

Abstract for Refereed Paper

Title:

Education, Training and Skills Development: solving the conundrum – a South African perspective

11 million jobs by 2030? One of the aims of South Africa's National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 is to reduce the current unemployment rate from 27 percent in 2011 to 6 percent by 2030. The paper will explore the South African education and skills development legislation through the lens of work integrated learning as a viable consideration in the skills debate. The Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (2011) published by the Council for Higher Education introduces new models for implementation of work integrated learning in South Africa.

Since 2004, the South African Higher Education landscape has changed, and continues to do so. The promulgation of the 10-level Higher Education Qualifications Framework in 2007 introduces the term 'work integrated learning' into formal Ministry of Education documents for the first time. The merging of the Department of Education with that responsible for Skills Development to form the Department of Higher Education and Training (2009) indicates a clear national commitment to education, training and skills development.

The National Skills Development Strategy III (2011) promotes partnerships between industry, education institutions and government – the triple helix - as a mechanism for solving the skills deficit. The above mentioned, together with the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2012) with its reference to various forms of workplace learning from internships to apprenticeships, and the proposed changes to the Skills Development Act (2012) provide a window of opportunity for work integrated learning to become firmly entrenched in the education landscape.

Thank you.

WACE International Conference 2012

Full Paper submitted for Refereeing

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### **Introduction**

11 million jobs by 2030? This is the number of employment opportunities required to reduce South Africa's (SA) current unemployment rate from 27 percent in 2011 to 6 percent by 2030 and is one of the aims of SA's National Development Plan: Vision for 2030 (SA, 2011). The paper will explore the post-1994 South African education and skills development legislation through the lens of work integrated learning (WIL) as a viable consideration in the skills debate, introducing new models for implementation of WIL in SA as published in the Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (Council on Higher Education, 2011). The discussion paper aims to show the window of opportunity that has opened for WIL to become firmly entrenched in the education landscape in SA.

### **Setting the scene: South Africa in context**

Situated at the southernmost tip of Africa lies the Republic of South Africa, the world's 26th-largest country by population (50.59 million in mid-2011) and 24th-largest by land area (including indigenous water) (www.info.gov.za, 14 February 2012). Nearly 70% of all South Africans are under the age of 35, which explains why issues surrounding education, training and skills development are a priority focus. SA also has the world's 26th-largest economy by gross domestic product, with an advanced broad-based industrial sector and the 33rd-largest labour force. SA is referred to as the 'rainbow nation', a nation with variety of cultures, languages and religious beliefs and nine official languages. Of these, English is the main language in business and official public life.

The 1994 elections signalled the end of the apartheid era with its White minority rule. The highest law of the land is the Constitution (SA, 1996), which came into force on 4 February 1997 and is considered to be one of the most progressive in the world.

Formal education in SA is categorised into General Education and Training, Further Education and Training and Higher Education structures. SA has 25 public higher education institutions, a public Further Education and Training sector with 50 colleges and 263 campuses nationally in addition to numerous private training providers.

A key aspect of the National Development Plan (SA, 2011) is sustainable development for the country, with government, business and civil society initiatives to improve the lives of all South Africans. The 3P's of sustainability and the theme of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg, SA - People, Planet, Prosperity – remain relevant today.

## **South Africa's higher education: landscape and legislation**

The higher education landscape in SA changed from one of having 21 public universities and 15 technikons (also known as polytechnics) to a new landscape first approved by Cabinet on 29 May 2002 (Asmal, 2002). The new landscape saw the creation of universities of technology (previously technikons) and so-called comprehensive universities (mergers between some traditional universities and technikons). As a consequence of this, the Higher Education Act (SA, 1997), which set the policies under which universities and technikons operated, was amended. The fore-mentioned is important, as experiential training/learning (now known as work integrated learning) largely fell in the domain of the technikon sector.

SA had an eight-level National Qualifications Framework structure until the introduction of the ten-level Higher Education Qualifications Framework was gazetted in 2007, a revised qualifications framework that necessitates re-evaluation and redesign of programmes to align with the new framework, with an implementation date of 1 January 2009 (SA, 2007). The Higher Education Qualifications Framework for the first time introduced the term 'Work Integrated Learning' (WIL) into a Department of Education document. This statement, the curriculum design process, in conjunction with new models for WIL and skills legislation and economic development in SA are the drivers of this paper – offering both opportunities and threats for the cooperative education model and for WIL.

Pre-2009 the Education and Labour ministries operated as separate bodies, with the latter responsible for training and skills development. In 2009 aspects related to skills development in the Department of Labour were moved to the Department of Education to form the Department of Higher Education and Training, signaling an opportunity for alignment of education and training. The release for public comment of the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training (SA, 2012) is an important phase of the process begun with the creation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, with mention of work-based learning made.

### **Labour and skills development in focus**

SA has stringent labour laws. Legislation (and the amendments) promulgated that affect the world of work (and thus the student going into the WIL workplace) are as follow: the Labour Relations Act (SA, 1995), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (SA, 1997), the Employment Equity Act (SA, 1998a), the Skills Development Act (SA, 1998c) and the Skills Development Levies Act (SA, 1999) with their amendments. International students are additionally affected by requirements of the Immigration Act (SA, 2002), the Immigration Amendment Act (SA, 2004) and the Refugees Act (SA, 1998b).

The stipulations of Labour Relations Act make it imperative that companies hire the right staff, as the dismissal process is both lengthy and costly. Ideally, the most competent person for the job should thus be hired, which is where WIL and the cooperative education model offers advantage: the WIL period may be utilized as a probation period prior to full time employment for entry level staffing. Given the Immigration Laws, this option is, however, seldom applicable

to international students in SA, unless they are granted a formal work permit after completion of their studies.

Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established with the introduction of the first skills development legislation in 1998. The role of these is to disburse the funds across the identified major sectors of economic activity in SA. The 21 Sector Education and Training Authorities landscape came into effect on 1 April 2011 and now functions under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Aligned to the above is the National Skills Development Strategy that first came into existence in 2005, aiming to ensure skills for productive citizenship for all South Africans. The most recent version of the strategy, the National Skills Development Strategy III (2011-2016), was promulgated in January 2011 (SA, 2011). Central to the strategy are partnerships between employers, public education institutions, private training providers and Sector Education and Training Authorities, "to ensure that cross-sectoral and inter-sectoral needs are addressed". The strategy is thus clear with closer links between relevant bodies to be forged, and additional funding made available for PIVOTAL (Professional, Vocational, Technical and Academic Learning) programmes. PIVOTAL programmes are occupationally-directed programmes requiring supervised practical learning in a workplace, hence of relevance in this paper. The indication is that workplace learning should be an integral part of all vocational programmes; something that higher education in SA would need to consider when qualifications and programmes are re-designed. Effective partnerships between education and employers are considered to be the key to successful cooperative education: the education sector largely

providing the academic content and the industry partner the practical workplace component. The National Skills Development Strategy thus provides an opportunity for the expansion of WIL in the country.

The Skills Development Amendment Bill 2011 (SA, 2011) has been published for comment and notices advising of the proposed amendments of the Sector Education and Training Authorities grant regulations in line with the National Skills Development Strategy provisions have been issued (SA, 2011). One of these will be the 10% mandatory grant to industry for participation in the PIVOTAL programmes, an opportunity for WIL programme offerings.

The signing of the National Skills Accord (SA, 2011), is one of the national efforts to speed up the skilling of young South Africans, which is a key element in the National Growth Plan (SA, 2011) and is yet another indicator of the attention focused on skills development, with its attendant opportunities for WIL.

### **Internationalization and legislation**

In SA immigration legislation rests with Department of Home Affairs. The relevant legislation linking WIL and international students is contained in the Immigration Act and its amendments and in the Refugees Act (SA, 1998). These acts govern the issuance of study and work permits: international students with valid study permits may be employed by companies for purposes of their WIL.



SA is a signatory to the 1997 South African Development Community Education and Training Protocol (Southern African Development Community, 1997), which expects that 5% of higher education students in SA be from the South African Development Community countries. This poses no problem per se, except for students registered in programmes that have a WIL component, which requires industry employment, as international students experience greater difficulties in securing WIL opportunities. Various factors contribute to this: SA's National Skills Development Strategy is one of the biggest contributing factors (since international students do not qualify companies for skills levy rebates), uncertainty around legislative issues (study vs. work permit), workplace/staff dynamics (due to high unemployment of South African nationals), xenophobia (that raises its head every so often) and the fact that WIL is often used as an entry-level staff recruitment strategy (and work permits are not easily obtainable for international students).

The Higher Education Qualifications Framework with its requirement that higher education institutions are responsible to place students into WIL programmes means that careful enrolment and placement management needs to occur to ensure that suitable and sufficient WIL workplaces are available for students. This is just more complicated in the case of international students.

A high-impact proposal to include international students in the skills legislation would show clear intention of SA to be a full partner in the development of regional human resources, especially in the South African Development Community region. The definite need for a strong link between government, education and skills development is evident here. Management of higher education institutions will need to understand the predicament their international students

face and the legal implications of the Higher Education Qualification Framework: enrolment management, possible changes in policy and closer links with governments and their agencies and industry in SA and relevant South African Development Community countries is required for successful international student placement for WIL.

### **Experiential education: a theoretical framework with a focus on work integrated learning**

The field of experiential education is the pedagogical foundation for WIL (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2006). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the noun *pedagogy* as: ‘The method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.’ The beginnings of experiential education may be attributed to Confucius (450 BC), who said “Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand.’ Since this time, various theories/theoretical frameworks have evolved, concepts have been formulated and various terms have been coined in this field, with the best known contributions being outlined. Given the readership of this paper, no extensive theoretical foundation of the underlying theories will be provided.

That experiential education may be conceptualized by Dewey’s formula: Experience plus Reflection equals Learning (Dewey, 1938) is widely known in the cooperative education community. Thus, experience, interaction and reflection on the interaction leads to learning. David Kolb (with Roger Fry) (Kolb, 1984) conceptualized the experiential learning cycle, which depicts the cyclical pattern of learning from experience, through reflection (focusing on what the experience meant to the individual), to conceptualizing (generalizing by linking the experience to

one's frame of reference) to action (applying the new knowledge in various situations).

Kurt Lewin, seen as the 'father' of action research, developed an action research model. The cyclical nature of the typical action research process is depicted, where each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect. John Dewey, David Boud and Donald Schön proposed a model of reflective enquiry and observation (Schön, 1983). The foregoing serve as a brief theoretical framework to experiential education, out of which the conceptual framework for WIL was developed.

The concept of 'cooperative education' is ascribed to Herman Schneider who made a unique contribution to higher education when, in 1906, he founded the first programme of cooperative education in the United States ([www.ceiainc.org](http://www.ceiainc.org)). Cooperative Education is practiced in SA with the workplace component terminology having undergone various adaptations.

SA's Higher Education Quality Council defines WIL as:

Work Integrated Learning is the component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of learning in an authentic learning workplace context under the supervision and/or mentorship of a person/s representing the workplace. It addresses specific competencies identified for the acquisition of a qualification that make the learner employable and assists in the development of related personal attributes.

Workplace/service employees and professional bodies are involved in the assessment of

the learning experience, together with University academic employees (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004).

Aligned terminology that is used interchangeably with WIL in the South African context is: in-service training, experiential training, experiential learning and work-based learning. In some instances the term 'internship' is used to refer to WIL, although it is most commonly applied to a period of employment for the purpose of gaining experience in a specific field after a qualification has been attained.

Advantages of WIL range from those to the student, the education institution and for the employer. In the South African context of low skills levels and high unemployment, WIL programmes also specifically benefits the national economy.

The Council for Higher Education publication Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (2011: 16-21) outlines specifically four main curricular modalities for programmes - promoted as new models in SA - that align workplace and academic interests (theory) as follows:

- Work-directed theoretical learning: theoretical disciplinary demands aligned with workplace relevance, enhancing the academic quality of the programme by using industry-based authentic examples, inviting guest lecturers and making use of case studies, for example.
- Problem-based learning: where 'problems' rather than the academic subjects are the organizing structure of the curriculum. According to the guidelines (p 17), problem-

oriented learning is more common in SA, where projects and assignments are used to include real-world scenarios.

- Project-based learning: this involves learning through projects, which may be located in the workplace and thus be ‘real’.
- Workplace learning: learning that takes place when students are in the workplace. This is commonly referred to as WIL in the South African context.

These models provide a new way of looking at WIL, moving away for the notion that the work experience needs to exclusively be in an actual workplace for an extended period of time. Whilst the latter is undeniably the most beneficial, circumstances in the education institution (it s location, number of students, type of programme), the economy and other factors may determine the need for other models to be considered. As author I would like to suggest that ‘industry’ should be ‘brought into the lecture hall’ to a greater extent, with real and relevant examples and case studies, guest lectures, company presentations and visits to companies to be considered.

The above, together with the formal publication of the National Qualification Framework Level Descriptors by the South African Qualifications Authority (2011) and the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework open a window of opportunity for WIL to be introduced into new and revised academic programmes.

The current reality in higher education in SA, however, is a move to eliminate WIL from programmes being redesigned. One reason for this is that despite extensive employer networks higher education cannot guarantee WIL placement opportunities as required by the new 10-level

framework. The national focus on the further education and training sector and the re-introduction of apprenticeships in the country is also a contributory factor as elaborated on below.

### **The way forward for WIL in South Africa – the education, training and skills development conundrum solution**

The Higher Education Qualifications Framework introduces the term WIL into a Department of Education document for the first time in 2007. The restructuring to form the Department of Higher Education and Training in 2009 brings skills into the higher education domain thus providing more opportunities and better synergy for implementation of WIL programmes. This coupled with the 2011 National Skills Development Strategy, the National Skills Accord, the New Growth Plan and the 2012 Green Paper on Post-School Education firmly places education, training and skills development into the spotlight.

The 2011 Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide offer new formats for WIL, moving away for the more traditional format of extended periods in industry. Partnerships between the main role players – industry education and government – are key to successful implementation of this model of education and training.

It would be short-sighted not to understand that there are purely opportunities. These will need to be carefully balanced against some perceived obstacles and threats: the national focus on the development of the Further Education and Training sector, with its 50 colleges nationally is the

primary site for skills-development training, some of which has a legislated workplace learning component; the focus in the national discourse on universities of technology as providers of skills (thus sidelining the comprehensive and traditional university sector that would then need to market their WIL programmes more vigorously), the movement towards service learning as an academic component (albeit with a focus more on civic awareness and development of the student) and also as WIL and its requirements and advantages offered are not always yet fully understood.

The Southern African Society for Co-operative Education re-launched itself in 2011, moving towards establishing itself as a professional body that would formalize minimum standards, best practice and accreditation procedures for work based learning partnerships, placements and practice to which the Minister of Education and Training pledged his support, stating that one of the key principles of the National Skills Development Strategy was to make WIL a critical component of education and training: 10% of SETA grants will fund workplace based training opportunities. This is seen as a positive for further development of WIL in SA.

## **Conclusion**

Partnership development and marketing of cooperative education as a viable education model is a key need, to realize a deeper understanding of the mutual benefits to be derived from WIL interactions. For international students the discussion will continue: it is the contention of the

author that a healthy SA economy can but contribute to a strong South African Development Community region.

The paper outlines the backdrop against which WIL takes place in SA: education reform, skills development, national legislation, a large unskilled population with high unemployment, presenting a window of opportunity for the cooperative education model with WIL to become firmly entrenched in the higher-education-industry-government triple helix. Whether the higher education sector will capitalise on this is still unclear, given that the redesign of programmes has just begun. What is certain, however, is that where WIL (in whatever form) is included in the academic curriculum, benefits to the role players involved will follow.

11 million jobs by 2030? With nearly 70% of all South Africans are under the age of 35 education, training and skills development certainly needs to be high on the national agenda. It is the conviction of the author that work integrated learning is a viable vehicle to achieve this goal.

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