The Role of Reflection After Placement Experiences to Develop Self-Authorship Among Higher Education Students

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1 Introduction

The importance of higher education (HE) empowering students to develop the capabilities for achieving their goals and developing a successful career permeates across institutional strategies, operational planning and curricula. In line with notions of the contemporary university (Connell, 2019), it is important for HE to advance disciplinary expertise and transferable non-technical skills deemed essential for individual and organisational achievement, such as collaboration, communication and problem-solving (Business Council of Australia, 2017). It is becoming clear, however, that HE must extend beyond human capital in preparing students to succeed. Innovation and rapid change means industry needs critical and reflective professionals who can take a positional stance to drive innovation and achieve organisational success (Foundation for Young Australians, 2016).

Graduates are not employed to 'follow' but are expected to use initiative – and eventually lead - across diverse functions, sectors and industries, augmenting continuous improvement through the evaluation of ideas and information, complex problem-solving and creation of new working practices. While enterprise skills – 'the ability to problem solve, communicate effectively, adapt, collaborate, lead, create and innovate' (Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand, 2017, p. 4) – are important, graduates also need the maturity and authority to enact their capabilities and vision in unfamiliar work settings. This means graduating students must develop the confidence, competence and sense of professional belonging

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(Adams, Hean, Sturgis, & Clark, 2006) to flourish in the workplace. They must not be bounded by others, meaning their actions should be informed but not defined by others. Students' transition from accepting existing realities to creating new practices and ways of working is foundational to professional success (see Hodge, Baxter Magolda & Haynes, 2009).

Baxter Magolda's (1998) theory of self-authorship provides a useful framework for the development of professional confidence and maturity among HE students (Jackson, 2017; Nadelson et al., 2015). Baxter Magolda asserts that students' progress through four stages to self-authorship: first, *following formulas* where they lack understanding of their own values and identity and seek approval from authority and others, allowing them to shape their own opinions and actions. Second, they proceed to *crossroads* where students may feel unsettled as they realise the importance of developing their own beliefs and values and the need to evaluate knowledge posited by authority, rather than simply accepting it. Next is *self-authorship* where students begin to realise what is important to them, are developing the ability to listen to others yet not be bounded or constrained by them, and begin interpreting and evaluating knowledge and forming their own perspectives on its purpose and value. Their enhanced confidence means they have greater insights into self, others and the workplace which enables them to contribute their perspectives appropriately to advance and improve current practices. Finally, *internal foundations* is where individuals are driven by their sense-of-self, act on their own values and contribute to their disciplinary field. The framework conceptualises how individuals interpret and draw meaning from their different experiences and interactions with others, such as family or management, and how this augments professional self-efficacy and capability.

Although critical for producing responsible graduates, self-authorship is often overlooked in literature relating to graduate employability (Daniels & Brooker, 2014), problematic given academic success does not guarantee self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Developing self-authorship among HE students will better equip graduates to navigate the uncertain world-of-work, strengthening their confidence and enabling them to seek a purposeful good match between self and organisational values and aid a promising a life-wide career.

Pivotal work on how to foster self-authorship among students includes Baxter Magolda's (2004) Learning Partnerships Model where a new partnership between educators and learners is formed based on 'sharing authority, mutually constructing meaning, and facing complexity squarely' (p. 29), bringing students' internal voice to the fore. This underpins Hodge et al.'s (2009) engaged learning philosophy where students grow through 'continuous self-reflection, seamless and authentic curricular and co-curricular experiences that steadily increase in challenge, and appropriate levels of support' (9). However, student development of self-authorship appears limited to following formulas, where few critique current thinking and draw on their own knowledge to identify better ways of working (Jackson, 2017). To explore this further, our research aimed to, first, evaluate the progress of students in the latter stages of their degree towards self-authorship and, second, identify strategies for augmenting self-authorship among HE students.

We start this chapter with a discussion of theoretical ideas about self-authorship and highlight its complex relationship with social, professional structures and established professional practices. Self-authorship is located in the socio-cultural perspective that recognises individuals are closely connected to others and the cultural context within which they live, learn and work. We then present our empirical study that aimed to explore students' progression towards self-authorship. Student participants were in the later stages of their degree program and had just completed an authentic workplace learning experience. We gathered qualitative data from workshops in two geographically dispersed Australian universities. Collaborative reflective activities explored how students interpreted and drew meaning from their workplace experiences. We discuss how the experienced work placement proved useful for gauging and developing self-authorship, exposing students to situations which demanded an internal voice and invoking, in partnership with deliberate reflective activities, complex meaning-making of their learning experiences. We conclude with implications for work placement design that enables students on their journey to self-authorship and consider directions for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework for Self-Authorship

Baxter Magolda's (1998) four stages of self-authorship – *following formulas*, *crossroads*, *self-authorship* and *internal foundations* - assert that individuals will progress from followers to leaders, developing a sense-of-self that allows them to understand their own values and identity and trust their professional judgement on presented information and knowledge in context. As their self-confidence matures, they are no longer solely defined by others and they shift away from continually deferring to authority and seeking approval from others. Progressing from following formulas (replicating the processes adopted by authority, such as managers or seasoned professionals) to self-authorship involves managing challenges at the crossroads stage where students realise that simply accepting knowledge and following orders without questioning and understanding them is not always beneficial (Billett, 2009). To become professionals, students need to learn to think for self by bringing their own beliefs and values into a relationship with organisational values and cultures (Trede & McEwen, 2015). Crossroads are characterised by 'key incidents' (Meijer, Oolbekkink, Pillen, & Aardema, 2014) that create uncertainty and panic, or 'practice shock' (Veenman, 1984). Developing trust in one's internal personal and professional voice and identity indicates their progression to self-authorship. Students are no longer dominated without reflection by the values and interests of others and are able to interpret and articulate their professional reasoning processes, offering new perspectives to contribute to their professional community.

Nadelson et al. (2015) argue the student's journey to self-authorship is critical, enabling them to 'be self-reliant and more discerning in their perspectives, judging claims using multiple inputs, and pondering different perspectives' (p. 4). Indeed,

the transition from theory to its application in the workplace is complex and challenging (see Hutchinson & Kettlewell, 2015) and developing self-authorship is an important aspect to preparing for work. Students not only need disciplinary expertise and non-technical capabilities to succeed but must also develop 'a frame of mind that allows students to put their knowledge in perspective; to understand the sources of their beliefs and values; and to establish a sense-of-self that enables them to participate effectively in a variety of personal, occupational, and community contexts' (King & Baxter Magolda, 2011, p. 207). Parallels may be drawn between self-authorship and the notion of professional self-efficacy (Tan, van der Molen, & Schmidt, 2017). The latter is a dimension of professional identity, where students 'feel they are in the process of becoming the new practitioners who can make reasonable professional judgments, and adequately address each given professional situation with the relevant array of knowledge, skills, tools and resources' (p. 1509).

Although empirical analysis appears limited, the expectation that students can make meaning independently from authority and become self-authored is ambitious (Baxter Magolda, 1992). They need the necessary exposure to crossroads situations (Jackson, 2017) and support to make appropriate professional choices when they do encounter conflict and tension (Pillen, 2013). It may not be desirable and even unrealistic to assume graduates can assert their own knowledge to drive change without meaningful practice prior to graduation, particularly in the uncertain and fast-paced nature of today's work. Further, while stages of self-authorship feature in both Baxter Magolda (1998) and Nadelson et al.'s (2015) models, its development may not always be a linear process. Individuals can experience career changes which require them to rebuild their confidence and knowledge and high levels of mobility, horizontal career progression and portfolio working (McCrindle, 2015) may mean more back-and-forth movement among individuals between different stages of self-authorship.

3 Fostering Self-Authorship in Higher Education Students

Hodge et al. (2009) posit that HE must focus on three key areas of development to foster self-authorship. First, epistemological knowledge (intellectual maturity) to enable students to create new ideas and knowledge from critically evaluating knowledge during their studies. Second, intrapersonal knowledge (personal maturity) where students learn to understand their values and sense-of-self, can distinguish these from others' perceptions and use them to guide their choices. Third, interpersonal knowledge (interpersonal maturity) where their dependence on, and need for, affirmation from others transforms into an ability to engage effectively with others to contribute to the professional community – yet not be bounded by them. Addressing each of the three maturity aspects, Hodge et al. (2009) argued 'a carefully sequenced and developmentally appropriate curriculum can help students develop self-authorship while in college' (4).

Hodge et al. (2009) emphasised that developing self-authorship should be a key focus for HE to produce responsible graduates who are prepared for their chosen careers. They described this as a state where students have 'cultivated a secure sense-of-self that enables interdependent relations with others and making judgments through considering but not being consumed by others' perspectives' (p. 2). As noted by Pizzolato (2005), self-authored students are able to use 'their internally defined sense-of-self and goals to direct their decision-making and knowledge construction' (p. 624), meaning they will be equipped to evaluate knowledge, generate new ideas and engage in informed problem-solving. These are highly desired in new graduates (FYA, 2017), particularly in an increasingly complex working environment that requires autonomy yet collaboration, accountability as well as the confidence to lead.

Progressing beyond following formulas requires students to critique, and understand the importance of their own ideology and how it may differ from others. This is underpinned by student-centred learning where students question what they experience, think critically about self and others, and start to take a positional stance on knowledge presented to them. Hodge et al. (2009) outlined particular ways this may be achieved, such as encouraging debate and comparison of perspectives among students using authentic cases through simulation, small group debates, role-plays, case studies or written reflections. They developed an innovative learning strategy with students being asked to write an imaginary dialogue between themselves and an important figure in their lives on a topic they differ on, asking students to consider how they could assert and act upon their own views while maintaining good relations.

Pizzolato (2005) focused on how HE can enable students to experience and manage crossroad experiences, as well as fostering their development of self-authorship. She argued that a provocative moment – resulting from a series of experiences – can induce students to commit to drawing on their own ideology, rather than others, in their interpretation of knowledge and experiences. Tension at the crossroads stage may arise from encounters in the work setting where misalignment between personal and professional values becomes pronounced for the individual (Pillen, 2013). These tensions are critical for developing self-authorship (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004), encouraging students to make meaning of arising situations and construct new perspectives based on their own knowledge and understanding.

Pizzolato (2005) highlighted that the crossroads often resulted in 'intense discontent and dissonance arising from dissatisfaction with formula following' (p. 630) and noted that students with certain characteristics were more likely to self-author. First, those with higher levels of volitional efficacy, staying focused on the achievement of a particular goal, and those who self-regulated their behaviour rather than relying on others such as family and peers. Hodge et al. (2009) argued educators should treat students as thinkers, negotiating goals and supporting them through mentoring and coaching. They also encouraged ongoing critical reflection of workplace experiences and their influence on career aspirations.

Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda's (2013) continuum of 'Developing Positions in the Journey toward Self-Authorship' provides a useful tool to evaluate students' progress in developing self-authorship. The continuum was adapted from Baxter, Magolda and King (2012) and comprises ten developmental positions, ranging from *Solely External*, where individuals 'consistently and unquestioningly rely on external sources without recognizing possible shortcomings of this approach' and *Solely Internal*, where individuals 'trust the internal voice sufficiently to refine beliefs, values, identities and relationships. Use internal voice to shape reactions and manage external sources' (p. 874). Barber and colleagues describe these positions as reflecting a 'particular structure a person uses to construe knowledge, identity, and relationships at a particular point in time' (p. 872), with each position representing more complex meaning-making than the one before. They also acknowledge that this progression is not necessarily linear and more aligned to a helix, with time at each position varying among individuals.

4 The Value of Critical Collective Reflection After Work-Integrated Learning Experiences

Work-integrated learning (WIL) involves students' participation in authentic learning with industry and/or community partners that forms part of their degree studies (Jackson, 2018). Examples of WIL include work placements, practicum and internship, where students are physically immersed in the work setting. WIL is an ideal learning environment for students to experience crossroads because WIL occurs in authentic professional settings where personal, professional, cultural, economic, ethical and organisational interests meet and at times collide (Trede, Markauskaite, McEwen, & Macfarlane, 2019).

Pizzolato (2005) found that while students often have the 'provocative' moments required to progress to self-authorship, and may respond well during targeted reflective activities, these rarely happened in highly didactic lectures in classrooms. WIL provides a useful pathway for developing self-authorship, exposing students to the challenges of 'ill-defined problems and multiple perspectives' which 'can be shaped into opportunities for growth through journaling assignments that encourage reflection or engaging in discussions that encourage students to juggle competing knowledge claims to make complex decisions' (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005, p. 26).

Jackson (2017) confirmed that WIL helps students develop a clear understanding of professional ideology in the following formulas stage and found certain WIL design principles assisted in progressing students towards self-authorship. These included combining observation with active engagement; facilitating networking with internal and external stakeholders; encouraging goal setting and accountability; placing students in challenging situations where they could draw on appropriate support and feedback; and facilitating exposure to different work areas. Jackson's

study highlighted, however, that simply completing WIL or undertaking work experience is not enough to augment self-authorship. Aligning with the broader notion that critical reflection can trigger transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997), she argued students benefit from facilitated critical reflection to help them make sense of what they had experienced and learned. Explicitly considering whether they had reached the crossroads stage and, if so, what triggered this could therefore lead to a greater sense-of-self and development of self-authorship.

Post-WIL reflective activities allow students to 'share, compare and critically consider what they have experienced and address important educational goals associated with the development of occupational knowledge' (Billett, Cain, & Le, 2018, p. 2). According to Barber et al. (2013), 'the achievement of higher-order learning outcomes is associated with complex meaning-making, those students who more quickly adopt increasingly complex forms of meaning-making will be advantaged in learning' (p. 868). Developing capabilities in meaning-making is essential for professional success, meaning creativity, critical thinking and capacity to innovate. This study was designed to encourage students to reflect collaboratively on their exposure to professional life and their crossroad situations. It aimed to evaluate students' advancement towards self-authorship and identify strategies for its development through encouraging them to make explicit links between what they experienced, how they responded and how they could better find their professional voice in the future.

5 The Study

In this study, WIL consisted of a 100 to 150-hour work placement, structured in either block format or as one to two days per week over the academic semester. The first institution operates multiple campuses with the study conducted in New South Wales. Students undertaking a WIL placement as part of their undergraduate degree in Communications, with majors in Public Relations, Marketing and/or Advertising, were invited to participate. In the Western Australian-based institution, both postgraduate and undergraduate students completing a WIL placement in Business were invited to participate. Both institutions are similar in size, with 36,000 and 27,500 students respectively. The first performs relatively well in graduate employment outcomes and the second is above the national average in ratings for teaching and learning quality and course satisfaction (Social Research Centre, 2016). Characteristics of all participating students are summarised in Table 1.

Students in both institutions completed their WIL experience during 2017 and the post-WIL intervention was conducted immediately afterwards. In accordance with ethics approval, a workshop was held on each respective campus, designed as a post-WIL intervention comprising collaborative reflection in small groups. The workshop was referred to as a *huddle*, a term referring to an informal means for communicating in small-groups (see, for example, Fogarty & Schultz, 2010). Kuh et al. (2005) advocated *intergroup dialogue* to develop meaning-making capacities.

Table 1 Participant demographics

Characteristic	Sub-group	Institution 1		Institution 2				Total	
				UG		PG			
		N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Gender	Male	3	13.0	14	42.4	7	35.0	24	31.6
	Female	20	87.0	19	57.6	13	65.0	52	68.4
Age (years)	0–24	20	87.0	20	60.6	2	10.0	42	55.3
	25–29	1	4.3	5	15.2	11	55.0	17	22.4
	30–39	1	4.3	6	18.2	7	35.0	14	18.4
	40+	1	4.3	2	6.1			3	3.9
Residency	Domestic	23	100	22	66.7	3	15.0	48	63.2
	International	0	0	11	33.3	17	85.0	28	36.8
Current working status	Working			19	57.6	10	50.0	29	54.7
	Not working			14	42.4	10	50.0	24	45.3

Collaborative reflection can help students consider their experiences in a wider context and answer questions they would not normally ask of themselves (Tigelaar, Dolmans, Meijer, de Grave, & van der Vleuten, 2008), such as their response to critical incidents. Similar to Meijer et al.'s (2014) 'At-tension program', students were asked to share their moments of tension with peers, what emotions they experienced, how they coped and responded, and then discuss collectively other ways they could have managed the situation.

In the first institution, the huddle was organised as a voluntary session by the research investigator and students were invited to attend by their academic WIL coordinator. In the second, the huddle took place during the on-campus, debrief session. While attendance was not mandatory, students were encouraged to participate by their WIL coordinator. The huddles commenced with the facilitator (respective research investigators) briefly explaining the importance of learning from WIL experiences via collective reflection that is open, honest and critical. The notion of self-authorship was informally introduced and, as emphasised by Meijer et al. (2014), students were reminded the huddle was a respectful, ethical and safe environment for them to share their experiences. It was emphasised that the research was not part of the course but relevant to developing their employability and career success.

Students were placed into small groups by their facilitator and were asked to discuss their response and management of a crossroads scenario that arose during their placement. Students recorded discussions on poster-sized paper and, approximately 30 minutes later, transitioned to a second topic that they selected from a choice of two. Following the small group discussions, the group shared what they considered their most important discussion point in a two minute debrief to the larger class. The research investigator was on-hand during the discussions and periodically encouraged all students to contribute. Following the huddle, students completed an individual evaluation to elicit the perceived value of collective reflection.

Table 2 Huddle discussion points

Discussion points	Huddle activity
1. Reflect on an/any unforeseen situation(s) that you found confronting and describe how you responded.	How did you react initially (feelings and behaviours)? What did you do to resolve this dilemma? Did it help? Why, why not? What could you do differently next time?
2. Describe some differences that you encountered between theory learned in the classroom and actual practice observed/undertaken in the workplace	How did observing/experiencing these differences make you feel? How did you cope with these differences? How could you have managed the differences better and why you did not do this initially?
3. Describe a situation where you encountered conflict between your personal values and ones in the workplace. This could mean identifying conflict around culture, religion and ethical values	What was the tension/problem? How did you react initially? How did you manage this? What could you have done differently and why did you not do this?

In their small groups, students were asked to reflect on the first discussion point listed in Table 2. They were then asked to choose and discuss a second topic from the second and third points listed in Table 2. Adopting the basic principles of qualitative research (for example, Mishler, 1990), poster paper entries were transcribed verbatim into a word document and then reviewed and themes identified using inductive coding methods for a) the types of crossroads situations; b) student reactions to the situations; c) resolution tactics employed by students; and d) alternative strategies generated by the group.

The framework of themes developed for each point was reiteratively reviewed by both authors. Data were re-examined for any areas of difference, which were notably few, until consensus was reached on the final set of presented themes. An audit trail was kept of any issues encountered and decisions made during the analysis. Emergent themes were then examined to assess students' progression in self-authorship, interpreted using Barber et al.'s (2013) continuum of developmental positions.

6 Findings

Here we present the results of the study. More specifically, the types of crossroad situations experienced by students, their responses, adopted resolution tactics and other helpful strategies for augmenting self-authorship that were identified during the collaborative reflective activities.

6.1 Experienced Crossroad Situations

Findings indicated that students were exposed to five types of crossroads situations. The first was internal workplace conflict, caused by personality clashes, cultural differences, bullying, inappropriate relationships and parties not listening to one another. These did not appear to be evidenced frequently but were more isolated incidences that students witnessed during their WIL experience. The second, noted only by two students in their small-group discussions, was a shock event. One was the death of an internal stakeholder and the other a co-worker being fired from their position. The third type involved difficulties coping due to inexperience or a lack of knowledge. Some key examples included tight deadlines for complex tasks; being invited to social functions or informal events with clients and not knowing how long to stay, protocol with drinking alcohol or what role to play; and feeling lost regarding certain tasks due to a lack of understanding of organisational structure, culture and/or operations.

A further type was students feeling challenged due to specific characteristics of their workplace or WIL experience. This included unclear task instructions; insufficient scope or depth to assigned work; managing work/life imbalance due to excessive demands on time; poor supervision and mentoring; and inadequate feedback. Finally, differences between classroom theory and workplace practice created challenges for students. Some witnessed practices which were in conflict of the theories they had been taught and some felt business models were antiquated or strategies were not delivering the return-on-investment which they could. Some expressed surprise at the pressures of the working environment, commenting on how difficult it was to satisfy customers and clients.

6.2 Responses to Crossroad Situations

There was some congruence in student responses to their crossroads situations and seven themes were identified, with illustrative examples, see Table 3. There were some instances where students discussed a particular situation yet did not record their emotions. This was interpreted as not following the activity instructions for many reasons, for example, not feeling comfortable sharing emotions, rather than simply not feeling anything from the arising situation.

The types of situations that triggered the given responses were also recorded on the butcher paper. All who reported *tension* cited situations where they had advocated a particular viewpoint to their supervisor or senior management. For most, this lead to confrontation such as for one student who commented ‘I felt none of their strategies were worth using. I generally asked them, do you track your investment of money? They didn’t like me talking … because I was a student. Things got tense and I could not speak further. It felt very uncomfortable in the room and afterwards’. Another described their boss as ‘stuck in old ways and not willing to

Table 3 Student reactions to *crossroads* situations

Crossroads situation	Types of situation	Types of reactions
Querying senior management about strategies used Supervisors/managers not listening due to assumed lack of experience and knowledge Dealing with challenging personalities Difference between workplace practices and classroom theory	Internal workplace conflict Difficulties from inexperience (lack of knowledge) Difference between theory and practice	Tension
Being asked to complete unfamiliar tasks Being left unsupervised for long periods Not receiving feedback on performance Feeling overloaded with tasks Uncertainty about workplace culture and professional conduct	Difficulties due to inexperience (limited learner agency) Difficulties from specific work characteristics Difference between theory and practice	Uncertainty and confusion
Techniques and practices in the workplace not 'matching' classroom theory Unanticipated disregard for theoretical and professional reasoning Limitation on creativity and ideas Observing poor practice Insufficient allocation of work or inability to complete assigned tasks Inability to apply theory to practical work.	Difficulties from specific work characteristics Difference between theory and practice	Frustration
Realisation that practical work holds more value than theory. Work is a high-pressure environment and it is difficult to satisfy customers	Difference between theory and practice	Resignation
Lack of experience and opted not to ask for help but keep practising Draw on inner resources to complete tasks	Difficulties from inexperience (lack of knowledge) Difference between theory and practice	Determination
Death of an internal stakeholder Following the firing of a co-worker	Shock event	Awkwardness
Evidenced conflict between employees Direct confrontation from someone in the workplace due to cultural/religion differences	Internal workplace conflict Difficulties from inexperience/ lack of knowledge	Upset and shock

change'. *Uncertainty* was reported with students feeling overwhelmed and confused by arising situations. One student was given a major task that they could not complete prior to the end of placement, 'this caused a lot of stress as I was worried it would impact on my mark for the unit and also made me feel worried that I was not performing as I should have'. Others commented on feeling lost, nervous, confused, neglected, worried and withdrawn as they tried to cope in their various situations.

The third theme was *frustration* and was particularly apparent where students felt unable to apply their theoretical knowledge, leading them to question the length, worth and necessity of the degree. One observed, 'workers did not seem to apply

theory in real life. They just did what was told to them, the way it was 'always done' inside the organisation copying past work'. Another commented, 'the workplace was informal and just cared about end result, not how you got there… Uni emphasises how vital theory is in every situation, but not many 'outside' people will agree'. Interestingly, some considered the workplace's emphasis on natural reasoning rather than theory to be inefficient and ineffective, with participants stating, 'everything was underwhelming and more basic than expected', 'there were so many more limits on ideas/creativity than expected, just do what the clients want', and 'employees only knew about their role, not whole organisations'. Other participants, however, were concerned that theories were no longer relevant for contemporary work practices. For example, 'I feel like the theory is a bit outdated, and does not match the continuous development of the digital space'. Some expressed their frustration at not being given sufficient work to complete and having to continuously 'intrude' on their supervisor for additional tasks, 'this made me feel useless as I wanted to contribute but did not have anything to give'.

A further theme was students experiencing *resignation*, which closely related to the theme of frustration because this emotional response was prompted by evidencing differences between theory and practice. Students commented on practical work holding more value than theory, the focus being on 'getting the job done', and there was an underlying sense of disappointment as they interpreted this as belittling what they had been doing for the past few years. The theme of *determination* was evident only in a small number of students who chose not to seek assistance but draw on inner resources to achieve task completion. One, for example, stated '[I] had to use research skills [and] creativity to fulfil the task and professional judgment as managers did not have time to review'. *Awkwardness* and *upset*, or shock, were both expressed by only a small number of students.

6.3 Resolution Tactics

Resolution tactics adopted by students are summarised in Table 4, along with illustrative quotations on how students managed their different situations. Participants reported that they opted to *avoid conflict*, and only when they realised after an extended period of time that avoidance was not working did they chose to speak with co-workers or their supervisor. Students wishing to draw on theoretical knowledge were not willing to overtly critique current practice and were bounded by usual workplace practice. When participants openly suggested their theoretically informed approach may work better, responses were not favourable and resulted in tension. Resignation to *identify pragmatic solutions* was therefore a resolution tactic.

Those who chose to *seek assistance* from others appeared to do so with assurance and believed that asking questions was the norm. They turned to graduates, junior workers and, less occasionally, senior management for help and guidance. The outcome of their resolution tactics was positive for most while some found their strategies did not help. One noted their approach generated an email to all WIL

Table 4 Student resolution tactics to *crossroads* moment

Type	Illustrative quotes
Avoid conflict	"Overwhelmed and just tried to manage on my own without saying anything". "Found a shoulder to cry on – Spouse at home and waited for emotions to calm down before discussing further". "Keep quiet, not having the courage to speak". "I queried as to best practice with my superior. I questioned the necessity of theory. I also tried to educate my superior the correct way to prompt responses in a non-leading way. Otherwise I just went with it and did what I was told because obviously they know best". "I thought some changes could be made to their current business model. This resulted in conflict with boss regarding making overall process more efficient. I tried to speak with the boss but he was not listen*ing* [sic]".
Identify pragmatic solutions	"Using a lot of common sense theory". "Go with it. There are moments were theory is not always applicable to real life". "Theory has a short memory span compared to practice. Theory sets the foundation but practice is the building. Practice helps in enhancing skills useful for future. Practice gives you an idea of strengths and weaknesses. Perception is classroom in different than practical".
Be patient and rational	"Had to be sympathetic and understanding and patient". "Communicate patiently and explain in detail". "The only thing that helped me was to try to be rational and I found this helped eventually".
	"Best resolution [was to] follow the procedure".
Persist	"I was persistent and this helped as I was able to find a task". "Just kept giving it a go without help and improve".
Seek assistance	"Tried to resolve by talking to other employees and finding out how best to stop it". "Resolved this by just being confident that no question is stupid question, so you might as well ask rather than being unsure and doing the task incorrectly". "Saw a situation of workplace bullying. Discussed with manager. They had a meeting. I don't know any more than that and didn't like to ask". "Solved by asking graduates/junior people for advice. Asking as many questions as possible". "Ask heaps of questions – Feel expected to ask questions because still learning.
Take initiative	"I learnt that I had to use initiative / improvise, build skills by being 'thrown in the deep end'. Patience from mentors helped. Let me put degree into action. Built confidence – I was scared of adults". "Joining into workplace culture with Friday afternoon drinks and finding out how to fit in with that and how much to drink".
	"It became clear that ignoring theory was not effective in this situation. So I attempted to continue using theories I had been taught, but also going along with what had become the norm".

students advising them of the correct process (electronic message via internal platform) if they needed support. Another retrospectively realised they should have approached their immediate supervisor with their concerns regarding inadequate feedback, rather than senior management that resulted in undue tension. Some found that speaking to their supervisor simply did not help and they still felt

unsupported or had insufficient, meaningful work to complete. Students who took *initiative*, tended to use a trial and error approach rather than explicitly working in a guided fashion. Although isolated to only a few cases, some could not identify a way of resolving their encountered situations, if it broadly related to placement design or the industry within which they were based.

A limited range of alternative strategies for managing crossroads situations were identified. Several felt that seeking help earlier would have been beneficial. Some spoke of the importance of building mentoring relationships and drawing on co-workers for support to avoid confusion and to help them contribute earlier in WIL. Some groups discussed the importance of asserting their theoretical knowledge, 'try and apply elements of a known theory and explain how this could help do things better', while others felt demonstrating emotional intelligence was important. They spoke about not getting offended, not seeking justice and being more diplomatic in the workplace. Some groups also recognised the importance of being more confident and taking initiative.

6.4 Progression to Self-Authorship

Using Barber et al.'s (2013) ten-point continuum of developmental positions, progression towards self-authorship was evident during the students' meaning-making process. Barber and colleagues classified the first three points on the continuum as 'solely external' with students at the first point relying only on external sources and not recognising inadequacies in this approach. This level of self-authorship was not apparent in the group discussions but the second point, where students 'consistently rely on external sources but experience tensions in doing so, particularly if external sources conflict; look to authorities to resolve these conflicts' (p. 874), was evident. Shock events and internal workplace conflict caused upset, tension and awkwardness among students who 'left' it to others to resolve these issues. An example was, 'I concentrated on my work and tried to ignore conflict between other people. It helped because I was not directly involved but it did not stop it occurring'.

At the third point on the continuum, individuals remain reliant on external sources yet are mindful of the limitations of this approach. This was evident in participants' discussion around the tension caused by depending on the knowledge, feedback, input and support of co-workers, supervisors and managers. Dissonance was apparent due to inconsistencies between workplace practice and theoretical knowledge, prompting students to engage in deep reflection on the value of learning classroom learning and the overall worth of completing a degree. In alignment with Baxter Magolda (1992), students at this point assumed those in authority were correct and, despite their frustration, continued to be guided by others.

Equally evident was students actually entering the crossroads stage, spanning the fourth and fifth points on the continuum, where students demonstrated awareness of the need for an internal voice to manage their frustration with having to rely on others. They wished to operationalise their knowledge more quickly and freely and

seek independence and autonomy in the workplace. Choosing to avoid conflict as a resolution tactic (see Table 3) aligns to the fourth point as they demonstrated uncertainty in how to proceed, 'giving up' and reverting to accepting usual workplace norms and practice. Feelings of despondency from not being able to demonstrate knowledge and skills - due to insufficient workload, needing more information or inability to apply theory – can also lead to feelings of resignation.

The illustrative quotes in Table 3 for *draw on theoretical knowledge*, aligned to Barber et al.'s (2013) fifth position, 'actively work on constructing a new way of making meaning, yet 'lean back' to earlier external positions' (p. 874). Here students tried to use their own knowledge to introduce new ways of working yet were bounded by established practice. Participants experienced responses in the workplace that ranged from dismissal to tension. Students' commentary demonstrated intellectual maturity and, perhaps to a lesser degree, the personal maturity associated with self-authorship. Their interpersonal maturity, however, was limited as they still sought affirmation and were bounded by others.

The sixth and seventh points on the continuum focus on students developing their internal voice to leave the crossroads. At the sixth point, the internal voice is listened to carefully yet this is made difficult at times by the strength of external influence. Participants' commentary regarding drawing on theoretical knowledge to 'educate' their supervisors to improve processes, apparently without success, resonated here. At the seventh point, concentrated effort on strengthening the internal voice does not allow external influences to overpower one's knowledge and values. While participants appeared capable and willing to add meaning and value to the workplace, positive change did not eventuate.

7 Implications for Higher Education

Findings affirm that WIL can be a 'developmentally effective experience' for nurturing self-authorship (King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay, 2009), particularly when students are explicitly encouraged to collaboratively reflect on and make meaning from their experiences. Crossroad situations appeared, however, to challenge students in two main areas. First, navigating tensions between workplace practice realities and their theoretical knowledge and second, managing their desire to add value in the workplace through self-directed learning and autonomy while being reliant on others for meaningful work, feedback, and guidance. Many students appeared aware of the importance and value of their internal voice and acquired knowledge, but struggled with navigating well-established norms and resistance from others to optimise their learning in the workplace.

Although progressing through these feelings of discomfort is inherent to the crossroads stage, it appears some adjustment among both industry partners and those responsible for WIL curriculum design may aid students on their journey to self-authorship. Shared understanding of everybody's roles in WIL, including responsibilities and expectations, would enhance conditions for students to develop

their professional voice and agency (Henderson & Trede, 2017). This is critical for developing confident and capable future professionals who - with enhanced self-authorship - can drive creative and innovative practices. Students or graduates entering the workplace need to be encouraged to share their thinking and theoretical learning. Of those keen to engage in improving practices, many were frustrated by their inability to contribute to creativity and change.

Educators should focus on pedagogy that develops students' self-awareness, confidence, and emotional intelligence so that they can effectively draw on their internal voice in diverse contexts and in an appropriate and productive way. Identifying how theory can be applied in different practical contexts is just the first step in developing adaptability, the next is having the self-awareness, confidence and prowess to navigate contextual factors and assert their knowledge where appropriate. Educators must find ways to better prepare students to make sense of applying theory in practical situations. This may include developing a broad appreciation among students of the distinct cultural differences between industry, inherently focused on knowledge creation, and the university classroom which is intent on knowledge building.

Mentoring students through this process could be achieved by tutor-based systems where every WIL student is assigned an active tutor who is both familiar with theoretical concepts and has industry experience to understand and articulate different forms of application. While WIL provides a vehicle for such practice, it is often undertaken in the latter stages of one's degree. Where workplace immersion is not interwoven into early stages of curriculum, such as in Education and Nursing, other pedagogies – such as action-based or project-based learning – could be used to prepare students in this area.

Industry must also encourage students to grow their knowledge and apply their thinking and ideas to aid their development of future work capabilities. In addition, industry needs to enhance it own capabilities in mentoring students to develop their self-authorship. Ensuring those in the workplace actively listen to students' concerns and ideas in supportive forums which promote collegiality could further develop students' confidence and a willingness to speak up. Workplaces should embrace, and not limit, the creativity of upcoming talent by usual practice, inspiring experimentation in students (and new graduates) through feedback, mentorship and work that encourages collaboration, autonomy and the operationalisation of new knowledge. The study does highlight unease among students of the relevance of classroom theory for contemporary working practices, affirming concerns with the relevance of HE curricula (Manpower, 2015), and highlighting the need for enhanced collaboration among educators and industry (Trede & Mahinroosta, 2018).

Although WIL is widely considered to enhance resilience (Drewery, Nevison, Pretti, & Pennaforte, 2017), its design should explicitly prepare students to the exposure of stressful events and challenging circumstances to promote development of self-authorship. With this, it is important that universities sufficiently induct and prepare industry partners on mentoring and supporting students to learn to cope with real-life, real-time experience where the unanticipated must be accommodated. WIL design should also ensure that students are provided with meaningful work of

appropriate scope and challenge and there is regular review of assigned workload. Encouraging workplace supervisors to support their students in drawing on acquired knowledge may foster personal agency and confidence in completing tasks and enhance students' learning and self-worth. In a bid to strengthen their volitional efficacy and self-regulation, clarifying tasks and ensuring students are suitably skilled and resourced will facilitate independence while incorporating collaborative working will build confidence in seeking support. It is also important that educators liaise with workplace supervisors to ensure they have realistic expectations of student capabilities (Henderson & Trede, 2017), aligning with previous studies in WIL (see, for example, Jackson, Rowbottom, Ferns, & Mclaren, 2016).

Giving students valuable insight into organisational structure and mission will help them understand culture and operations, providing context to their work and enhancing their contribution. Clarity around reporting lines and how students should raise concerns, and with whom, may guide them in their work and could avoid inactivity that invokes feelings of despair and a lack of worth. It is also important that workplace supervisors are aptly skilled to facilitate student learning, including being able to identify meaningful tasks for completion, provide useful feedback and be committed to supporting their assigned student. Additional strategies include providing opportunities and support, within both the curriculum and the workplace, for managing one's time could improve workplace performance. Enabling students to learn the latest software and digital tools also appears important. While work placements completed by distance can be more inclusive for regional students or those with logistical constraints, purposeful use of digital tools may facilitate just-in-time mentoring and lessen disconnectedness between students and critical others (Trede et al., 2017). Connecting and working collaboratively online may enhance a sense of belonging among students who attend the workplace irregularly or only on a weekly basis.

8 Concluding Remarks

As traditional graduate roles dissolve in the face of digital disruption, the gig economy and portfolio careers, designing and implementing curricula to foster self-authorship is critical. Progression towards self-authorship was evident yet students largely remained bounded by others and constrained by structural issues. The WIL experience provided a useful platform for gauging and developing self-authorship among students, exposing them to situations that demand an internal voice and invoking, in partnership with deliberate reflective peer activities, complex meaning-making of their learning experience. The study contributes to the limited empirical research on student development in self-authorship and presents important collaborative strategies for HE and industry to enhance self-authorship among higher education students. The study also highlighted the value of the huddle activity for encouraging students to explicitly consider their experiences and progression in self-authorship post-WIL, and how they may further develop this as they prepare for future work.

This study highlights pathways for improvement yet has limitations. Data were gathered only on the crossroad experiences that students wished to share and the sample size is not representational and confined to business and communication. A longitudinal study on how students develop their own professional voice may enrich data and findings further. Future research could extend to exploring employer perspectives of student responses to challenging situations and how curricula and workplace design can deepen learning and enhance student self-authorship. Comparing the development of self-authorship across discipline groups may add value. Finally, examining social and cultural capital (O'Shea, 2016) that students bring to self-authorship would also be useful (Wawrzynski & Pizzolato, 2006), particularly given self-authorship is demonstrated earlier in students from marginalised groups (Barber et al., 2013).

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