifications and does not have a long tradition in international qualifications. Furthermore, while educator placement in industry as an element of continuing professional development has been an international practice for many years, there is little research on the application of learning from this in teaching practice or the actual impact.

Research on industry-based WIL for vocational educators indicates that this is different from WIL for vocational students. WIL for students involves learning with the aim of implementing skills that were the topic of college curricula. WIL for lecturers on the other hand involves more than the mere application of skills, it involves theorisation with the aim of improving classroom teaching practice and the practice of college graduates.

WIL is a feature of various programmes at TVET colleges; NC(V) programmes include an optional period of workplace-based experience, N6 programmes are capped by an internship that leads to a diploma, and learnerships and apprenticeships include structured learning in the workplace. WIL has a strong tradition in apprenticeships and cooperative education programmes offered by Technikons/universities of

technology as has WIL in the form of teaching practice for qualifying school teachers and college lecturers.

While the surface appearance of different types of WIL programmes varies, they all involve a skills development cycle, based on reflection and generalisation of the application of experiences. The experiential learning cycle involving experience, reflection, generalisation and application has been attributed to Kolb (1984).

In contrast to the experiential learning cycle, Schuller and Bergami (2008) argue that lecturer industry-based experience, what they refer to as Teacher Industry Placements (TIP), is a six phase process. The six phases involves industry placement, experience gained from the experience, skills development during the placement, development of theory, classroom teaching and, putting theory into practice. Once theory has been put into practice a new theory/practice dynamic exists, which requires a new TIP experience to develop further.

The TIP cycle starts with a placement occurrence, in which a vocational educator is placed in an appropriate industry setting. There is potentially an infinite number of placement options, including spending part of a working day in the workplace to block release programmes in which leave is granted for industry placement. During the placement the lecturer is exposed to certain experiences and gains skills related to the work that is carried out at the place visited. Like other forms of WIL, the success of a TIP placement and experiences is dependent on appropriate location and timing, and appropriate skills development. During

the placement, however, the difference between TIP and WIL becomes evident. While skills development and its link to theory already learnt is the key reason for WIL, skills development is part of TIP. Lecturers are not merely industry specialists, lecturers are education specialists of the industry they serve by providing students. In addition to skills development and its link to related theory used at college, lecturer's industry experience involves skills refreshment or skills reinforcement, where new knowledge is learnt and existing knowledge is updated or confirmed.

A significant difference between student and lecturer workplace-based WIL, lies in what is done with what has been learnt. While competency and a deeper understanding is what a learner takes from a WIL experience, according to Schuller and Bergami, a lecturer is provided with an opportunity to develop new theory and to place the newly developed theory in classroom practice for the next generation of students to take into industry.

Unlike students who learn to do during WIL, lecturers need to link what they have done to the theoretical constructs that underlie what is being done, with the aim of placing the adapted theories in the classroom. Lecturers need to, to apply a statement of Michel Foucault, know *what they do, does*. Once a lecturer has theorised the content of a workplace experience, classroom practice and content will be adapted and, finally the new theoretical constructs will be taken to the workplace by new learners. Changes in the workplace that resulted from revised classroom content need to be experienced by the lecturer.