

Creative WIL as Pedagogical Proof of Concept: A Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Research Brief on Non-Placement, Course-Embedded Work-Integrated Learning

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Abstract

As post-secondary institutions grapple with limited traditional practicum and professional placement opportunities and increasing calls for inclusive, practice-connected learning, there is growing interest in non-placement forms of work-integrated learning (WIL). This research brief presents Creative WIL as a pedagogical proof of concept situated within the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Creative WIL is a course-embedded, non-traditional WIL initiative that brings together Bachelor and Master of Education students and Engineering students to co-design and facilitate a three-day, strengths-based, project-based learning camp for Grade 7 youth. Using an iterative case study design informed by reflexive thematic analysis, this study examines how real-time pedagogical application, feedback loops, and co-design foster student agency, pedagogical fluency, and inclusive practice. Findings demonstrate collective learning across students and instructors, with participants describing the experience as hopeful, energizing, and generative for their own classroom practice. Through iterative delivery, the project also gave rise to the kinetic teaching and learning model, an emergent pedagogical framework aligned with self-determination theory. This brief contributes to SoTL by positioning Creative WIL as an iterative, course-embedded approach to pedagogical inquiry and a provocation for rethinking how pedagogy, practice, and inclusivity are integrated within course-based learning.

Keywords: scholarship of teaching and learning; non-placement work-integrated learning; iterative case study; student agency, inclusive course design

Introduction: Situating Creative WIL in SoTL

Within the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), teaching is understood not only as practice but as inquiry; systematic, reflective, and evidence-informed exploration of how learning occurs and how pedagogy can be designed to better support it (Felten, 2013). Work-integrated learning (WIL) has long been positioned as a bridge between theory and practice; however, traditional placement-based models often remain structurally separate from coursework and are not always accessible or equitable for all students (Dean et al., 2020; Dean & Rook, 2023). This study is grounded in a SoTL methodological stance that treats teaching as iterative inquiry (Felten, 2013).

Creative WIL emerged in response to these tensions. Rather than positioning WIL as something that happens after or outside coursework, Creative WIL embeds applied practice directly within specified university courses, allowing students to enact pedagogical strategies in real time while receiving immediate feedback. This research brief positions Creative WIL as a SoTL-informed proof of concept that integrates pedagogy, practice, and reflection through a non-placement WIL model asking: how can we design active learning opportunities within a course structure that allows students to apply theory, test pedagogy, engage in inclusive design, and develop educator agency?

Project Context: Creative WIL

Creative WIL is a cross-faculty initiative involving students from the Bachelor of Education (BEd), Master of Education (MEd, Accessibility Studies in Education), and Engineering programs at a Canadian university. Education students elect to participate in Creative WIL as an alternative to traditional course-based assignments, while engineering students volunteer to participate for their own learning and experience. Participants collaboratively design and facilitate a three-day March Break camp for 30 Grade 7 youth who have experienced academic or social isolation in school contexts and who may benefit from strengths-based, hands-on learning opportunities involving engineering design challenges, collaborative problem-solving, and introductory 3D printing activities.

While the broader research project involved Grade 7 students (approximately 12–13 years old), university students, facilitators, and parents, the focus of this research brief is on participants in the post-secondary space: the university students, who co-constructed and delivered the 3-day camp, and the facilitators. The camp is structured around project-based learning and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, with a co-developed driving question related to designing solutions for a common challenge, e.g., how to keep people safe, warm, or entertained in cold environments. University students act as guides, supporting youth through inquiry, experimentation, and reflection while working alongside peers from different disciplines.

Importantly, Creative WIL is intentionally designed as a barrier-free experience for participating youth and university students. Transportation, meals, materials, and participation

costs are fully covered, ensuring that financial and logistical barriers do not limit participation. This approach models inclusivity at a structural, pedagogical, and relational level.

Methodological Orientation

In this study, we employed an iterative case study design, adapted from Steenhuis' (2015) pragmatic approach, using repeated cycles of design, implementation, reflection, and redesign to examine how pedagogy, feedback, and practice evolved across multiple iterations (2024, 2025, 2026) of Creative WIL.

Data Sources

Data included

- written and video reflections from participating university students,
- semi-structured interviews with selected participants,
- field notes and reflexive memos authored by the instructors,
- informal feedback loops during planning days and camp delivery,
- insights offered by parents and community members at a Showcase of student work.

All procedures received institutional ethics approval.

Analytic Approach

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), allowing for interpretive engagement with participant voice and instructor reflexivity. Rather than seeking generalizable outcomes, analysis focused on identifying patterns of learning, agency, and pedagogical insight across participants and iterations.

This methodological approach aligns with SoTL commitments to contextualized knowledge, transparency in teaching decisions, and the co-construction of meaning between instructors and learners by foregrounding systematic reflection on teaching, incorporating learner perspectives, and using iterative evidence to improve pedagogical practice.

Findings: Iterative Learning and Pedagogical Shifts

One of the central SoTL contributions of Creative WIL lies in how feedback-informed pedagogical redesign occurs across iterations. Early participant feedback revealed that, in the first iteration, insufficient leadership structures resulted in greater instructor involvement than intended, limiting opportunities for education and engineering students to assume decision-making roles with confidence and reducing student agency (Garner & Wilson, 2026).

In response, subsequent iterations intentionally aligned more closely with self-determination theory (SDT) by strengthening supports for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Further, the following iterations intentionally redistributed

leadership through defined roles, choice-based responsibility, and peer coordination. These design shifts resulted in greater student agency, collective problem-solving, and more sustained engagement with pedagogical decision-making. This evolution reflects a core SDT insight: autonomy is not created through the absence of structure, but through intentional design that supports competence and shared responsibility.

Collective Learning Through Practice

Rather than positioning outcomes as a contrast between instructor learning and student learning, Creative WIL functioned as a collective learning environment. University students described learning through “being and doing,” applying theory in context and refining practice in response to feedback from learners in real time.

Participants frequently described the experience as hopeful, energizing, and transformative for their sense of professional possibility. One student reflected, “This experience gave me ideas I can actually use. It showed me what inclusive teaching can look like in practice, not just on paper.” Another participant shared, “It changed how I see my students. I’m more focused on strengths and possibility [sic] now, instead of problems.”

Instructors simultaneously engaged in reflexive analysis, adjusting pedagogical structures and leadership approaches in response to student input. This reciprocal learning reinforced the value of positioning students as co-designers and co-theorists within SoTL inquiry (Eady et al., 2025).

Emergence of the Kinetic Teaching and Learning Model

Through iterative delivery and analysis, Creative WIL gave rise to the kinetic model for teaching and learning, an emergent, inclusive designer model developed through practice, feedback, and reflexive analysis. The model provides structure for the intentional selection of pedagogy and approaches to incorporate into a learning opportunity and highlights the process of active teaching and learning (Engage, Explore, Exchange, Extend, Energize). In this way, the kinetic design model is flexible and supports educators in thoughtfully considering the diversity of needs, always beginning with UDL (Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2024), the contextual constraints, and pedagogies that will come together to foster self-determination in learners. The model applied to Creative WIL integrates established approaches, consistently applying principles of UDL (CAST, 2024) and incorporating project-based learning (PBL) (Kokotsaki et al., 2016), strengths-based pedagogy (Pattoni, 2012), trauma-invested practice (Souers & Hall, 2016), and an innovator mindset (Couros, 2015), to intentionally support the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and connection articulated in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Rather than functioning as a prescribed program, this model operates as a conceptual tool, a design orientation: a way of noticing, structuring, and adjusting learning opportunities to promote taking purposeful risks, experiencing competence through doing, and engaging

meaningfully with others. The kinetic model is now shared with BEd and MEd students as a way of weaving together learnings from coursework, practicum, and pedagogy.

Figure 1. Kinetic model for Creative WIL

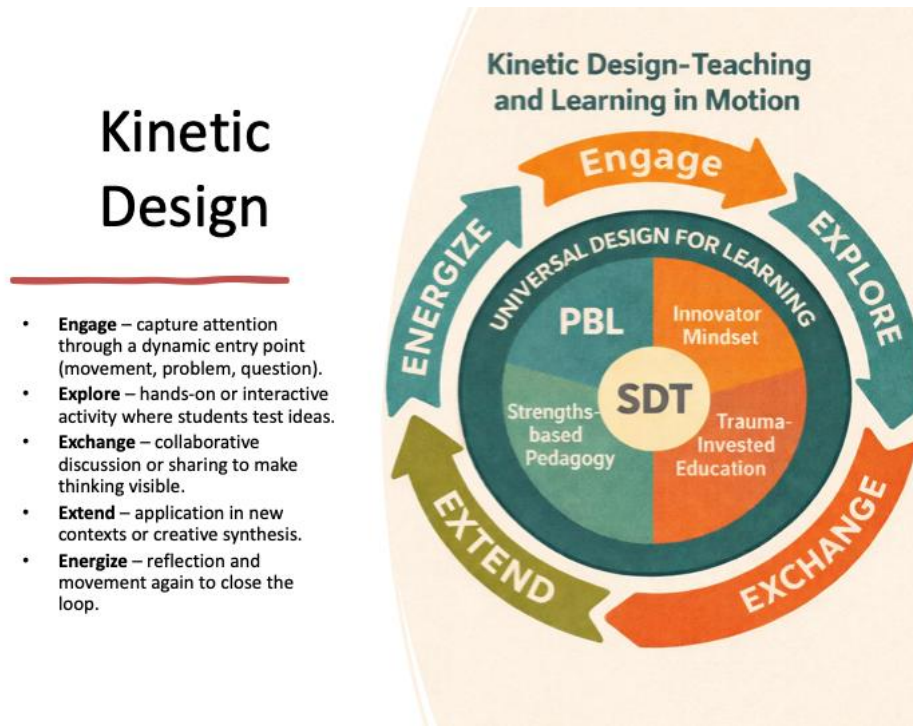


Figure 1 illustrates the kinetic teaching and learning model (Engage, Explore, Exchange, Extend, Energize) for Creative WIL, beginning with UDL as the design foundation and drawing on the approaches at the centre of the model to support the psychological needs identified in SDT.

Creative WIL as Proof of Concept and Provocation

As a proof of concept, Creative WIL demonstrates that non-placement, course-embedded WIL can support deep pedagogical learning, foster inclusive practice, and generate confidence and professional hope through real-time application and feedback. The *Exchange* element of the model ensures feedback, trialling methods, direction setting, and sharing of thinking, while the *Energize* element ensures reflection to consider the impact and adjustments for the next implementation, thereby supporting self-determination.

As a provocation, it challenges assumptions that meaningful WIL must be externally placed or temporally separate from coursework. Instead, Creative WIL suggests that when pedagogy, practice, and reflection are intentionally designed together, WIL can function as a powerful SoTL site for inclusive experiences and course design. If adopted more broadly, this

model could expand access to meaningful WIL experiences by reducing reliance on limited placement opportunities and strengthening authentic links between theory, coursework, and professional practice.

Conclusion

Creative WIL illustrates the potential of SoTL-informed pedagogical innovation to bridge theory and practice by engaging students in co-designing and facilitating authentic learning experiences using the kinetic model, supported by ongoing feedback and reflection. In doing so, university students lived the pedagogy they were implementing, developing pedagogical fluency, inclusive design practices, agency, and collaborative problem-solving. Through iterative case-study inquiry, this project demonstrates that non-placement, course-embedded WIL can serve not only as a meaningful learning experience for students but also as a site of pedagogical innovation and scholarly inquiry.

As post-secondary institutions seek sustainable, equitable approaches to applied learning, Creative WIL offers an evidence-informed model that expands access to authentic work-integrated learning without relying solely on traditional placements. More broadly, it suggests that intentionally designed, course-embedded learning environments can enable students to apply pedagogical theory and professional knowledge in authentic, real-world contexts while benefiting from the course's guidance, feedback, and reflective support. In this way, Creative WIL offers a scalable pathway for integrating authentic practice, reflective inquiry, and pedagogical innovation into the curriculum without separating theory from practice.

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