Assessing workplace-based learning

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Vocational education is distinctive by virtue of workplace-based learning in curriculum. This nexus of theory with practice, extends the learning space to authentic work environments. A critical issue of workplace-based learning is the assessment thereof. This article presents a review of workplace-based learning assessments in terms of whether the specified learning areas were attained, using portfolios and performance appraisals as the dominant assessment methods. Interviews with workplace coordinators and a review of assessments for diploma programs were subjected to content analysis to extrapolate themes related to the objectives of this study. Literature on workplace-based learning and assessment formed the backdrop for data analysis and discussion. The emerging themes revealed the influence of institutional and workplace dynamics on assessments and that portfolio development required revision. The import of this study foregrounds the need to evaluate current practices to ensure that workplace-based learning gains its rightful place as a valuable learning space.

Keywords: Vocational education, workplace-based learning, assessment, higher education

Workplace-based learning (WPBL) is a distinguishing feature of diploma qualifications in South Africa given their vocational career pathway and focus on the application of knowledge, skills and attributes. Du Pré (2010) notes that the private and public sectors have consistently singled out universities of technology (UoTs) "for their career-focused, hands-on approach to education and training and the delivery of graduates with knowledge that is immediately relevant in the workplace" (p. 17). O'Toole (2007) explains WPBL as requiring:

> some type of student placement in an organisation external to the formal learning institutions of universities. Such placements involve some partial training arrangement within a minimum period of time. Generally work placements have specific outcomes attached to them for student skill development and at the completion of the placement students should have acquired new skills and a broader knowledge base (p. 52).

The efficacy of WPBL resides in ensuring appropriate placements where students are afforded apt opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, skills and attributes that align with WPBL outcomes. Where WPBL is effective, it contributes to developing new understandings and insights of knowledge application in professional practice (Qualters, 2010). While appropriate placements and developmental opportunities for learning in professional practice are important, the research objectives for this study focused on the assessment of WPBL. The main objectives were to determine whether WPBL assessment achieved the intended learning areas in selected diploma programs of study, and whether the assessment instruments of portfolios and performance appraisals were effective in assessing WPBL in practice. Since assessment relates to what has been learned, this study contributes to the debate on WPBL as workplace pedagogy and whether the assessment instruments were appropriate to assess the intended learning areas.

WORKPLACE-BASED LEARNING IN VOCATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

Workplace-based learning, also termed work-integrated learning (WIL), co-operative education, experiential learning and internships (Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2011), might have different interpretations based on the application thereof. The Council on

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Higher Education *Higher Education Good Practice Guide* (2011) defines WIL" as an umbrella term to describe curricula, pedagogic and assessment practices across a range of academic disciplines that integrate formal learning and workplace concerns" (p. 4). Within this context, WIL is the vehicle to integrate theory with practice by incorporating pedagogic practices such as work placements, problem-based learning, project-based learning, service learning and simulated learning. Workplace-based learning as a "learning program where academic work and actual work experience are structured as part of a formal qualification" (Cooper et al., 2010, p. 50), is but one modality of WIL. It is this understanding of WPBL that is carried throughout this article. The principal advantage of WPBL is that "students gain experience in a professional field during their formal studies and begin working life with knowledge of the marketplace, organizational structures and employers' expectations" (Du Pré, 2010, p. 17).

The premise presented here is that the learning context and modality of professional practice is an extension of classroom learning, not adjunct or peripheral to it. In other words, "theoretical learning and practice learning can be complementary parts of a whole, each elaborating, extending and challenging the other" (Cooper et al., 2010, p. 33). This view aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion that "learning . . . takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning" given that "changing locations are part of actors learning trajectories" (pp. 36, 40). Different settings for learning and teaching present different learning opportunities and learning modalities. However, Kolb and Kolb (2005) and Dewey (1938) caution that it is not a given that all experiential learning might prove to be meaningful. Kolb and Kolb (2005) are of the opinion that not all learning spaces "promote growth-producing experiences for learners" such that students are immersed in the experience and "feel that they are members of a learning community" (pp. 205-206). Dewey (1938) notes that some experiences might well be "mis-educative" and alerts us to the reality that, "the belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely educative . . . some experiences are mis-educative" (p. 25). An example of this would be student placements that do not offer the requisite learning experiences that align with the learning outcomes.

The pedagogy of WPBL needs to be carefully weighed against the pedagogy of classroom practice in considering learning and assessment. Moore (2004) avers that "the pedagogy of workplace and classroom learning is very different [where] classroom pedagogy . . . is largely formal classroom teaching with written prescriptions whereas workplace pedagogy is by means of observation and practice" (p. 331). Where the classroom focus is on the acquisition and application of knowledge in simulated contexts, the workplace setting draws on the use and production of knowledge which is 'invoked and employed in the definition and solution of problems (Moore, 2004, p. 331). In other words, the curriculum of a workplace is a dynamic process where various forms of knowledge are organized and used in different ways to classroom contexts. While WPBL is the nexus of classroom teaching with professional practice, it can only be meaningful and educative if all the relevant factors are aligned to achieve the intended outcomes of WPBL in its entirety.

PURPOSE AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

This research was conducted within the business faculty of a University of Technology, one of six faculties at this institution. The business faculty constituted 14 academic departments, each offering a diploma qualification. Diplomas are three-year qualifications, with the WPBL component occurring mainly in the final year of study. The dominant assessment instruments for WPBL across the 14 diplomas were students' portfolios of evidence and a performance appraisal completed by the workplace supervisor. This was the status quo for the past 15 years. A recent institutional curriculum

revision exercise, necessitated by the revised national Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (Council on Higher Education, 2013), prompted staff to reflect on current practices for future improvements. One of the areas of reflection was WPBL. To this end, the assessment instruments used in assessing WPBL in six diplomas were reviewed to determine whether the portfolios and performance appraisals provided evidence of the intended learning areas. Given the different learning contexts of the classroom and varying workplaces for business studies students, the import of this study resides in how WPBL was assessed and whether the learning areas were attained.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF ASSESSMENT AND WORKPLACE-BASED LEARNING

Constructivism

One of the institutional approaches to teaching, learning and assessment is that of constructivism, which posits that learning is situated such that learners construct knowledge and meaning within the context and experience in which learning occurs (Brodie & Irving, 2007). A national guideline on teaching and learning, that is, the CHE *Teaching and Learning Resource No 1* (Council on Higher Education, 2004) describes a constructivist approach as one where students are "innovative thinkers, and emphasizes that meaning is created by the student, through the student's learning activities" (p. 8). While constructivism speaks to student-centered learning, the question to be asked relates to how this construction of knowledge is realized in the assessment of WPBL in fluid workplace contexts that are prone to the vicissitudes of changing business environments. It is nevertheless important that good practice assessment principles of validity, reliability, fairness and transparency are brought to bear in workplace-learning contexts as well.

Assessment of Workplace-Based Learning as Part of Curriculum

From a pedagogic perspective such as constructive alignment (Biggs, 1999, 2014) assessment forms part of the teaching and learning cycle. Assessment is not a linear means to an end, that is, to determine what and how much students know and can do. In contrast, assessments inform students and lecturers where the knowledge gaps are and what improvements and academic interventions might be necessary. This view aligns with Walvoord's (2010) assertion that "assessment is the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions that affect student learning" (p. 2). Assessment is "central to the process of learning itself" (O'Toole, 2007, p. 51), requiring students' agency in their academic and professional development (Biggs, 1999, 2014). With reference to WPBL, Qualters (2010) notes that "experiential education is not just integration of theory and practice but can (and should) be transformative, creating new knowledge, skills, and attitudes for students that neither theory nor practice alone can accomplish" (p. 55). However, assessment for WPBL is very different from assessment for classroom-based instruction. Ferns and Zegwaard (2014) draw attention to the complexities of assessing WPBL as follows:

- the outcomes of WPBL are variable depending on the placement environment;
- some tasks are collaborative, rendering individual performance difficult to assess;
- assessment instruments need to measure the achievement of intended learning outcomes within varying workplace settings where the intensity and rigor of outcomes might not be applicable.

Furthermore, "assessments must be designed to support and encourage the learning process and individual development in their different experiences" (Clements & Cord, 2013, p. 116). These

complexities relate to the socio-cultural, situated aspects that characterize WPBL, where the institution has minimal (if any) recourse or control. An added complexity is that workplace supervisors might not have the requisite knowledge, skills and practice at the appropriate level of learning, to offer the necessary support and conduct fair assessments (Jackson, 2018). The overarching premise is that a theoretical understanding needs to inform the design and implementation of WPBL, in conjunction with industry partners, in order to alleviate workplace challenges (Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014).

PORTFOLIOS AS WORKPLACE-BASED LEARNING ASSESSMENT METHOD

Assessment methods should be fit for and of purpose to align with the field of knowledge and practice, as well as the level of learning. Cooper et al. (2010), aptly describe the purpose and function of the WPBL portfolio as "grounded in the stated learning outcomes" which should be analyzed by the student "in order to identify what kind of evidence they need to produce" (pp. 112-113). The students, together with their workplace supervisors, then seek out tasks and responsibilities "that will provide them with opportunities to generate evidence regarding their competency or capability" (Cooper et al., 2010, p. 113). The portfolio as assessment method is favored by Lirola (2018) as it: (1) allows for the integration of tasks; (2) offers insights on how each assessment criterion was addressed, and (3) illustrates the "whole learning process and reflects how, when and where the different concepts, abilities and competences have been acquired by students" (p. 29). Qualters (2010) similarly maintains that the experiential learning portfolio is one of the most comprehensive methods of assessing WPBL, its distinguishing feature being the reflection component. Qualters (2010) asserts that "a learning portfolio is not just a showcase of student materials, but a purposefully designed collection connected by carefully thought out structured student reflections" (p. 60). Reflection requires an understanding and analytical thought processes of events and activities, in order to gain a better understanding for improved future practices. Cooper et al. (2010), draw on Schön's two concepts of reflection, that is, "reflection-on-action, an analytical process of thinking about an experience after it has occurred, and reflection-in-action, the in the moment thinking that gives rise to experimentation" (p. 60) (see Clements and Cord, 2013]. Although both aspects of reflection are applicable to WPBL, reflection-on-action, should be evident in WPBL portfolios. Reflection as an influential learning experience, is a process of inter- and intra-personal engagement that takes cognizance of current knowledge, values, dispositions, actions performance and competence for future improvements in similar or unfamiliar situations. The portfolio should include the main competences and objectives achieved during the work placement, the purpose of each activity should be clarified as to how it relates to achieving the intended outcomes and appropriate evidence of learning in practice should be provided (Lirola, 2018; Qualters, 2010; Simm, 2005).

METHOD

The research methods of interviews, that is, participant accounts of their experiences and practices and document analysis, places this study within a qualitative descriptive research paradigm. Six diplomas, which represent various fields of business and management studies were purposively selected to explore whether the assessment of WPBL aligned with subject outcomes of the qualification. Although placements for all students was the ideal, this was not always the case in practice for all diplomas. The selected diplomas had consistent WPBL placements and represented a cross-section of business and management studies. Four work placement coordinators were interviewed to find out how assessments were conducted in their respective departments. Work placement coordinators were attached to departments and were solely responsible for WPBL preparation, placement and assessment. Two of the four work placement coordinators were responsible for placements and supervision in two

diploma qualifications each using the same approaches to WPBL. One WPBL coordinator reported on Tourism Management and Event Management, another reported on Human Resources Management and Entrepreneurship, and two coordinators reported on Management and Operations Management respectively. Semi-structured interviews allowed leeway to probe and ask additional questions to the interview protocol, while simultaneously providing interviewees the space to clarify information where necessary. The interviews were recorded with the necessary consent from the interviewees to ensure authenticity of data and accurate transcriptions. All interview transcripts were sent to participants for verification. Content analysis was used to develop themes, for example, how WPBL assessment was conducted and whether portfolios fulfilled their purpose in WPBL assessment. The interview data were analyzed firstly, to identify "the visible surface content" (Babbie, 2004, p. 318), that is, to understand each participant's perspective of WPBL assessment. This process of analysis evolved into a second level of thematic content analysis, that is, categorizing data and extrapolating trends that aligned with the interview questions (Grbich, 2007). In addition to the interviews, document analysis of WPBL subject guides, portfolios, performance appraisals and assessment rubrics was conducted for each diploma to augment the interview data. The selected documents contained primary information, that is, they were developed first-hand based on the practices of individuals for WPBL assessment (Grbich, 2007). With regard to ethical considerations, participants were invited to participate via email, in which the details of the project were explained. Participants were assured they could withdraw from the project at any time. This project was funded by an institutional research initiative and institutional ethics protocols and approvals were observed. The findings and discussion are limited to this study and this faculty and are not generalizable to other faculties or institutions.

FINDINGS

Workplace-Based Learning Duration and Assessments

Workplace-based learning was a compulsory subject in each diploma with different time periods in industry. Three diplomas had 3-month, and 6-month industry placements respectively (refer to Table 1). According to the interview data and subject guides, the workplace supervisor assessed students by completing the performance appraisal template and students completed the portfolio of evidence during their time in industry. These were the main credit-bearing assessments for the actual workplace experience and are the focus of this paper. Additional assessments for certain diplomas, such as assignments on work preparedness, a company research project for one diploma and group/individual presentations were required. The workplace supervisor's performance appraisal, which was the same template for all diplomas, contributed between 15% and 50%. This formed part of the logbook for Operations Management. The assessment methods and weightings were different across the diplomas of study. The duration and assessments for WPBL were inherited by the workplace coordinators, who made changes to assessments as they saw fit.

WORKPLACE COORDINATORS

Workplace coordinators were attached to particular departments and diploma qualifications in the faculty. They took sole responsibility for all aspects of WPBL such as workplace preparation (for example, CV writing, interview skills and portfolio development), placements, assessments and site visits to companies where students were placed. Coordinators referred to WPBL as "my sole responsibility" and "entirely my responsibility". They worked independently in their respective departments although they had the same roles and responsibilities. The coordinator for Human

TABLE 1: Workplace-based learning duration and assessment methods.

WPBL	Tourism Management	Event Management	Human Resources Management	Entrepreneurship	Management	Operations Management
Duration	6 months	6 months	3 months	3 months	3 months	6 months
Assessment and Weightings	Portfolio 50%	Portfolio 50%	Portfolio 40%	Portfolio 40%	Portfolio 60%	Project and Logbook 50%
	Performance Appraisal 50%	Performance Appraisal 50%	Performance Appraisal 20%	Performance Appraisal 20%	Performance Appraisal 15%	No Performance Appraisal
			Assignment 30%	Assignment 30%	Assignment and Individual Presentation 25%	Assignment 35%
			Group Presentation 10%	Group Presentation 10%		Individual Presentation 15%
Number of Learning Areas	14	7	4	4	8	10

Resources Management noted that "we're working in isolation because if you go to another department, maybe they are going to tell you a different thing … we assess portfolios but maybe they are using something else, not what I'm doing", while the Operations Manager coordinator commented that "you do your own thing and somebody else does his own thing". Similarly, collaboration with subject lecturers was negligible from one diploma to another. The default practice was that subject content was taught by subject lecturers and WPBL, albeit a subject, was the domain of the coordinators.

LEARNING AREAS

The data revealed that each coordinator had different assessment criteria, which they termed learning areas. (refer to Table 1). These learning areas represented the subjects of study and the outcomes to be achieved. Tourism Management and Event Management had 14 and seven learning areas respectively, with the coordinator conceding that "it's very difficult to link up the exact outcomes for the course" with roles and responsibilities in practice. Human Resources Management and Entrepreneurship incorporated four learning areas. According to the coordinator, "we understand that not all organizations can expose students to all learning areas that we would like them to", hence the limitation of four. Management had eight learning areas and Operations Management had 10 learning areas, despite the reality that "organizations are different [and] they are not able to expose all students to all [10] learning areas". The difficulties of matching diploma specializations and learning areas with workplace tasks were problematic. According to the Management coordinator, students could not be in "a management position for three months … companies won't allow them to be part of that". This was reflected in students' portfolios which consisted mainly of tasks such as "taking stock", "generating invoices", generating Excel spreadsheets, accounting and administration tasks as recorded under the respective learning areas, while management tasks were largely under-represented.

ASSESSMENTS: PORTFOLIOS AND PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

The portfolios of evidence for the six diplomas conformed to similar guidelines and expectations with specific formats and documentation to be included. The portfolios reviewed included copious documentation of placement companies which did not necessarily align with the learning areas or relate to narratives in the report. Documentation included, for example, company brochures, organograms and procedures, together with a summary of tasks completed. Minimal evidence of engagement with learning areas was provided and where this was the case, it was a tick box approach of listing tasks completed. In some companies students were required to complete specific tasks independently and in others students were introduced to different departments in the company without necessarily engaging in specific tasks. Reflection was often not included, minimal or misplaced, focusing on personal growth rather than the intended academic experience that reflection in - and on- action was meant to manifest. Where reflection was included, the students commented on "the in-depth understanding gained on how each department is structured, how they operate and their daily roles and responsibilities…" (Student A), "the experience was beneficial" (Student B), and "I learnt so much" (Student C). For Operations Management, the coordinator reported that a student feedback form was completed on whether "we lecturers, adequately prepared you as student for the work place . . . but other than that, we do not have any reflection feedback from them". For all diplomas, the contents of the portfolio should include the main competences and objectives achieved during the work placement, the purpose of each activity should be clarified as to how it relates to achieving the intended outcomes and appropriate evidence of learning in practice should be provided. This is presented as the ideal but was not the case for portfolios across the diplomas. For example, a portfolio of evidence for Event Management included more information on how companies engaged in the

different learning areas, with supporting company procedures, rather than on how the student was immersed in practice. Incomplete or incorrect portfolio submissions could be attributed to poor class attendance during the work preparedness phase. The coordinator for Management reported that class attendance was a "big challenge since students don't attend . . . they don't know how to do the portfolio properly because they've never been – and I take a lot of time to tell them exactly how to do the portfolio".

The performance appraisal template was divided into sections on communication, skills and abilities, character traits, interpersonal characteristics and quality of work and did not include learning areas. A rating scale with seven categories ranging from "Poor" (0-35), to "Outstanding" (85-100) was used to enter a score for student performance on each aspect identified. The scores were indicators of performance and were not always supported with narratives or explanations. While this information might be useful to students entering the workplace, there was no debriefing to affirm what students had achieved or where improvements might be made. The coordinator for Tourism Management "felt that was a gap . . . that there isn't a debriefing for the student to effect improvements" based on feedback from assessments. The performance appraisal mark was subjective, based on the perception of the workplace supervisor and had no formative value, the sole purpose being to contribute to the final summative mark for WPBL.

DISCUSSION

The difficulties of assessing WPBL as noted earlier in this paper were apparent in students' portfolios. This discussion will focus on the findings in terms of whether WPBL portfolios and performance appraisals achieved the specific learning areas. The influence of workplace dynamics (i.e., appropriate placements and supervision) and institutional support (i.e., collaboration of coordinators) can however, not be ignored. Different companies provided different learning experiences which impacted the evidence of tasks and responsibilities documented. The fact that students were deemed to be entry level employees meant that they were allocated basic tasks without necessarily being granted opportunities to focus on the specified learning areas. The important part of WPBL for the coordinators was finding appropriate placements, yet once students were placed there was minimal recourse to demand specific learning opportunities in busy companies where projects and production were paramount. A meaningful WPBL experience where appropriate learning opportunities and learning areas converge is contingent on an appropriate placement. Several placement factors impacted the work experience and the assessments. These included the nature of business, the size of the company, the enabling or constraining culture of learning and the ability of workplace supervisors to mentor students. The lack of appropriate evidence in the portfolios on the consolidation and construction of knowledge, skills and attributes, might be that students were privy to activities and tasks important to the company but were misaligned with the learning areas. Students might have "learn[ed] things outside of the scope of the intended learning outcomes, or they may not have [had] sufficient of the right kinds of experiences to ensure all the objectives have been met" (Smith, 2014, p. 212).

Although the portfolio of evidence seems to be an appropriate assessment method given the tracking of evidence during the WPBL experience, current practices seem too focused on collecting copious company profiles rather than on documenting and reflecting on actual learning experiences beyond stating tasks completed. Furthermore, matching tasks to learning areas proved to be more difficult in some areas than in others. For example, learning areas such as communication, computers and basic accounting lend themselves to being mapped more easily than project management that requires extended periods in industry. The limited focus on reflection in the subject guides and in the portfolios

calls for reflexivity to be taught and integrated into all subjects, not necessarily for WPBL exclusively, especially where narratives inform improvements regarding knowledge, skills and attributes (Dean, Sykes, Agostinho, & Clements, 2012). On the issue of validity, the paucity of information in all but one rubric brings into question the subjectivity of marking and validity in terms of exactly what was assessed and how marks were allocated. In other words, "assessment devices or protocols … are valid to the extent that they can be shown to measure the thing they are designed to measure" (Smith, 2014, p. 210). Rubrics with limited explanatory criteria and no mark range for each criterion, courts subjectivity in marking. Although expectations and learning areas for WPBL were clarified in the respective subject guides, it is *how* the assessment protocol and rubric speak to what and how the assessment will measure that renders it a valid assessment. The performance appraisal seemed to be primarily a subjective perspective of workplace supervisors' impressions of student performance in communication skills, workplace skills, character traits, problem-solving and teamwork. It is acknowledged that WPBL is not only about professional practice, knowledge and skills. The importance of conduct, demeanor, emotional intelligence and communicative abilities are equally important. As such, it should be incumbent on supervisors to be consistent in providing formative feedback on all aspects of workplace practice. While formative feedback might be occurring, there is no evidence of this in documentation. In some diplomas, WPBL happens in the last semester of the three-year qualification, with students not receiving feedback at all.

The minimal collaboration between coordinators and lecturers in their departments signals the need for more integration and support for coordinators. Quinn and Shurville (2009) aver that "for many reasons, academics tend to approach teaching and learning tasks as individuals, rather than using team-based approaches [which] are essential for the successful implementation of experiential learning" (p. 336). This necessitates a mind-shift of integration and inter-disciplinarity of subject content as well as clarifying understandings of WPBL assessment. The perception of WPBL as practice following theory acquisition in classroom contexts is enacted in the disconnect that subject lecturers have with WPBL. Similarly, a collaborative approach to developing a community of practice among workplace coordinators would present opportunities to share best practices on WPBL assessment (such as rubric development) and improve current and inherited ways of knowing and doing. This collaboration should ideally be extended to workplace supervisors who are integral to ensuring a meaning WPBL experience and validity in assessments.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties of assessing WPBL are manifold, ranging from demonstrating achievement of learning areas; maintaining good practice principles for assessment; garnering appropriate evidence of learning and achievement; ensuring consistency in formative assessments; feedback and reflection, to mention a few (Alanson & Robles, 2016; Dean et al., 2012; Jackson, 2018; Peters, 2005; Smith, 2014; Walsh, 2009;). Peters (2005) aptly summarizes these difficulties by asking, "How can learning gained in a life/work setting be quantified and evaluated in academic terms?" (p. 275). To this end, the question of whether WPBL assessments achieved their purpose, whether they were valid and whether the learning areas were achieved, cannot be answered in a clear-cut way. In revisiting the objectives of this study, the findings and discussion reveal a misalignment of learning areas with the evidence of learning provided in the portfolios. The performance appraisals have value as external contributions to the final mark. Smith's (2014) summation that "placements are unreliable in terms of the consistency of the experiences a cohort of students gets across a widely disparate set of workplaces" (p. 211), reveals the impact that this has on whether WPBL achieves the intended outcomes. While new experiences might have been gained, the transformative acquisition of "new skills and a broader knowledge base" (O'Toole, 2007, p.

52) need to be addressed. Since the literature espouses the merits of the portfolio of evidence as the WPBL assessment method, further research could be conducted on the development of e-portfolios, the inter-disciplinarity of workplace settings and how the trajectory of learning during WPBL may be presented. The literature seems to have limited portfolio models to emulate which captures WPBL as the culmination of all subject content in a qualification, in terms of how this relates to professional practice. The portfolio should be a strategic, planned document of tasks, learnings and accomplishments, presented in a way that it becomes a marketing tool for future employment opportunities and not merely a summative assessment. Given the imminence of the 4th industrial revolution and advancements in technology, an electronic portfolio should be encouraged (Alanson & Robles, 2016).

The opportunity that WPBL provides for students to experience insights to professional practice in authentic workplace contexts remains a distinguishing feature of diploma qualifications in South Africa. Hence the need to effect distinct improvements regarding WPBL assessments. The application of a range of learning areas in fluid workplace contexts, the diversity, and organizational culture can never be replicated in a simulated environment. The workplace is a dynamic pedagogic space where epistemological and ontological perspectives are equally important, which "neither theory nor practice alone can accomplish" (Qualters, 2010, p. 55).

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