

Co-creating inclusive work-integrated learning opportunities: insights for stakeholders

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to position work-integrated learning (WIL) as a transformative pedagogy for international business (IB) education. By embedding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) into WIL, the authors demonstrate how universities can better prepare IB students to navigate global challenges and thrive in multicultural, dynamic business environments. WIL brings together students, industry and higher education providers to meet the needs of the labour market, where DEI increasingly matter from both a business case and social justice perspective. Building on over 30 years of cumulative experience in industry engagement and WIL, the authors discuss key forces, trends, challenges and opportunities in co-creating inclusive WIL opportunities for an increasingly diverse group of learners.

Design/methodology/approach – Drawing on illustrative examples and institutional best practices the authors discuss the experiences in WIL and posit that a practically driven pedagogical approach to IB education can co-create an inclusive WIL environment.

Findings – Embedding DEI within WIL not only enhances inclusivity but also equips IB students with critical skills such as cultural intelligence adaptability and emotional resilience. These capabilities enable learners to effectively navigate the complexities contexts and connections unique to IB as a field. The authors argue for a systematic DEI-driven WIL approach to foster better integration of academic knowledge with real-world IB practices.

Originality/value – Existing literature discusses WIL as a practice-based learning approach but limited research examines its intersection with DEI in the context of IB education. The viewpoint bridges this gap showcasing specific strategies and best practices that enhance IB students' readiness for global industries. The authors propose a framework for embedding DEI into WIL informed by both institutional initiatives and theoretical insights to improve employability and global competence diversity co-creation equity and inclusion.

Keywords Work-integrated learning (WIL), Diversity, Equity and inclusion, Practice-based learning, Co-creation

Paper type Viewpoint

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1. Introduction

The international business (IB) discipline inherently requires students to engage with work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunities that prepare them to address the pressing challenges of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in a global business landscape where the concepts of *distance* (as a central concept in IB) and *diversity* are seen as two sides of the same coin (Doh, 2021). In a recent defence of IB's uniqueness as a discipline, Beugelsdijk (2022) highlighted the evolving conceptualisation of IB, which has shifted from focusing on proximity or distance to a more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness between individuals and the importance of DEI within organisations and society more broadly. Such evolution underscores the necessity for IB students to develop skills and perspectives that align with the complexities of DEI in global contexts across various levels, but particularly within organisations.

Beugelsdijk's (2022) analysis of "otherness" and "othering" – two concepts tied to foreignness and the liability of foreignness (Lu *et al.*, 2022) – is particularly relevant to DEI. His "here and there" framework defines othering as "qualitative disjunctures that shape contextual changes and identity formations across space" (p. 2056). Such a perspective informs IB research and highlights the critical role of social identity and socio-cognitive theories in fostering an inclusive and globally aware IB curriculum, which needs to prepare students for the "real world" through WIL (Klarin *et al.*, 2021).

As educators grapple with the evolving challenges faced by multinational enterprises, integrating DEI principles through WIL becomes increasingly essential and a differentiating factor in the global job market (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024; Klarin *et al.*, 2021). In particular, students must develop cultural intelligence and adaptability to navigate identity-driven complexities in organisational and societal contexts. Rašković (2022) underscores the importance of identity politics in IB, a view echoed by Beugelsdijk, who argues that "the concept of being (or perceived to be) different is fundamental to IB research" (2022, p. 2057). While Beugelsdijk applies this primarily to firms addressing cross-national differences, its relevance extends to traditional DEI issues across multiple levels of analysis (Newbury *et al.*, 2022) and phenomena of interest (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2023).

By embedding DEI principles within WIL, IB education can better prepare students to engage meaningfully with the challenges of operating in diverse workplaces across different contexts (Klarin *et al.*, 2021). This focus helps to evolve IB education beyond having an awareness of global issues towards a more developed understanding of IB (Kwok *et al.*, 2022). This raises the critical question:

- Q1. How can work-integrated learning (WIL) programmes in international business (IB) education more effectively incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to support the learning needs of diverse student populations?

2. The concept of work-integrated-learning

WIL has been widely adopted by many higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world because of its ability to prepare students for work (Klarin *et al.*, 2021), as well as foster professional socialisation and develop specific types of skills valued by employers (Jackson *et al.*, 2023). It embodies many of the elements of innovative educational practice (Dieleman *et al.*, 2022) through recognition of emerging technologies, knowledge and practice by industry via experiential learning opportunities. The concept of WIL covers a wide range of practice-based education approaches, including internships, work placements, service learning, cooperative education, consultancy and applied research projects (Nielsen *et al.*,

2022). However, the parameters and understanding of WIL also differ significantly across universities and countries.

For example, many US and European universities engage their students in live case studies, work simulations, cultural immersion exercises and short-term industry projects. While the concept of WIL is mainly limited to applied research projects in Asia, within Australia and New Zealand, the approach to WIL is broader. Within the Australian and New Zealand context, examples in IB can range from an industry programme supported by specific industries (i.e. ICT, consultancies and high-tech manufacturing) to a global business practicum, where the students spend a semester abroad working with an industry partner. It is further necessary to note that many of the opportunities are sometimes limited to postgraduate students, either through resourcing constraints in supervision or due to student capabilities associated with their level of scholarship. Over the past two decades, WIL has gained increased recognition as an effective pathway for students to manage the transition between theory and practice, university and professionalism. One Canadian study (Galarnau *et al.*, 2020) revealed that students who participated in WIL were more likely to be used in a field related to their studies and on a higher income level than those who did not.

Many HEIs' WIL programmes range from non-placement-based to immersive *in situ*, yet the disparity in student capabilities can dislodge the success of such initiatives. Not all students, particularly in undergraduate studies, are fully equipped to manage the transition into placements, nor are institutions adequately resourced to facilitate and support those transitions (Dean *et al.*, 2020). While some programmes are financially supported and well-resourced (for example, in Canada), others may receive very little. Careful design and delivery of WIL programmes is critical to ensuring quality opportunities and avoiding exacerbating disadvantages (Mackaway *et al.*, 2014). An additional benefit of a well-curated IB WIL course lies in the insights gained via stakeholder feedback, which benefit the development of feeder courses (Nehrt, 2018) and, arguably, the preparation of students for their WIL placements. To date, however, limited research has addressed the barriers and unavailability of WIL opportunities to specific groups of students like students from lower socioeconomic groups, Indigenous students, LGBTQ+ students and/or migrants (Jackson *et al.*, 2023; Li *et al.*, 2023). Introducing policies expanding higher education access for non-traditional students has further heightened the need for diverse student support services (Li *et al.*, 2023), thereby further increasing demands on WIL programmes. The incorporation of WIL at the undergraduate level is also very much dependent on the objectives of the degree programmes and the broader strategy of each university. In New Zealand, approximately 5,500 students completed a bachelor's degree in management and commerce, with some 285 specialising in IB (Ministry of Education, 2024a). While not all 285 students will complete a full WIL placement (as it is compulsory at only two of the eight universities), variations of WIL are likely in the form of client projects, (international) case competitions, interactive seminars or optional experiences (including study tours and foreign exchanges to other overseas universities where WIL is also integrated into the curriculum). Such innovative experiential teaching methods have been shown to be a key driver to the IB knowledge students gain, yet research highlights continued reliance on traditional methods, i.e. lectures and discussions (Kwok *et al.*, 2022). It is in this context that we present our insights into IB WIL strategies, reflecting on institutional best practices at a leading university in New Zealand for WIL. The University is explicitly known for WIL and prides itself as a "university of opportunity" with a diverse student body from over 140 countries, including a large cohort of Māori and Pasifika students and first-in-the-family students (Ministry of Education, 2024b).

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The University, and particularly its Business School, has built a reputation for developing industry-ready skills among its graduates. Unlike many other universities in New Zealand, the key point of distinction here is that WIL is a *capstone* requirement that *all* undergraduate business students must complete in the final year of their bachelor's degree. Unlike other WIL approaches noted earlier, the capstone WIL course requires students to seek a nine-week work placement within their final semester of undergraduate studies. The Business School has connections with a wide network of New Zealand-based industry partners with whom the students can seek placement to complete their WIL capstone project, as well as with some international organisations. Most of these opportunities are promoted on the intranet; however, students also apply to organisations outside of those partners or organise their own placements.

Changes brought about by COVID-19, and economic tightening led to the conditions requiring IB students to complete placements overseas being loosened. Benefits gained through connecting IB students to locally based international firms and the introduction of virtual placements (in offshore organisations) have reduced barriers to course completion while also preparing students for the new realities of remote and online working. Each of these options gives students exposure to possible industry opportunities beyond New Zealand, which is not only highly valued by potential employers but also necessary given New Zealand's diverse job market and multi-ethnic population. However, the importance of ensuring IB students are in placements with organisations that have a strong global focus remains critical to the development of adaptive skills in new graduates (Jackson and Dean, 2023). An IB capstone placement experience, bringing together expertise gained through a programme of standalone IB courses, as illustrated by Kwok *et al.* (2022), strengthens students' preparedness for the increasing internationalisation of organisations. Students' own previous experiences and cultural identity in relation to DEI can both extend and/or hinder their ability to respond to DEI initiatives. As such, students need to be provided with authentic experiences in seeing and/or applying insights from their specialist IB studies. Gaining direct experience in IB operations offers a deeper understanding of the complexities involved with working in multicultural and diverse environments, enabling students to develop an understanding of the varied nature of DEI initiatives in practice.

During the nine-week placement, students undertake work-related activities for the industry partner (jointly supervised by industry and academic mentors). In most cases, the placement is an entry-level position where the students are expected to contribute to the day-to-day organisational operations. During the semester, students are also required to complete academic coursework designed to encourage reflection on their progress aligned with the principles of authentic assessment (i.e. focused on the application of knowledge and skills to real-life settings, often through personal reflection), drawing on their understanding of theory in practice via their work-related activities. Equally, the industry partner is asked to provide feedback on the students' overall organisational performance. At the end of the semester, students deliver an oral brief and a written report on their learnings discussing any challenges they encountered during the placement. Such a WIL approach supports students to refine and develop soft skills sought and valued by industry partners (Shek *et al.*, 2023), including (but not limited to) an understanding of DEI, critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork and collaboration, time management, emotional intelligence and cultural awareness.

Indeed, the need to develop soft skills and subject matter expertise (i.e. so-called hard skills) in an integrated manner is well documented by academic research (i.e. Hains-Wesson and Lucas, 2024) and industry, as indicated in Table 1.

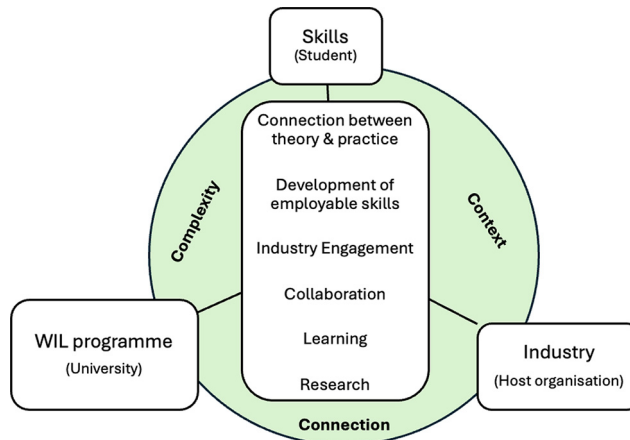
Such an approach to WIL supports a tri-partite relationship between the university, the students and the host organisations (Zegwaard *et al.*, 2023). Through effective

Table 1. Comparison of graduate skills and outcomes

Soft skills	Graduate learning outcomes	Industry needs based on McKinsey research	IB learning outcomes and key skills
Critical thinking	Be inquiring, open and agile thinkers able to seek out and address complex problems	Critical and analytical	Ethical decision-making leadership and management skills
Problem-solving	Be knowledgeable in a specialist area(s)	Leadership	International marketing skills
Teamwork and collaboration	Be able to work collaboratively	Interpersonal and empathy	Diversity, equity and inclusion skills
Emotional intelligence and cultural awareness	Be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large	Emotional and cultural intelligence	Global mindset
Conflict resolution	Be effective communicators	Negotiation	Cross-cultural communication/management
Ability to adapt and agility	Be adept at working in changing local and global contexts and environments	Adaptability/agile thinking	Entrepreneurial orientation

Source: Adapted from [Hilton Segel and Hatami \(2024\)](#) and [Hains-Wesson and Lucas \(2024\)](#)

collaborations involving practical constructivist experiences, each stakeholder works towards enabling the students' transition from novice towards experienced professional, equipping them for their future work ([Succi and Canovi, 2019](#)). The IB WIL placement provides students with the opportunity to experience and reflect directly on the uniqueness of IB as a field – i.e. *context*, *complexity* and *connection* ([Dau et al., 2022](#)). This experiential learning opportunity is important. Complexities in IB arise from multiplicities in size, connectivity, diversity and change ([Casson and Li, 2022](#)). A framework developed by [Van Tulder and van Mil \(2022\)](#) cites five key dimensions of structural, generative, dynamic, communicative and societal complexity. Context is as critical to consider yet also challenging because of its multidimensionality and dynamic nature ([Michailova, 2011](#)). Depending on what aspects of context are emphasised, outcomes and strategies will differ. To better comprehend interwoven dimensionalities, learners need to embrace effective pedagogies. Students need to be moved beyond leveraging class diversity and case studies, acknowledged by [Ramburuth and Daniel \(2011\)](#) as both important and valuable to IB education towards a more immersive learning model. Through this direct experience, students have the potential to develop their emotional intelligence and, in turn, a much-needed global mindset ([Paik, 2020](#)). Beyond this, the opportunity also benefits IB faculty by offering insights into their students' workplace experiences, facilitating reflection on whether existing curricula are fit for purpose and potentially even helping generate some possible research opportunities through discussions with host organisations, which we have depicted in [Figure 1](#). The interaction between the three parties to the WIL relationship contributes to authentic work-focused experiences that intentionally focus on bridging the theory-practice gap and must be considered in designing an inclusive WIL environment at a systems level ([Garant-Jones et al., 2024](#)).



Source: Authors' own depiction adapted from Succi and Canovi (2019)

Figure 1. Tripartite relationship behind IB work-integrated learning

3. The importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in a work-integrated learning context

Educational institutions and placement organisations play a pivotal role in recognising and valuing the diverse identities of students, particularly in shaping their decision-making processes influenced by intersecting identities (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024). In WIL, students face numerous structural and situational barriers that hinder their ability to fully engage in inclusive and rewarding experiences. These include financial constraints (e.g. paid vs unpaid placements), inequitable selection processes based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion and a lack of cultural competence among supervisors in both academic and industry settings. Additional challenges arise from ambiguous role expectations and limited professional development opportunities for students and workplace supervisors. Addressing these barriers through intentional and equitable programme design is critical, particularly within IB education, where adaptability, cultural competence and inclusivity are essential (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024).

In New Zealand, tertiary institutions embrace a learner-centric approach guided by frameworks such as the Ōritetanga Learner Success programme, which prioritises equity and inclusivity. For instance, *Kia Ōrite* – New Zealand's Code of Practice for students with impairments – offers a dynamic framework to foster inclusive learning environments (TEC, 2024). As a living document, *Kia Ōrite* builds staff confidence in supporting diverse learners and provides managers with tools to lead inclusivity initiatives effectively (Achieve, 2024). This approach is further enriched by the foundational principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi), which emphasises partnership, participation and protection. These principles ensure that Māori perspectives, language and customs are embedded within educational and workplace practices, promoting shared decision-making, cultural safety and equity (Duder *et al.*, 2022). In a multicultural society like New Zealand – home to over 160 ethnic groups – cultural competence and diversity management are critical not only for education but also for students' success in a globalised world (Diversity Works New Zealand, 2022).

The University and its Business School align closely with these principles through their mission as a “University of Opportunity”, fostering an environment that supports diverse learners. With a student body comprising over 40% Asian students, one-third identifying as Māori or Pasifika and 20% of New Zealand European origin, the institution reflects the multicultural fabric of the region. Its initiatives, such as appointing a Professor of Diversity, developing a Disability Action Plan and establishing a refugee education centre, demonstrate a proactive commitment to equity and inclusion. These efforts go beyond the traditional “business case” for diversity, adopting a broader social justice perspective to eliminate systemic barriers (Vangeli, 2024). By embracing an intersectional approach, the University enriches the educational experience for all students, empowering them to adeptly navigate the complexities of a globalised world (Šilenskyte and Rašković, 2024).

The University’s WIL programmes are strategically designed to integrate principles of equity and intersectionality, supporting diverse learning needs while fostering a meaningful connection between academic and professional environments (Primecz and Mahadevan, 2024). These programmes allow IB students to engage with global business dynamics in safe and supportive settings. Initiatives such as entrepreneurial pathways, virtual internships with overseas organisations and the “Gig” option (combining part-time paid employment with additional placements) exemplify innovative approaches to accommodate varying student needs. Capstone projects and partnerships with family businesses further expand opportunities for experiential learning, enabling students to develop practical skills and global competencies (Jackson *et al.*, 2023; Abdelzaher and Onumonu, 2024).

Collaboration among students, industry partners and educators is central to creating inclusive WIL experiences that align with the demands of IB education programmes. Visits by WIL programme managers to host organisations, workshops on employability skills and alternative placement pathways demonstrate the University’s commitment to addressing both student and industry needs. Such co-designed learning environments promote integrative thinking, or “synergistic mindsets”, essential for navigating global DEI challenges (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024; Al-Majeed, 2024). Professional development for academics and administrators ensures consistent and practical student support, enabling a transformative WIL experience (Zegwaard *et al.*, 2019).

From a pedagogical perspective, WIL placements enhance students’ social and cultural capital, fostering resilience, adaptability and professional networks. For international students, these experiences build agency and self-efficacy, equipping them to navigate the complexities of the global environment (Pham *et al.*, 2023). Cross-cultural interactions in multinational placements create opportunities for shared learning, benefiting both students and host organisations through exchanging ideas and practices (Newbury *et al.*, 2022). Such initiatives align with higher education pedagogical strategy, which increasingly emphasises co-designing curricula and WIL experiences to address global challenges such as sustainability, diversity and social responsibility (Zeivots *et al.*, 2024).

Ultimately, WIL serves as a vital mechanism for addressing DEI issues in IB education. By embedding equity considerations into programme design and fostering partnerships across cultural and institutional boundaries, universities empower students to tackle “grand challenges” and “wicked problems” within the global economy (Buckley *et al.*, 2017; Rašković, 2022). This paper examines how these principles can be further integrated into IB education, ensuring that WIL programmes prepare students to address DEI challenges and contribute as active agents of change in an increasingly interconnected world.

4. Examples in practice

Hay and Fleming's (2024) inclusive WIL framework aligns with four core tenets: self-determination, belonging, well-being and care and respect – essential elements for achieving student inclusiveness. Fostering inclusive environments that generate a sense of belonging is critical to making students feel welcomed, valued and supported (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024). In IB practice, this might range from cultural welcomes, such as a Māori pōwhiri or a Chinese tea ceremony, to preparing business cards for global business meeting exchanges, such as Japanese *meishi*. These culturally specific practices not only enhance the professional readiness of IB students but also underscore the importance of cross-cultural sensitivity and competence in global business contexts.

Hay and Fleming (2024) further acknowledge several key characteristics associated with inclusive academic supervisors and co-workers, including appreciating students' unique strengths, fostering safe spaces for learning, enabling professional connections, challenging biases and using culturally appropriate and inclusive language. These practices are particularly relevant in IB, where fostering global connections and understanding cultural nuances are essential for preparing students to navigate diverse markets and workplaces. Their work highlights the roles all stakeholders have in ensuring DEI learning needs are met, calling for a systematic approach to WIL that integrates DEI considerations across all stages.

With the increased prominence of DEI (Ferdman, 2020), there is hope that stakeholders are moving towards more inclusive practices in WIL, moving away from historical challenges arising from systemic biases, insufficient support systems and a lack of diverse perspectives. Failure to advance DEI initiatives puts learners at risk of graduating with inequitable experiences, organisations at risk of ineffective outputs and educational institutions at risk of reputational damage. Such examples include marginalised students being placed within the university due to difficulties in securing suitable host organisations; students' last-minute acceptance of placements in organisations lacking development and support structures to accommodate DEI needs; students accepting community-based (often unpaid) placements aligned with personal cultural values but offering limited professional development or authentic alignment with IB majors; and international students experiencing low-value IB experiences due to imbalances in expectations between host organisations, students and education providers.

Students' acceptance of their social identity is critical in their transition into the wider community and can be enabled through work-related experiences where they feel accepted and valued (Ferrigon and Tucker, 2019). The above examples illustrate the urgent need for a process model that allows IB students from diverse backgrounds to engage in meaningful learning experiences and successfully transition from learners to practitioners. Such a process model is built on the concept of equifinality, allowing different groups of students, regardless of their backgrounds and needs, to achieve common learning outcomes provided by an IB WIL programme. By addressing DEI through intentional design, these programmes not only benefit students but also help prepare them to thrive in an interconnected global economy

5. Recommendations for enhancing international business work-integrated learning programmes

Our viewpoint is intended primarily for university administrators, IB educators and policymakers interested in advancing the outcomes of WIL programmes. By incorporating DEI, these programmes can better prepare IB students for the complexities of global markets (Klarin *et al.*, 2021). DEI initiatives are essential not only for fostering inclusivity but also for enhancing the global readiness of IB graduates (Klarin *et al.*, 2021), ensuring they

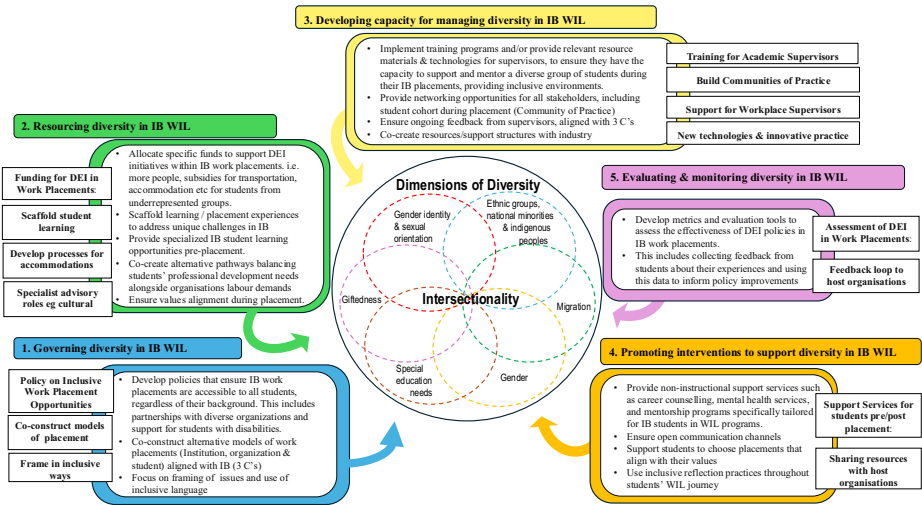
possess the skills and mindsets needed to thrive in diverse professional contexts. Educational practices that support the use of personal reflections and reflective learning are necessary to IB education, providing students with the readiness to handle new, unusual and changing situations (Calma *et al.*, 2024). WIL is an essential pedagogical tool in IB education, equipping learners for a job market where DEI is crucial from both a business case and social justice perspective (Rašković *et al.*, 2024; Šilenskyte and Rašković, 2024; Vangeli, 2024). WIL allows students to develop their agency through practically applying what they have studied and helping them socialise in a safe professional setting (Jackson *et al.*, 2023). Advancing learning beyond the domains of a typical classroom, WIL provides a sound framework for incorporating IB's uniqueness of context, complexity and connection (Dau *et al.*, 2022) through carefully developed processes and systems that support balanced relationships (learner, industry partner/host and HEIs). It is because of this tripartite relationship that IB WIL education is strongly positioned for innovation, collaboration and pedagogical advancement. Through these relationships, WIL and IB can expand the understanding of and responses to DEI (Šilenskyte and Rašković, 2024), and importantly, respond to the specific needs IB students have to be simultaneously exposed to different influences (Dieleman *et al.*, 2022). In turn, also through WIL, IB can also help advance our understanding of the DEI field, thus establishing a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship between IB and DEI (Rašković *et al.*, 2024). Recent advancements in "Reflecting on the five dimensions for inclusive education" proposed by Cerna and colleagues (2021), as well as drawing on the key findings from a scoping review undertaken by Garant-Jones *et al.* (2024), we propose an adapted framework for embedding DEI in WIL (see Figure 2). We highlight these under each dimension:

- (1) the need for relevant work placement policy developments;
- (2) alternative funding models and resourcing;
- (3) training for supervisors, academic and industry-based;
- (4) mentoring and support service initiatives pre- and post-placement for stakeholders; and
- (5) the development of metrics to evaluate and feedback into stakeholder experiences.

We encourage the collaborative co-creation of many of these initiatives by educational providers in partnership with students and placement organisations, recognising the importance of such tripartite relationships.

Previous research (Cheng *et al.*, 2021) has affirmed the value of WIL in enhancing students' academic capabilities. However, as highlighted by earlier examples, there is still significant work needed to ensure cooperative models of education and industry effectively address and develop the varied learning needs of diverse student groups (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024). A fully immersive IB WIL programme may not be achievable for IB educators at the outset; however, advancements towards WIL can begin with smaller study trips, structured reflections and collaborative projects (Calma *et al.*, 2024).

Undoubtedly, IB researchers are well-positioned to guide WIL stakeholders towards innovative practices that enhance understanding of DEI initiatives while addressing emerging challenges. Boafo and Dornberger (2024) affirm that organisations are reliant on the (global) mindset of individuals to drive entrepreneurial activities and innovative business responses. An example of one educational approach is the use of learning laboratories (Zettinig *et al.*, 2022), which can provide IB learners with a pre-placement opportunity to develop their readiness for real-world experiences. By emphasising cultural competence, inclusive curricula and experiential learning, IB programmes can better prepare students to



Source: Authors' own depiction adapted based on Cerna *et al.* (2021)

Figure 2. Embedding DEI in IB work-integrated learning

navigate and succeed in a diverse global environment (Dau *et al.*, 2022). Evaluative processes that involve key stakeholders play a critical role in refining these practices (Dimension #5, Figure 2). Building on the real-world business experiences gained through WIL, we argue that alternative models and approaches are necessary to expand stakeholders' capacity for effective diversity management.

In an increasingly complex world, we align with Köllen (2021), who calls for greater consideration of intersectionality to achieve this, and Fitzsimmons *et al.* (2023), who view DEI as a pathway to fostering a dynamic understanding of the context within IB settings. Given the multidisciplinary nature of business, adopting transdisciplinary research is imperative, particularly in IB, where the active involvement of diverse WIL stakeholders enriches outcomes. Research into WIL models that emphasise IB students as partners is essential to unlocking reciprocal stakeholder relationships, fostering individual agency (Baumber *et al.*, 2024) and promoting greater critical reflexivity (Vangeli, 2024).

Recognising DEI blind spots is another crucial area for future research. Van Bommel *et al.* (2023) underscore the importance of addressing both observable and unobservable characteristics of diversity. They advocate for a deeper understanding of social impacts, non-Western contextualisation and the nuanced relationship between diversity and inclusion, particularly within organisational settings. Given these insights, we urge IB educators to integrate DEI-focused dialogues and adopt innovative pedagogy, including the use of technologies (Dieleman *et al.*, 2022) into WIL to enhance stakeholder understanding and responses to DEI issues (Dimension #3, Figure 2).

A notable example is the Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit by the Association for Cooperative Education in British Columbia (ACEWIL, 2020), which offers actionable tools for placement organisations. These include:

- integrating and supporting diversity among students from international pathways;
- crafting barrier-free job descriptions;
- anonymising resumes to reduce bias;
- conducting culturally sensitive job interviews;
- supporting inclusive onboarding processes; and
- establishing success measures to evaluate DEI initiatives.

These tools provide tangible ways to reduce DEI barriers, whether by supporting learners who require additional accommodations or encouraging dialogues inspired by learners' unique perspectives.

IB educators must seek institutional support to ensure WIL programmes are adequately resourced. This is particularly important given the diverse approaches to WIL that can be integrated into various stages of the IB curriculum (Dimension #2, [Figure 2](#)). For institutions with high international student enrolments, framing a business case may be more straightforward due to the financial importance of this demographic. However, the resources developed should benefit all students, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Engaging in a university-wide community of practice can provide IB educators with diverse perspectives and innovative strategies for addressing DEI challenges. A critical area for future research is the role of language in shaping WIL experiences. [Ferrigon and Tucker \(2019\)](#) highlight the psychological implications of framing DEI issues, particularly in terms of abilities (e.g. people-first vs identity-first language). Examining how language influences WIL experiences within IB is essential, as geographic, cultural and social differences significantly shape students' learning journeys (Dimension #1, [Figure 2](#)).

Finally, WIL programmes in IB education can more effectively incorporate DEI by implementing targeted strategies to support the learning needs of diverse student populations. A formalised placement process should be established, using a checklist to evaluate opportunities based on academic relevance, meaningful tasks and host organisation standards while incorporating specialist advisors such as cultural or well-being experts to address varied student needs. Enhanced student support can be provided through flexible application deadlines, grant-supported virtual placements and alumni networks to create a robust system of local and international connections. Introducing self-reflection tools will enable students to disclose personal circumstances or learning needs in a safe manner, ensuring tailored support. Innovative practices using technology that also involve a collaborative approach further benefit the development of effective DEI tools for different stakeholders, recognising differences in their perspective. Placement agreements should be updated regularly to include inclusive language, accessibility measures and anti-discrimination policies while also promoting equity and belonging beyond legal compliance. Pre-placement DEI workshops should be expanded to address implicit bias, cultural intelligence and inclusive language through interactive exercises, with diverse facilitators reflecting varied social identities. Additionally, reflective practices should be embedded in assessments to help students understand and address inequalities, while host organisations' induction processes should be evaluated to ensure they align with DEI principles. By adopting these measures, WIL programmes in IB education can create a more inclusive environment that meets the needs of diverse students and strengthens DEI understanding across all stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

WIL is a transformative mechanism for fostering personal growth and agency, enabling stakeholders to address structural inequities effectively. Such inequalities span various institutional settings and socio-cultural environments, which is “home” to the IB discipline. WIL is an important part of IB education (Klarin *et al.*, 2021). In turn, the IB discipline can significantly enhance our understanding of DEI (Rašković *et al.*, 2024). In a world of diverse learners with varying needs, it is imperative to ensure all students feel included and supported, particularly those from marginalised and disenfranchised groups (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024). This perspective underscores the critical role of WIL in equipping stakeholders – including students, educators and industry partners – with the agility to respond to diverse learning needs (Garant-Jones *et al.*, 2024). By embedding DEI principles systematically, WIL programmes can promote empathy, inclusivity and systematic approaches to equity, ensuring that all learners – current and lifelong – are empowered to thrive in increasingly complex and diverse environments characterised by complexity, distance and diversity (Doh, 2021; Dau *et al.*, 2022).

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