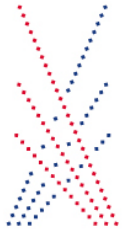

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Work Integrated Learning and Development of Graduate Identity

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Abstract

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is increasingly promoted as a tool to encourage skills in graduates that academic study alone may struggle to provide. However the role it can play in influencing graduate identity is often overlooked, as it is seen more narrowly as something which is only useful in leading to employment.

This paper attempts to redress the balance. The development of professional identity in graduates is explored in three short vignettes taken from a larger longitudinal study of student experiences of WIL. These draw on both self-characterisation sketches, a method for describing the self developed by Kelly (1955/1991), and on interviews which took place with students in both second and final years of study. Findings are discussed and contrasted with both Social Identity Theory and Holmes's model of emergent graduate identity and illustrate the diversity of effects on identity that may be experienced by students during the course of their studies.

Keywords

Graduate identity; Work Integrated Learning; Professional development

Track

Identity

Word Count

6255

Introduction and context for the study

In English higher education the 'value for money' element of degree study is under increasing scrutiny (Burnett, 2017) leading to an environment where questions of graduate identity development and the process of 'becoming' a graduate are in danger of being overlooked. Driven by an increase in tuition fees and the pressure from competition introduced by the lifting of the cap on student numbers (BIS, 2011) measures of employment outcomes as a way of assessing the 'value' of a degree are prioritised. This is not a situation unique to England or to Higher Education: although English tuition fees are identified as the most expensive in the world (Kentish, 2017) the emphasis on student development mattering only if it leads to employment is also seen in other countries and other sectors. For example there is a large body of work in the Australian HE sector, which seems to have gained momentum after a similar change to funding arrangements imposed in 2005 (Bates, 2008).
Of course it is legitimate for employers and policy makers to concern themselves with issues of graduate employability as, ultimately, well-prepared graduates have a significant impact on economic development and on society more generally. However employability is a complex idea that is difficult to measure, with areas such as career development learning, job search skills, networking abilities, degree subject knowledge, generic skills and emotional intelligence all being part of the concept (Dacre Pool and Sewell, 2007, Jackson and Wilton, 2016). At its most fundamental level, employability is about the individual being prepared for and able to carry out a job (Harvey, 2001), meaning that it can also be impacted by characteristics such as gender, social class, race, and disability (Cranmer, 2006). It is, therefore, inextricably linked to identity and individual attributes including the construction of the self. It also needs to be acknowledged that employment is not only determined by how employable someone is, but also by things like availability of opportunities, and recruitment and selection processes (for example, graduates from higher ranked institutions may be favoured either consciously or unconsciously) (Jackson, 2013). However it is relatively common to conflate employability with the more measurable concept of employment and to assume that if graduates have a defined and measurable set of 'employability skills' this is sufficient to ensure employment. This means that when questions of how students develop during the course of their degree studies are considered the principal emphasis tends to be placed on graduate employment outcomes (Holmes, 2013b) and the need to produce 'work ready' graduates.

One strategy which is frequently suggested to encourage employment skills which academic study alone struggles to provide is Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (Bates, 2008, Crebert et al., 2004, Freudenberg et al., 2010). This is defined as work experience taking place as a formally assessed part of the programme of study, for example as sandwich placements, professional practice, or internships. In the UK an increased use of WIL has been particularly driven by responses to the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) and the Wilson review (Wilson, 2012) which set out the importance of universities in developing graduates to meet the needs of employers and society (Rhodes and Shiel, 2007). The position is taken that all students should be encouraged to take up placements in order to improve their employability and academic skills and that internships (shorter periods of work experience lasting months rather than a full academic year) should be developed and made more available to UK students to increase the flexibility of integration with academic courses (Wilson, 2012). Beyond the UK, there is also a clear interest in WIL as a way of developing graduate employability, often driven by similar agendas.

Although existing work focussing on acquisition of skills through WIL is valuable, the question of what else the experience may offer students and particularly the effect on identity in the work role is under-explored due to the emphasis on measuring employment outcomes.

The particular area of interest in this paper is therefore to explore what happens to views of identity in students who undertake WIL, looking to build a more holistic picture of their development across their programme of study and expanding research on the impact of WIL beyond the skills agenda.

Graduate professional identity

Looking beyond the narrow focus on employment outcomes, it is clear that if the impact of undertaking WIL on student identity is to be understood there is a need to explore how undergraduates develop their identity during the course of their studies: how do they 'become' a graduate professional? Much of the existing work on professional identity development in students is done in highly regulated areas such as teaching and medicine: this means it tends to be motivated by the imposition of external models of professional identity by government policy makers or educators (Helmich et al., 2010, Weaver et al., 2011, Wilkins et al., 2011) rather than professional identity being seen as something intrinsic and about behaviour, beliefs and self-efficacy (Lamote and Engels, 2010, Vähäsantanen et al., 2008). There is, therefore, limited work which specifically looks at the formation of identity by the individual practitioner. Instead, more is revealed about how new professionals negotiate the process of 'fitting in' to a highly regulated structure (Timoštšuk and Ugaste, 2010). However, there are two theoretical strands which challenge this approach, one applying Social Identity Theory to questions of graduate identity and the other relating to Leonard Holmes's work on graduate employability. Both are reviewed here in order to provide a theoretical framework for discussion of later case studies illustrating the experiences of three individuals.

Social Identity Theory and Graduate Identity

While limited, a contrast to work assuming that becoming a graduate professional simply means fitting into established structures is seen in a small number of publications which explore the broader changes in identity that are experienced by students during their course of study (Hallier and Summers, 2011, Jungert, 2011, Timoštšuk and Ugaste, 2010, Weaver et al., 2011). Using Social Identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Turner, 1975, Turner and Reynolds, 2012) Weaver et al.(2011) look at how medical students compare themselves to the identity of the 'ideal doctor'. Hallier and Summers (2011) consider the process that Human Resource Management (HRM) students go through in order to see themselves as a professional (which, in some cases, may mean rejecting this identity), although their work is limited by collecting retrospective views from final year students only. In contrast, Jungert (2011) conducts a longitudinal study of postgraduate engineering students over four and a half years to explore how their views of themselves change. The HRM students describe moving through stages where initial expectations were challenged and revised (for example, if their prior expectations of the profession are invalidated in their degree classes), through identification with practice developing through work experience, to the extent of possibly rejecting academic critiques of practice by final year (Hallier and Summers, 2011). Similarly, Jungert (2011) describes how his participants transition from self-identification as an 'engineering student' to thinking of themselves as 'an engineer'. In both cases, it seems that what appears to influence the change in identity is a challenge to expectations: when this happens either the student changes or the challenge is rejected. If academic critique is rejected, this is usually because the practitioner perspective is valued over the academic, and placement is seen as exposure to 'reality' in contrast to a theoretical academic position which

has previously been accepted. Academics can, therefore, be used as what Social Categorisation theory would say is the 'out- group' that the profession should be defended against as students come to see themselves as part of the 'in-group' of HRM professionals or engineers. However for some students identity as a professional is rejected when their initial expectations (what they believe on enrolment that a professional should do and be) are proved false, and they become isolated from the main group. These students are likely to reject the profession and choose a different path on graduation, although it is unclear what form this may take (Hallier and Summers, 2011). In contrast to work suggesting that one of the desirable outcomes from WIL is that students should develop high career decidedness and be ready to step into a profession on graduation (see, for example, Brooks and Youngson (2016); Cranmer (2006); Jackson (2014); Reddy and Moores (2006)), it seems possible that students may undergo a process of questioning identity, leading to an increase in uncertainty over future direction in graduates. An area of interest for this paper is therefore to explore which groups students most strongly identify with and also where they feel they are likely to 'belong' on graduation.

Holmes's Model of Graduate Identity

Holmes (2013a) suggests three possible models for how employability can be better defined in terms of graduate identity. His proposal is that Graduate employability can be seen as either:

- possession of requisite skills (such as graduate attributes);
- social positioning (linked to cultural capital such as the quality of the degree awarding institution);
- processual (moving into employment is simply another stage on the journey of the individual, it is not something to be taken in isolation but is about the overall 'emergent identity' of the graduate, a socially constructed relationship which changes over time).

He takes issue with the first model, pointing out that the process of becoming a graduate is complex, takes place over an extended time period, and is negotiated both between the individual and those around them (Holmes, 2015). In addition, he asserts that research shows there is a weak relationship between attaining these and employment outcomes. While the second model had relevance in the past, he suggests that it is becoming less influential with the move to a mass higher education system (Holmes, 2013a). He therefore favours the third (processual) model of graduate employability. This means that:

> … graduate employability can be considered as the always temporary relationship that arises between an individual graduate and the field of employment opportunities, as the graduate engages with those who are 'gatekeepers' to those opportunities, particularly those who make selection decisions. In presenting themself to a prospective employer, as a prospective employee, the individual is presenting their claim on being a graduate 'worthy' of such employment
>
> (Holmes, 2013a)

Graduate identity is therefore dependent on two aspects: how the student sees and presents themselves, and how they are seen by others (Holmes, 2013a). A graduate identity model is

proposed by Holmes based on these dimensions, suggesting that graduates move between four categories: agreed identity, failed identity, indeterminate identity, or an imposed identity. A fifth category, under-developed identity, is also possible. Each of these can be claimed or not by the individual, and can be affirmed by others or not. The model attempts to capture the non-static nature of graduate employability, and its relationship to both the identities felt to be valid by the graduate, and by outside stakeholders. The model is presented in figure 1 below:

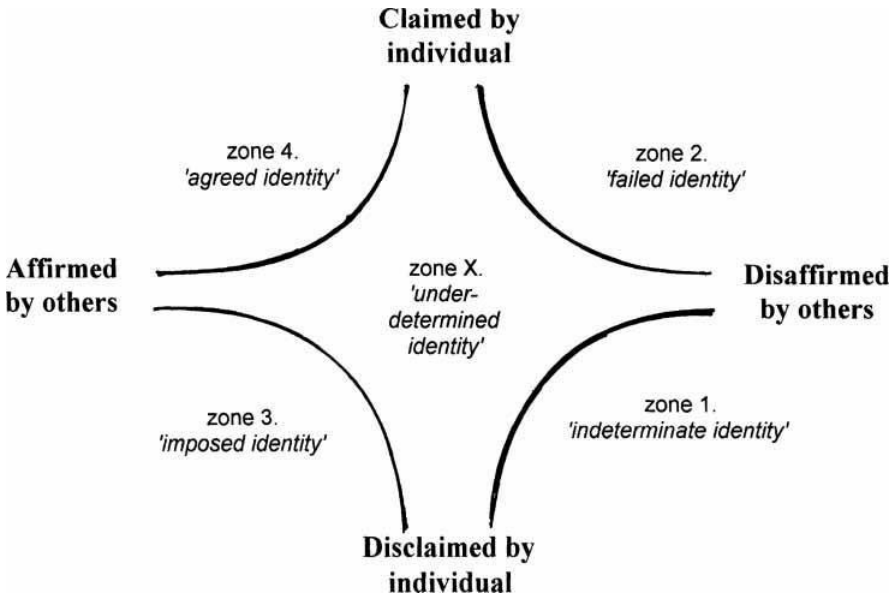

Figure 1: Claim-affirmation model of modalities of emergent identity (Holmes, 2013a)

In terms of the influence of Holmes's model to work on graduate identity, many authors cite his work although very few explicitly apply his ideas. There is clearly an opportunity for further exploration of how graduate identity develops over time drawing on this research.

Approach to the research

Theoretical framework adopted

The priority in this research is to understand the lived experiences and changing perceptions of undergraduate students as they progress through their studies and, in particular, to look at how professional identity development takes place. The research therefore explores graduate identity through individual categorisations, resonating with Burr's (2015) assertion that "what we regard as truth … may be thought of as our current accepted ways of understanding the world" (Burr, 2015) and also with Chiari and Nuzzo's (1996) discussion of psychological constructivisms. The way participants see themselves will change over time dependent both on their prior and current experiences and the contexts and environments they experience, so the study adopts a constructivist viewpoint. While constructivism can be categorised in a number of ways, and it can be difficult to make clear unambiguous distinctions between the various schools of thought which are labelled as constructivist (Chiari and Nuzzo, 1996), the work is particularly influenced by the particular variation of constructivism seen in Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955/1991). This theory is based around the concept of 'constructive alternativism'. The epistemological question of what constitutes a 'fact' is addressed by asserting that we, as humans, are presented with an infinite amount of choice

about how we categorise and describe the world around us (Butt and Burr, 2004). We organise our world-view using an individual network of bipolar constructs, and undertake a process of sense-making by assessing how and where our lived experiences fit into this (Butt, 2008). In PCT, it therefore follows that views of the world are unique to the individual, as they are chosen by each of us on the basis of what we think fits best with (or makes sense of) our experiences of it.

Data collection

Drawing on PCT as the theoretical framework, with the aim of exploring the changing construal of students across time, this paper draws on some of the findings from a longitudinal study of undergraduate students from a number of programmes at two UK universities with the aim of illustrating the changes in identity that take place for three individuals.

Initial data collection and recruitment for the study took place through a questionnaire survey of first year undergraduates from a number of courses, chosen to reflect a variety of WIL models. While detailed results from this stage of the work are not presented here, the information gathered in the questionnaire about perceptions on entry has been used to form a complete picture of change in the participants over the entire course of their degree. The principal focus in the work discussed in this paper is the qualitative research that took place with second and final year students using self–characterisation sketches, a method developed by Kelly (1955/1991) to explore construal by production of a short, individual description of the self. The principle is that by writing in the third person and following very specific instructions to write like "a friend who knew him very intimately and very sympathetically, perhaps better than anyone else could ever know him" (Kelly, 1955/1991) the respondent is invited to be more open and reflective than they might be otherwise. The aim is that:

> The resultant sketch will reveal, in part, the participant's truth, her story. We are not in the business of content analysis, nor checking off constructs used. Rather, we are looking at how the person construes, how constructs are integrated, and what implications they are seen to have.
>
> (Banister et al., 1994)

Each participant was invited to write two sketches at different time points during their studies. The first was towards the end of the second year of study and the second either towards the end of third year (for those on a three year programme) or at the start of fourth year (for participants who had done a sandwich year). In each, students were asked to describe themselves in a work role using a slightly adapted version of Kelly's instructions. The sketches were then analysed and used alongside semi-structured interviews with the same participants to explore changing constructions of identity.

A large number of the questionnaire respondents had volunteered to be contacted for follow-up research, and from this group fifteen second-year students were chosen to reflect a variety of WIL experiences. More emphasis was placed on ensuring diversity by course rather than on the institution of study because the initial (quantitative) survey suggested that this was a far more important differentiating factor. The sample included participants on courses offering optional whole-year sandwich placements (Business), a number of compulsory short periods of professional work experience (Social Work), and also more informal and ad-hoc assignments and internships (Journalism). Eleven of these original fifteen participants

continued to the second (final year) stage and data are therefore available from them across their full period as a student. The reason for classifying the later group of participants as 'final year' rather than 'third year' is that some (who undertook a sandwich placement) were on a four-year degree programme. The detailed sample composition at each stage is shown in the table below:

Table 1: Participant group

	Business Management	Social Work	Journalism	Total
University A	2 (2)	2 (1)	1 (1)	5 (4)
University B	4 (4)	5 (3)	1 (0)	10 (7)
Total	6 (6)	7 (4)	2 (1)	15 (11)

(Note: numbers in brackets represent the numbers taking part in final year data collection)

The sketches have been analysed according to a specific protocol designed by Kelly (1955/1991) to reveal the 'story' of the participants. Following this analysis the questionnaire, sketches, and interview transcripts were used to carry out longitudinal qualitative analysis (Saldaña, 2003) for each individual, examining the journey of each participant over time, which "describes, connects and summarizes the researcher's primary observations of participant change" (Saldaña, 2003). Case studies of each of the individuals and their views about the changes in self-construal of identity they have experienced were produced from this analysis. Three of these, chosen to illustrate diverse aspects of the development journeys that some of the participants undertook during their course of studies, are presented here in the form of short vignettes.

In the following discussions names and some minor details have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants. The university that participants attended has also not been identified, in order to make it more difficult to identify individual respondents.

Vignettes illustrating facets of identity development

Amira: Claiming identity

Amira was a Business Management student. She felt that she had no relevant work experience before starting at university, having come straight from college to her degree.

Of all of the participants, Amira's story most clearly demonstrates the potential for placement to provide a transformative experience, changing completely her view of herself at work and leading to development of a new identity. In second year, she expressed very little certainty or knowledge about future career directions, and struggled to see herself in any job role. There had clearly been strong influences from her family background: she had originally wanted to study a different degree subject but this would have meant moving away from home, and her father had discouraged this leading her to choose a general business degree instead. This meant that when we spoke in second year, her work identity was still nebulous and she expressed a clear lack of confidence in her abilities saying:

> Yeah because one morning I'll wake up and I'll be like 'yeah, I know what I'm

> doing' and then another morning I'll be like 'I'm not sure' you know, because I lack confidence as well so that brings me down a lot, because I don't have the confidence in me …. It's like I do want to open up my own business, be a manager there … but it's like I don't have the confidence. I don't think I'd be able to do it because it's a lot of hard work …. and then sometimes I'm like I'll have my degree, I'll just go work for someone else. Then one morning I'll just wake up and be like, I can't do none of this, I'm too stupid for it.
>
> (Amira, interview 1)

This illustrates a recurring theme present throughout Amira's first interview: a lack of confidence, leading to doubts in her ability and her 'place', and uncertainty over where she belonged. Her 'in-group' and 'out-group' in a work-identity sense were very hard to distinguish as she was situated so firmly in zone X of Holmes's graduate identity model ('under-determined identity'). Unsure of her place, seeing little opportunity for her to 'claim' a workplace identity, she struggled to see where she might go or even what type of experience she needed to help her to develop.

In contrast to this uncertainty and lack of identity, her final year interview tells a story of reinvention. Having taken up a one-year sandwich placement managing training, events, and other administration for a large department in the NHS she took the opportunity to be someone different from the shy student of interview 1, saying she realised that in her placement situation "nobody knows me so just be who I want" (Amira, interview 2). She saw it as an opportunity to take risks with her identity and to experiment with being someone else. Having said in interview 1 that she was nervous about even taking part in the research, because of the need to speak to a stranger about her views, by interview 2 she is someone who has decided that when she needs to go to London for work she has the confidence to go out by herself:

> You finish work at four or five o'clock, three o'clock and it's like 'What do I do for the rest of the day? I'm finished for the day.' So I thought 'Just go out and go shopping' and it wasn't actually bad, just to go out by yourself and find your way around and then get back
>
> (Amira, interview 2)

This view of herself as a confident and independent person was clearly helped by the team she worked with, who had been happy to support her development: the 'affirmation' from colleagues that "you've fitted in really well, that you're fulfilling our demands and you've learnt, you've picked up skills and fitted into the team a lot quicker than we thought you would have" (Amira, interview 2) has been crucial for her. Additional validation of her new, confident persona has come from university friends on her return to study:

> A lot of my friends said that when I came back to University, a lot of them did say, 'You look more confident. You come across more confident, you're more open, you're willing to do things that you didn't do, you've come out of your shell basically.' And they actually did say 'It's due to the placement.' And it definitely is.
>
> (Amira, interview 2)

The increased confidence also led to the development of clearer plans for the future: having

decided that she wanted to pursue a career in banking (a possibility that had been mentioned in interview 1 but that she had not followed up when applying for her first degree), she was making plans to study for a Masters qualification in a different city after graduation. Aided by her placement experience, she was clearly in the process of defining and claiming her identity as a confident and capable graduate.

Mark: Questioning identity

Mark was a mature student from the UK. He had worked in a call centre before deciding on a career change, and initially spent a short time in adult social care before deciding to do a degree in Social Work in order to progress further in this area. His first placement, in the second year of his degree, was in a school. In third year he undertook a statutory placement in local authority children's services.

Mark's sketches and interviews tell something of a story of questioning his professional identity, particularly towards the end of his course of study. While it is clear throughout that he expected to be a Social Worker, there are questions over which Social Work category he 'fitted' within, and which professional groups he associated himself with. Having started his degree identifying with the field of adult Social Work, he undertook a placement in children's services in second year to broaden his experience. He "was open minded and I thought, yeah, yeah, I'll give it a go, children terrify us but we'll see how it goes. It just opened up that area for me really and I was happy" (Mark, interview 1). Although he mentioned that job opportunities were a key driver of his decision to try working with children in this first placement, it seems that the experience also led him to change his ideas and to want to work with children for more reasons than just this. In terms of the identity he brought to the role, he saw himself as quite a creative person and thought this was a valuable asset when working with children. He was also surprised by how much of his previous work identity (in a call centre) was relevant to the placement role and how many of the skills were transferrable. For example he identified "communication skills" (Mark, sketch 1) as being important in both roles and saying in the interview that:

> It really did surprise me. It surprised me that I picked up on the children's different communication styles and adapted my communications styles to meet theirs. It was going well and I think that's when I realised I was doing big positive things
>
> (Mark, interview 1)

It is also clear that he has been affected by being seen as a role model by the children he is working with:

> He found working with children very rewarding and saw himself as a positive role model in the children's lives, however this made Mark feel a pressure of responsibility towards the children. Mark felt more responsible for his actions and the realisation of being a professional
>
> (Mark, sketch 1)

One of the aspects of this statement which merits discussion is that this is about how he saw

himself, there was an internal pressure and responsibility here to 'act' as a role model and, in common with Amira, it seems to be about a process of claiming an identity which the placement allowed him to gain validation for from others (in this case, the children who he identified as having few male role models allowing him to play this part). Linked to this is a developing understanding of his professional identity, with a stronger sense of what being a Social Worker actually meant in reality and he thought "the pressure and the responsibility came out because there was just me and it all begins and ends with me with what I do". (Mark, interview 1).

A further development of his professional identity can be seen in final year. At this time, Mark had secured a graduate job in children's safeguarding to be taken up after graduation. His tone at this point was much less positive in many ways, and he reflected further on challenges to his professional identity coming from a pressure of responsibility, expressing an amount of anxiety about taking up a 'real' Social Work job and trying to "fit in with the team" (Mark, interview 2). The responsibility and reality of what it meant to be part of the Social Work profession, rather than participating as a student, seems to have come to the forefront. This is understandable given he was about to face the transition from university into full time professional work, and was dealing with what this would mean for him. There was also a suggestion that he *should* feel happy, knowing that he was one of the fortunate students who would be going straight into a job after graduation.

There seemed to be an element of pragmatic choice and strategic decision making in his situation rather than a strong identity rooted in association with the Social Worker 'in-group'. The job was his because his "initial plan seems to have pad [sic] off" (Mark, sketch 2) and he used the placement to get himself known in the organisation so that when a job came up he was well placed to get it. However, when he talked about the role, his attitude appeared to be relatively passive, for example saying he would be "taking up employment" (Mark, sketch 2) as if this is something which has happened to him rather than being a positive decision on his part. It almost seems as if he felt he was claiming the 'Social Worker' identity falsely. He felt he should be grateful to have a job, but now he had what he worked towards he is worried both about the reality of the situation he will be going into and the responsibility he will have. He was understandably "nervous about having his own case load and the responsibility for people's lives which might make him anxious" (Mark, sketch 2).

In this case, it seems that placement has actually reduced career decidedness by giving Mark a strong understanding of the reality of the role, making him question whether it was something that he really wanted to do. It is questionable whether his professional identity on graduation is something that he chose or that was being imposed upon him by circumstances and opportunities. It seems that he was closer to Holmes's (2015) category of a graduate who is in Zone 3, with an 'imposed identity' placed upon them (albeit by his circumstances and the options open to him as much as by other people).

Connor: Static identity

Connor was another Business Management student, and he had (like Amira) come straight from other study into university. However in contrast to her story of reinvention, Connor's data show the potential for deep-rooted construal of identity to remain unchanged by placement experience. In second year, it was clear that Connor's previous work experience (part-time and summer work in a local shop near his home and on a building site) had had a very strong influence on how he saw his identity as a manager of others and his construal of

what the 'ideal manager' might look like. In particular, it had strongly affected his view of what his preferred 'in-group' and 'out-group' were, with movement between describing himself as someone who would be fun to be around, who would see his staff as "more of friends than just staff members" (Conor, sketch 1) but also as someone who would set targets and hand out rewards when these were met. Across all of the discussion there was clear conflict in his view of his workplace identity: he wanted people to enjoy being around him, and wanted his employees to see him as a friend and someone who was good to work with. However what this seemed to mean to him in practice was about his staff being rewarded for doing good work, and the social relationship (and fact they are all part of the same in-group) leads to this happening as they want to please him. Connor expanded on this in the interview, and explained that his views were very much influenced by a previous job he had held, where he had a very good relationship with the owner of a shop he worked in:

> I always offered to do extra help when I've had fun. So I see them more as a friend. I used to work in a little village store, and it used to be like I was working with my friend when he was there. So then whenever he needed a favour I was always happy to do it. So I would always hopefully do that when I hopefully become a manager if I could replicate that and be more like friends with the people who were working with me.
>
> (Connor, interview 1)

However he recognised that this may not be the way that everyone else sees things: although he wanted to be liked by his employees, he was concerned that this may lead to him being "to [sic] laid back and naïve to some members of staff therefore offering them liberties that they may not deserve" (Connor, sketch 2). There is a hint here that he recognised the style he prefers, where everyone he works with is in the 'in-group', may not be practical.

Further influences from his previous work experience also seem to have been fundamental to forming his view of how the ideal manager behaves and what he sees as an effective management style. This gives a clearer idea of the identity he would like to claim for himself. It is obvious that his boss in the village shop (who he enjoyed working for) is something of a role model of how he himself wanted to be as a manager, in contrast to experiences he had working on a building site. He makes very clear references to management behaviours he had seen in both situations, which he had learned from and would adopt (or not) as part of his own professional identity, for example around team working. In particular being prepared to do the same work as everyone else was important to him in establishing credibility, and in describing himself he said "he is caring and never would ask his staff to do something that he himself wouldn't be comfortable doing" (Connor, sketch 2). Talking again about his boss in the village shop during the second-year interview he also said:

> … whatever I did he would always help out, it never felt like he thought he was bigger or better to do something like that. Like he would always set the example, so I never felt like 'oh he's only given me this job because he's not going to bother doing it' or something
>
> (Connor, interview 1)

This contrasts to the building site work:

> sometimes we got asked to do things I didn't really want to do, and it was as if the other people weren't doing it, they were just giving it to us to do. And I hated that,

> like I lost all motivation for a while, and we worked with a bit of grudge and so I probably didn't work my best
>
> (Connor, interview 1)

It might be expected that these views of the ideal manager identity would change with the experience of more 'professional' work on placement. During his sandwich year Connor worked as a trainee manager at a hotel. Surprisingly, however, it seems that minimal change has taken place in Connor's construal of the ideal workplace identity after this experience. Describing himself in a future work role, his fundamental position was still that he would be a manager who "puts his staff first" (Connor, sketch 2). This was still very much a core part of his beliefs about himself. Above all else, there was still a very strong desire to be liked and respected by the people that he managed. His story of the workplace he hopes to manage was of a happy place, where people enjoy their job and there is fun and laughter. His job here would be to look after everyone and to make sure nobody is upset or unhappy, and he would take pride in this. However he identified that there would be some considerable pressure for him to maintain this atmosphere, and his identity still seemed to be rooted in having a large in-group. This would come with a lot of emotional investment in others' happiness: he "hates upsetting people as he always feels guilty thinking that someone may go home feeling they are useless or unwanted" (Connor, sketch 2). There appears to be no 'out-group' for him and instead it was all about:

> … talking to your work team and getting along with them, seeing the difference from when they actually wanted to be there to when there was a bit of animosity then I felt that was one of the other key skills, to get the team on your side and get the team working together
>
> (Connor, interview 2)

Ideas of reward and incentive were not mentioned until the very end of the final year interview, and there was also some reluctance to talk about disciplinary matters. He would rather avoid conflict, sorting out problems with "informal" methods (Connor, sketch 2) and he seemed to expect that he would be given the same level of respect he offered to his staff and that they would reciprocate his concerns to avoid letting him down. He wanted everyone to leave work "holding no grudges against himself or the organisation Connor works for" (Connor, sketch 2)

In common with the first sketch he expected to be able to do any of the work done by the people he managed, and that they would all see each other as comrades. He thinks that by demonstrating this competence he would gain their respect: he would show his team "he can do the little jobs and doesn't feel above them at all" (Connor, sketch 2). Further, he "has not just walked his way into a more senior role without getting 'his hands dirty' in the day-to-day roles first" (Connor, sketch 2). In the second interview it became clear that the placement had reinforced his already existing world view: as a trainee in the hotel Connor spent periods of time working in all the different areas (from cleaning rooms to washing dishes in the kitchen) and therefore felt he had 'earned' his place as a manager. This meant that when he was operating in a management role he had gained the respect of the people he was supervising.

In terms of Holmes's model, Connor is possibly closest to the 'Agreed identity' area: there is certainly a strong element of him claiming an identity for himself, although whether this is affirmed by others (or likely to be affirmed in the future) is perhaps open to debate.

Concluding remarks

The three vignettes presented above give a variety of views about the impact of WIL on the participants' views of their developing identities in the work role. It is clear that for each of them, their identity has developed in significantly different ways across the course of their studies. From Amira's increasing confidence and certainty about her abilities, through Mark's questioning of his place and identity as a Social Worker through to the relatively unchanging nature of Connor's fundamental construction of himself as a member of a supportive and friendly in-group of colleagues, it is obvious that the simplistic view of WIL existing only to provide skills development for employability misses a rich parallel story of change and growth. A longitudinal study such as this one has the potential to add considerable depth to understanding of how WIL can help students to shape their identity as employees.

It is also worth noting that the process of changing identity may not be easy or entirely positive, in contrast to work on developing graduate skills which tends to assume that with the right inputs, the right 'work ready' graduate will emerge from the process. In only one of the stories presented here (Amira) does WIL play its 'expected' part in moving the participants towards this place. Even though Mark is a clear success story in terms of gaining the 'appropriate' job at the end of his degree studies, WIL has led to some uncertainty in his direction and a questioning of whether the identity being imposed on him by this opportunity is actually the one he wants and is suited to. It could be argued that, particularly in a field such as Social Work, this reflection on the suitability of place and identity is no bad thing.

Connor's story provides a further challenge to the view that WIL can influence graduates in the 'correct' way. While it is clear that he has gained confidence and experience from his placement, the fundamental principles that he bases his workplace identity on seem to emerge unchanged from the experience.

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