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# Enriching work-integrated learning: conceptions of integrating Indigenous reflective practices

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## ABSTRACT

In an increasingly multicultural and globally connected world, educators are called to critically reflect on how their own cultural lenses shape approaches to student learning, particularly in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). This conceptual paper explores how reflective practice in WIL can be deepened by engaging with diverse ways of knowing, such as First Nations perspectives. While Western models of reflection remain dominant, they may not fully capture the lived experiences or worldviews of all learners. By identifying the limitations of conventional reflective frameworks and engaging with alternative epistemologies through literature and informal discussions with Indigenous curriculum experts, the authors propose a more inclusive lens for understanding reflection in WIL. These reflective dialogues helped shape a model encouraging more culturally responsive and meaningful student engagement with work focused learning. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for educators seeking to respectfully integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into WIL pedagogy, contributing to more holistic and equitable learning experiences.

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Reflective practice; work-integrated learning; Indigenous understandings; philosophy; cultural context

## Introduction

The changing nature of students learning about work as part of a purposely designed pedagogy, which interconnects to alternative insights, such as Indigenous approaches, requires a global re-think. As workplaces diversify, there are opportunities to reflect on methods to enhance learning about work (Jackson & Dean, 2022), which frequently includes reflective practice (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023).

One tactic utilised throughout the higher education sector is work-integrated learning (WIL). This is an intentionally designed curriculum that regularly focuses on enhancing students' employability skills, career identity and outcomes through self-reflection (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). However, there is modest research considering the benefits of non-Indigenous teachers connecting Indigenous approaches to reflective practice in WIL. By introducing

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Indigenous approaches to reflection, a new kind of learning occurs including feelings, knowing self, others, community, respecting elders and caring for land (Nielsen et al., 2022).

For example, the authors whose home countries are Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), and Australia (alongside other WIL teachers) are looking to Indigenous peoples for insights and learning to enhance their teacher scholarship and student learning outcomes in the domain of reflection. Further, Indigenous language revivals are influencing many of the changes teachers are beginning to implement in the classroom, which includes the workplace, such as Te Reo Māori (official language Indigenous to NZ) in place-name signs and the use of Māori and Australian Indigenous values within organisational strategic initiatives.

In NZ, the resurgence of Te Reo Māori and honouring of the Te Tiriti O Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) is having a profound impact on workplaces, and NZ society, bringing awareness to the importance of acknowledging traditional owners of the land. Similar cultural renaissances are happening in other countries too, such as Australia, Canada, and USA (Battiste, 2005; 2009; 2010; Lucas et al., 2022). This is influencing teacher WIL practice, pedagogy, assessment design and delivery. Yet, it remains unclear in the research how non-Indigenous teachers can genuinely transition learnings and practices from respective Indigenous peoples into reflective practice.

Reflection is a key pedagogical underpinning in WIL, and undertaking reflective practice and learning through an Indigenous perspective has many benefits to teacher scholarship. By non-Indigenous teachers having a better understanding (and the confidence) to approach reflective practice in this way, it can help to promote cultural understanding and inclusivity in the communities, universities, workplaces, and societies that teachers serve and care about.

To further advance this notion, the authors concentrate on what this might look like for non-Indigenous WIL teachers (and as key supporters for Indigenous teachers and teachings) seeking to incorporate different ways of knowing. To begin our journey, it is only right to acknowledge our positionality and to speak in the first person, which is a common narrative form in reflective practice for WIL (Dean et al., 2012). We, therefore, desire to position how we have considered the ethics of writing about Indigenous reflective practices as non-Indigenous researchers and WIL practitioners, as well as within the context of improving WIL pedagogy and placement learning, which is our domain.

## Background and context

We are two senior female academics of European descent who were born and raised in the country of the Indigenous processes we now reflect upon, which are New Zealand and Australia. As we explore a conceptual narrative about considering alternative ways to reflect in WIL throughout this paper, we actively attempt to identify our biases and work towards mitigating them. Our intention for this paper is to, therefore, contribute to broad understanding while respecting Indigenous reflective practices as non-Indigenous, white female WIL teachers who desire to make a difference in students' lives through reflective learning. We wish to emphasise the importance of cross-cultural dialogue, mutual learning, and ethical engagement with Indigenous knowledge to ensure Indigenous consideration is deliberated in reflective learning, especially within WIL pedagogy. We desire to be viewed favourably, regarding this paper's limitations and biases, by

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who we have the honour of teaching, as well as the teaching community we have the privilege of working with.

In this deliberation, we aim to contribute to preserving and future proofing the Indigenous practices we have directly or indirectly been privileged with, and which have enriched our lives, while also nurturing reflective learning for all students and teachers alike. It is important to note we do not shy away from the need to learn and understand our limitations. For example, the lead author has been involved in a sport course where WIL and Indigenous activities are integrated with theory to enhance connection to land, water, and country, e.g., a Waka ama (outrigger canoes) via field trip experiences, whereas, the second named author is new to such a concept, practice, theory, and type of learning, desiring to know more, and to gain confidence to implement different ways of undertaking reflection in WIL more generally, helping to improve student learning outcomes. We are, therefore, both keen to include Indigenous viewpoints when creating reflective practice frameworks and in cultural awareness, which is a key concept in WIL pedagogy and a challenging area of learning for students to master (Jackson & Dean, 2022).

Although we are non-Indigenous, we have extensive experience in the study and practice of reflection as a pedagogy within WIL. Our work includes a history of teaching reflection, familiarity with various frameworks, and research-informed development of reflective teaching practices we have implemented to enhance student learning (Hains-Wesson & Young, 2017; Lucas, 2015, 2017; Lucas et al., 2022; Lucas & Fleming, 2012). As reflective practitioners, our firsthand experience and backgrounds are central to this discourse. We recognise reflective characteristics from other perspectives, including Indigenous ways of knowing, can enrich our own practice and that of others. We acknowledge best practice in scholarship involving Indigenous perspectives often entails working in respectful partnership with Indigenous colleagues. For this conceptual paper, however, we made a deliberate and considered decision not to invite direct contribution from Indigenous collaborators. This decision was grounded in our awareness of the ongoing demands placed on Indigenous scholars and knowledge holders, and a commitment to avoid contributing to such burdens. Instead, we engaged critically and respectfully with existing Indigenous scholarship to inform our work. We recognise the limitations of this approach and have sought to be transparent in our positionality, acknowledging both the ethical tensions and the responsibility of non-Indigenous scholars to approach such work with care, humility, and accountability. By acknowledging our limited positionality, we aim to foster an inclusive and respectful approach for other non-Indigenous educators who are considering how to meaningfully integrate Indigenous reflective practices into WIL pedagogy.

Further, our writing journey presented here is as reflective practitioners who have taught students and teachers about reflection that concentrates on the value of humility, openness, and the continuous pursuit of deeper understanding. There are confines to the diverse and wide-ranging topics that could/should be of a focus for this paper. To assist with mitigating such a limitation, in the following sections, we briefly examine Indigenous and Western reflective practices to help identify potential learnings to be taken from these distinctive cultural contexts, traditional knowledge systems and community-based practices. We do this to afford a provocation for other teachers to consider. We then re-think such ponderings to help create a set of recommendations to enhance approaches to reflection in the evolving landscape of WIL.

More specifically, to achieve such a difficult mission, within the next sections of this paper, we first provide a brief overview of Western and Eastern reflective practice within a historical viewpoint before separating and concentrating on Western reflection compared to Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. This decision did not come lightly; however, we felt by structuring the paper in this way it would provide value to the reader. It is often universities' foundational underpinnings to the connecting of theory to practice that typically arise from Western and Eastern opinion, and despite the emergence of alternative philosophies, such as Indigenous reflective practice. By positioning the paper in this way, we are then in a better situation to consider Indigenous reflective approaches and in the context of WIL. Finally, a set of key recommendations are provided to support teacher practice.

This paper focuses on the opportunities presented by considering and integrating Indigenous perspectives of reflection. However we acknowledge the need for further exploration of systematic barriers including racism and prejudice, and the impact of current political contexts which is not covered currently.

### **A brief overview: Western and eastern critical reflection**

The history of self-reflection as a learning tool spans across various cultures, philosophies, and educational theories over centuries, revealing the enduring value placed on introspection for personal and intellectual growth. Self-reflection has roots in ancient civilisations, including those of Greece, India, and China. Philosophers such as Socrates, the Upanishads sages, and Confucius emphasise self-examination as a path to wisdom and ethical living (Gorry, 2011).

The Socratic Method, derived from the teaching practices of Socrates, is an early form of inquiry-based learning, encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection through questioning. This method highlights the importance of acknowledging one's ignorance as a first step towards developing knowledge (Gorry, 2011). Other philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius and Seneca advocated for daily self-reflection to develop personal virtue and to live a life in accordance with nature and reason (Ciubotaru, 2020).

Throughout the Middle Ages, Renaissance and at the height of rigorous religious practices people were encouraged to self-examine and reflect as means to spiritual growth and alignment with divine principles considering religious faiths. The benefit of self-reflection has transversed across the Enlightenment period, emphasising how knowledge comes from reflection on experiences (Dewey, 1910/1997; Hildebrand, 2008).

It was during modern education and psychology that theorists like John Dewey and Carl Rogers placed self-reflection at the heart of learning and personal development. Dewey's reflective thinking has influenced how we teach and learn today with other reflective thought leaders such as Donald Schön who focus on the importance of self-reflection in professional learning and development, spearheading such thinking, theory, and practice in the discipline of nursing, for example. It was Schön who introduced concepts like 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' to describe how professionals can think about their experiences in different ways, and via time, space, and place to improve their practice (Schön, 1983/2009). These early influences shaped how we now view, enact, and understand reflection through a Western viewpoint. Today, self-reflection is a key component of many educational approaches, which is very

much swayed by Western philosophy of the past and present, including WIL. However, alternative approaches to reflection, such as Indigenous approaches are urgently required for a more inclusive learning environment.

## Reflection in work-integrated learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a term used to describe educational activities to integrate academic learning of a discipline with its practical application in a work context. It is a form of experiential learning including a curriculum that connects learning to work experience, cooperative education, internships, and field placements (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). We define reflective practice within the context of WIL as a key pedagogical underpinning enabling students to critically examine their actions, beliefs and learning processes to foster continuous improvement and self-awareness before, during and after WIL experiences (Lucas, 2017; Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023). Reflective practice in WIL is recognised for its capacity to deepen understanding, foster personal and ethical growth, and enhance professional practice.

Thus, the teaching and assessing of reflective learning is a key principle in WIL (Bates, 2004; Dean et al., 2012; Doel, 2009; Howard, 2009). While the benefits of reflection are widely recognised, implementing reflective techniques in assessment is not always well understood (Dean et al., 2012) nor the implementation of other types of diverse reflective learning frameworks besides Western approaches to reflection (Kolb, 1984).

For instance, the Western historical importance of reflective learning within WIL is deeply intertwined with educational theory, especially experiential learning, helping to facilitate the transformation of experience into knowledge (Bolton, 2010; Brookfield, Lucas, 2017). Thus, when viewing reflective learning through the lens of a Western canon, it is John Dewey (1859–1952) who is often considered as the founder of experiential learning, especially the first forms of cooperative education in engineering.

Dewey emphasised the importance of reflection in education, arguing genuine learning occurs through the active exploration and manipulation of the environment (Dewey, 1910/1997; Hildebrand, 2008). Dewey's cycle of learning involves a continuous process of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, which has profoundly influenced how Western approaches to reflection are integrated into WIL.

Other experts in the field such as Kolb (1984) built upon Dewey's foundational ideas. Kolb (1984) is most known for the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) via four-stage cycles of learning, which include concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Consequently, Kolb's reflective model has become a cornerstone in designing WIL programmes from a Western philosophy of practice.

Another important Western influencer is Donald Schön (1930–1997) who noted the importance of reflection during and after an incident in the workplace to improve practice. Due to this person's foundational work several other models have been introduced widely across the Western higher education sector in WIL (Schön, 1983/2009). For instance, Gibbs Reflective Cycle (1988), which uses six stages that include describing an incident, associating feelings, evaluating understandings, analysis and providing a conclusion with an action plan (Gibbs, 1988). This model has been hybridised with simpler forms, such as Borton's framework (1970), assisting students with reflective writing and thinking (Borton, 1970).

Other models have built upon similar structured processes, assisting students to frame reflection that is deeply connected to theory and improving practice based on analysis of an experience (Bolton, 2010; Harvey et al., 2025; Lucas, 2017). Some of these models include the 5 step Rs framework (Bain et al., 2002) and Bolton's (2010) 'what if' framework, to name just a few. What these Western-based models have in common is that they are highly structured, influencing linear and chronological order in thinking and reflecting.

Finally, despite the depth of knowledge in the domain of Western reflective practice theories, frameworks and novel influences, there is less known about Indigenous ways of reflecting and how this aspect of inclusion and innovation might be incorporated into WIL by non-Indigenous teachers. When achieved well, this would support teachers to help students to consider connection to country, responsibility of land, difficult histories, and the painful past as well as reconciliation and truth telling.

In the following section, as non-Indigenous WIL teachers, we explore the possibilities of including Indigenous ways of reflecting to link theory to practice, unpack experience, extend knowledge, and improve practice. We argue this notion is different to Western ways of reflecting, and it is important to consider this when developing, designing, and delivering reflective practice in WIL, and beyond.

### Indigenous reflective practice

Indigenous reflective practices are of particular importance to Indigenous communities (Battiste, 2009). While reflective practices can vary widely among different Indigenous communities, the literature we have examined suggests there are several key principles underpinning Indigenous reflective processes.

For one, Indigenous practices take a holistic worldview where individuals are interconnected with their community, nature, ancestor, and spiritual domains (Battiste, 2005; 2009). Such a holistic perspective places an emphasis on interdependence of all living beings and an interconnectedness of the past, present and future. This is evident in the Māori whakatauki (proverb) *Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua* or *I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past*. Further, it is often through oral traditions and storytelling that play a significant role in Indigenous reflective practices. For instance, oral stories are used to convey cultural knowledge, values, wisdom, and teachings within the community group (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2005).

Second, in Aboriginal Australian cultures, the practice of 'yarning' – a form of storytelling and dialogue – provides a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences in an engaging and culturally appropriate manner (Bat et al., 2014). Yarning circles are used to create an inclusive space where everyone can contribute, fostering mutual respect and understanding (Bat et al., 2014; Cajete, 2017; MacCallum et al., 2010). This method of communication not only preserves cultural heritage but also facilitates reflective practice by allowing individuals to connect their personal experiences with the collective wisdom of their community.

Third, reflective processes may involve sharing personal narratives, myths, legends, and collective histories to deepen understanding and promote learning (Cajete, 2017). These stories contextualise information making it relatable to the individual while still connecting to the community. Meaningful learning comes from contextualised

information such as storytelling as it is the ‘most human of human forms of communication’ (Cajete, 2017, p. 115). Thus, ceremonies and rituals are integral to Indigenous reflective practices through the marking of important life transitions, changes in the seasons, various healing processes and significant community gatherings. During these ceremonial practices, usually of a sacred nature, spaces are created to enable reflection, meditation, prayer, and connection to spiritual forces. These events are sustained over generations and are contingent on intergenerational learning (Smith, 1999).

Indigenous reflective practices emphasise the critical role that elders, knowledge keepers, and community leaders play in sharing wisdom, teachings, and life experiences with younger generations (MacCallum et al., 2010). This form of knowledge transfer fosters continuity, cultural resilience, and a strong collective identity. Many Indigenous reflective practices are grounded in a deep strong connection to the land, geography, ecosystems, and natural elements where a community is located. It is common for land-based reflection to occur in natural settings such as forests, rivers, mountains, or sacred sites. This includes oral reflection, remembering, through belonging and imaginatively. The essence of this form of reflection fosters a deep sense of belonging, stewardship, and environmental consciousness (Wildcat et al., 2014).

These community-based connections may extend to spiritual guidance and healing where Indigenous reflection often integrate spiritual elements, ceremonies, and healing modalities to address physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). This may include seeking guidance from elders, engaging in prayerful contemplation, or participating in healing ceremonies.

A priority of Indigenous reflection is collective participation, dialogue, and consensus building within the community. Therefore, coming together is vital because collective wisdom plays a key role in many decision-making processes where communal reflection, storytelling circles, council meetings or other forms of group dialogue occur in honour of diverse perspectives and shared values. The communal gatherings are respectful and honour ancestral knowledge, cultural heritage, and traditional ways of knowing (i.e., epistemology). This reflection integrates ancient wisdom with modern challenges and opportunities (Bat et al., 2014).

Finally, by incorporating some of the above noted Indigenous ways of viewing the world into WIL, teachers can enrich reflective practices and foster a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all aspects of life (Arney, 2022). This approach not only enhances individual learning but also strengthens the community’s role in the educational process, including industry and government.

### Considering Indigenous and Western reflective practices

We drew on our extensive knowledge of these Western frameworks and examined the literature focused on Indigenous and Western reflective practices. This process was iterative, including a scoping exercise where we individually scanned relevant literature, reviewed it, then we met frequently to discuss our findings and how to present them within the content in our summary [table 1](#). From this process of reflection and critical conversation several aspects and their related key points arise. Understanding these points can help foster dialogue, mutual respect, and meaningful engagement between Indigenous and Western perspectives on reflective practice. For instance, teachers can identify aspects of both reflective

**Table 1.** Summary table.

Aspect	Indigenous reflective practices	Western reflective practices	References
Cultural context	Deeply rooted in cultural traditions, beliefs, and values specific to Indigenous communities	Influenced by philosophical frameworks such as critical reflection, phenomenology, and hermeneutics	Battiste, 2010; Eady et al., 2022; Keen & Eady, 2022
Worldview and epistemology	Holistic, interconnectedness with nature, community, spiritual. Knowledge is relational and experiential	More rational, objective, and individualistic. Knowledge is pursued through empirical observation, logical reasoning, and critical analysis	Arney, 2022; Cajete, 2017; Lucas, 2017; Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003
Methods and processes	Community based, storytelling, oral traditions, ceremonies, and rituals. Organic and connected to environment	Structured processes such as journaling, de-briefing, critical incident analysis, and guided reflection sessions	Cajete, 2017; Lucas, 2017; Smith, 1999
Purpose and goals	Foster harmony, connectedness, well-being, develop or preserve cultural identity and knowledge	Development of critical thinking, self-awareness, professional development, and improvement of future actions	Duder et al., 2022; Lucas & Fleming, 2012
Time and space	Embedded in time concepts, seasonal rhythms, and sacred spaces	Occurs within structured time limits, scheduled meetings, workshops and educational courses or programmes	Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Yeo et al., 2022
Ethical considerations	Focus is on community, cultural appropriation, respect for traditional knowledge, role of outsiders	Centred on the individual, confidentiality, respect for diversity, power dynamics and rights of individuals.	Lucas, 2017; Yeo et al., 2022

processes where there is connection and disconnection. To assist with this viewpoint, we have created a table (see Table 1) to help provide a comparison of the two approaches to reflective practice, highlighting unique features and differences. Although the aspects identified have commonality, the practices for the most part do not.

As the above table suggests, cultural context stems from the historical roots of societal development over time. Thus, Indigenous reflective practices are deeply rooted in the cultural traditions, beliefs, and values specific to Indigenous communities or groups (Battiste, 2010; Cajete, 2017). The phrase ‘deeply rooted’ indicates these practices are not recent developments but intrinsically linked to long standing cultural heritage, values and beliefs, going beyond just a method of learning to vital parts of cultural identity and community life. On the other hand, Western reflective practice is influenced by frameworks that systematically structures critical reflection, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, which underpin much of the WIL literature discussing reflective practice (Keen & Eady, 2022; Lucas, 2017).

Western and Indigenous reflective practices differ in their worldviews and, therefore, epistemology. Indigenous reflective practices are holistic with a strong emphasis on the interconnectedness of people to nature, community, and spirituality. Knowledge construction is also seen to be relational and experiential (Arney, 2022; Battiste, 2010; Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003). Although this may be similar in some Western cultures it is more profound in Indigenous communities of practice. In contrast, Western-style reflective practice tends to be rational, objective, and individualistic. While some philosophical frameworks, such as Gibb’s cycle (Li et al., 2020; Spiteri, 2024) encourage reflection on emotions, practitioners seldom view this as a critical aspect of their practice. Western knowledge in reflective practice is often pursued through empirical observation, logical reasoning, and critical analysis (Lucas, 2017; Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023).

The methods and processes of reflection essentially differ between Indigenous and Western systems with the former being more community based and relying on belonging to a group/s. Whereas, Indigenous reflective practice is steeped within storytelling, oral traditions, ceremonies, and rituals (Cajete, 2017; Smith, 1999). This type of reflection can be viewed as organic, less structured, yet more connected to the environment compared to Western reflective frameworks (Kolb, 1984). Additionally, the research proposes that Indigenous people use reflection to foster and maintain harmony, connectedness, and well-being in a community to preserve cultural identity and knowledge (Arney, 2022). While Western reflection aims to develop critical thinking, self-awareness, professional development, and improvement of future actions and is more commonly seen in learning fields such as education, health care, and leadership areas (Zegwaard & Pretti, 2023).

The purpose of reflection may also be influenced by factors such as time and space with Indigenous reflection embedded in cyclical time concepts, seasonal rhythms, and sacred spaces to enhance understanding (Yeo et al., 2022). Western reflection typically occurs within very structured time limits, including scheduled meetings, workshops, and educational programmes in both formal and informal settings such as workplaces (Bolton, 2010; Lucas & Fleming, 2012).

Finally, most reflective processes incorporate ethical considerations, however, particularly when involving Indigenous groups this is especially important. These considerations include respect for community, cultural appropriation, traditional knowledge, and the appropriate role of outsiders (Bat et al., 2014; Cajete, 2017; Lucas, 2017; MacCallum et al., 2010; Yeo et al., 2022).

### **Indigenous reflective practices and WIL**

There appears to be a modest amount of research advising how Indigenous reflective practice can contribute significantly to WIL programmes, linking theory and practice, experiential learning and broadening of knowledge (Eady et al., 2022; Harvey et al., 2025; Smith, 1999). For one, Indigenous reflective practices such as storytelling can help to emphasise the connection between one's lived experience and broader cultural concepts. These practices may also support linking theory to practice by bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application as may be witnessed with debriefing in clinical practice or teaching practicums.

Responsibility and relationships are central to WIL and Indigenous paradigms. Thus, Indigenous storytelling and sharing of stories illustrate how theoretical concepts are applied to the real world, which can help make abstract ideas more relatable and understandable to both the teacher and the student. Thus, we posit a more holistic perspective provides opportunities to integrate emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects of an experience, aligning more closely with industry needs, such as the multi-faceted nature of many professional fields in healthcare and business management.

Indigenous methods of reflection enhance learning in the realm of personal narratives to reflect on experiences, which can foster a deeper emotional and cognitive connection to the learning material and context. However, emotions can be dismissed as a vital driver of learning in academia but feature strongly in Indigenous methods of reflection (Lucas, 2015). Therefore, we could encourage our students to draw on their emotions as a trigger for their learning.

Further, workplaces are communities of people, thus, taking a community approach to workplaces would also involve extending the learning process to consider the Indigenous community of knowledge and wisdom, providing diverse perspectives and learning. Incorporating Indigenous reflective practices enriches the learning experience by introducing diverse viewpoints and methodologies. Therefore, broadening the scope of knowledge development in WIL.

Due to WIL providing students with opportunities to broaden their knowledge beyond the classroom and the delivery of theory (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Lucas, 2015), cultural awareness can be further enhanced by promoting understanding and appreciation of diverse cultural practices and worldviews. We believe this is crucial in a globalised work environment, which teachers need to prepare students for and where students are entering in mass.

In summary, effective integration of both Indigenous and Western reflective practice methods into curriculum development and delivery as well as collaborative projects, and workplace learning, could ensure teachers are better preparing their students for the future of work.

### **Integration of Indigenous principles into reflective practice within WIL**

Although Indigenous reflective practices can vary widely among different Indigenous communities, there are some key principles underpinning Indigenous reflective processes (Cajete, 2017). These approaches could be applied to current reflective practices in WIL to better prepare students for the evolving landscape of education and industry.

We suggest several actions teachers can take to foster reflective practice in WIL that aligns with societal transitions toward alternative viewpoints, such as Indigenous reflection. Examples include New Zealand's bicultural approach honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Australian Indigenous 'yarning' practices, and a broader cultural focus across government and media on the importance of Indigenous connection to land through alternative narratives. The following recommendations are, therefore, only a starting point, assisting to highlight our context while also illustrating how we consider Indigenous ways of seeing the world, which is influencing our practice as non-Indigenous WIL teachers and scholars.

We acknowledge the importance of co-creation and collaboration with Indigenous colleagues, particularly in the development of culturally sensitive frameworks. While we did not engage directly with Indigenous scholars in the co-authoring of this conceptual paper or seek formal feedback on [Table 2](#), we did consult with Indigenous curriculum experts within our respective universities to inform and shape our thinking. Their advice guided our understanding of respectful representation and use of Indigenous perspectives in educational contexts. We recognise this engagement does not replace the value of direct collaboration or co-authorship, and we view this work as a preliminary contribution, a pilot model that would benefit from further validation and development in partnership with Indigenous educators and communities.

The approaches set out in [Table 2](#) can also include engaging in reflective practice aligning with a student's identity or to develop an approach resonating with a student's learning preference and irrespective of their cultural alignment (Harvey et al., 2025; Reid & Dawes, 2022). Identifying opportunities to encourage students to share their

**Table 2.** Recommendations for Integration of Indigenous principles into reflective practice within WIL.

Recommendation	Connection to WIL	References
Curriculum development	Reflective practices aligned with personal identity and cultural sensitivity to motivate students to make sense of their learning	Eady et al., 2022; Duder et al., 2022; Reid & Dawes, 2022
Encouraging storytelling	Sharing WIL experiences through storytelling and group discussions enhances peer learning and cultural understanding	Cajete, 2017 Nielsen et al., 2022
Transition phases in WIL	Ceremonial elements during transitions mark milestones and foster belonging and accomplishment in WIL programmes	Reid & Dawes, 2022 Yeo et al., 2022
Intergenerational and peer learning	Interactions with mentors and community members enrich reflective practices and knowledge exchange	Viscogliosi et al., 2020
Reflection activities in natural settings	Reflective activities in culturally significant settings enhance understanding of environmental sustainability and connection to the land.	Duder et al., 2022; Reid & Dawes, 2022
Holistic well-being and mindfulness	Workshops on holistic well-being and traditional healing practices support students' mental, emotional, and spiritual needs	Keen & Eady, 2022
Community collaboration and engagement	Collaborations with Indigenous communities in WIL create culturally relevant and mutually beneficial learning experiences	Nielsen et al., 2022; Yeo et al., 2022
Culturally diverse educators	Educators' respect for ancestral knowledge and cultural protocols fosters trust-based relationships and ethical considerations in reflective practices	Keen & Eady, 2022; Nielsen et al., 2022; Reid & Dawes, 2022; Yeo et al., 2022

experiences and learning through forms of storytelling considers Indigenous oral traditions (Nielsen et al., 2022). Utilising formats of verbal presentations, reflective group circles and reflections where WIL experiences are shared with peers, either informally or formally, can be highly beneficial. Further, as students transition within their WIL programme, it may be possible to incorporate ceremonial or ritualistic elements at these transition times (Yeo et al., 2022).

Such rituals may include debriefs, orientations or graduation ceremonies to help mark the milestone achieved and/or foster a sense of belonging and accomplishment. The bringing of students back to a common position, when often distanced during a placement, for example, may assist with WIL transitional experiences and career pathway considerations (Eady et al., 2022; Reid & Dawes, 2022; Viscogliosi et al., 2020). By involving community members in programme design, guest lectures and experiential learning projects, students can explore reflective practices from many perspectives, thus, potentially adding new dimensions to their understanding of linking theory to practice (Nielsen et al., 2022; Yeo et al., 2022).

Finally, through integration of Indigenous principles in reflective practice, WIL programmes can promote inclusive and culturally responsive transformative learning experiences for students. These experiences can help honour Indigenous ways of knowing (i.e., including reflective practices), foster intercultural competence (i.e., crucial to any disciplines of learning) and prepare students for increasingly diverse professional contexts (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). These outcomes can be achieved through collaboration with Indigenous stakeholders (i.e., community, organisational, HE institutions, industry, and students) and requires ongoing reflection by WIL teachers (Yeo et al., 2022.). Indigenous reflective practices in WIL can enable

greater consideration of these relationships, learnings, and diverse ways of knowing by bridging the gap between individuals and community that includes the workplace and world.

## Discussion

We focus on the authors' views of the importance of non-Indigenous WIL teachers considering diverse ways to integrate reflective practice into WIL pedagogy, namely Indigenous ways of knowing. We believe this is drastically needed in the workplace as much as it is required in higher education. Inclusion of storytelling and oral traditions aligns well with experiential learning theories central to WIL, thus enhancing engagement and retention of knowledge, both Indigenous and Western, through personal and shared experiences. Ritualistic transition elements within WIL programmes may also find the recommendations listed in this paper helpful to foster a greater sense of belonging and accomplishment for students.

Mentorship and peer learning can also provide teachers and students with opportunities to engage with industry professionals and, thus, Indigenous community members to help co-create culturally relevant and respectful WIL experiences. Utilising reflective activities in natural settings may also enhance the teacher and student perspective about connection to the environment while supporting holistic well-being in a changing world that may feel overwhelming and bewildering at times. Teachers should be encouraged and supported to adopt a more confident and comprehensive approach to education, including diverse ways of knowing the world through a cultural lens, such as Indigenous approaches to integrating reflective learning.

## Conclusion

This paper focuses on individual reflective practice teacher scholarship and student learning in the domain of WIL, exploring its importance, methodologies, and impacts on student learning and development when considering Indigenous approaches to learning. While individual reflection is a significant aspect of WIL, it is essential to acknowledge group-based reflective practices are also widely used and hold considerable value (Spiteri, 2024). These collective approaches can enhance collaborative learning and provide diverse perspectives. However, the scope of this discussion remained on individual reflective practices within a WIL context.

Based on our limited understanding and the specific scope of the paper, our conversation throughout this paper brings us to consider how best we can present reflection within Indigenous, relational, and trans-cultural knowledge framework (Datta, 2015; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003), and as part of WIL pedagogy, teacher practice and student learning in a changing world. A main question running throughout this paper was: What might this look like? We offer several suggestions in [table 2](#).

As non-Indigenous WIL teachers, we explored ways to introduce alternative reflective practices, namely Indigenous ways of knowing, feeling, and learning that is culturally informed for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students who undertake WIL. This approach would require co-creation and collaboration with Indigenous communities with an interest in WIL education.

Throughout the paper, we endeavoured to demonstrate how incorporating Indigenous processes into reflective practice offers valuable insights and alternative perspectives to bridge theory and practice, enhance experiential learning, and broaden knowledge in WIL. We highlight the benefits of integrating Indigenous methods to enrich reflective practices, which are traditionally dominated by Western approaches in WIL. By valuing and incorporating Indigenous reflective practice, WIL programmes can foster more inclusive and well-rounded teaching experiences for all students while supporting Indigenous and non-Indigenous WIL teachers to preserve and consider Indigenous knowledge in reflective practice.

In summary, this paper provides a valuable contribution to WIL by advocating for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to reflective practice. By integrating Indigenous perspectives, we argue WIL programmes can better prepare students for the future of work, promote ethical practices, and foster a deeper understanding of the diverse world around us. The paper also serves as a starting point for further research into the intersection of Indigenous knowledge and Western reflective practices in WIL, and higher education more broadly.

### Limitations

We again acknowledge our identity as white women, which is a key limitation in writing this conceptual paper. However, developing the paper has broadened our perspectives of reflection in WIL, enhanced our cultural sensitivity, sense of connectedness, confidence and deepened our personal growth and learning. We encourage others to travel with us as we begin to learn together and strive to become better WIL teachers. We note there could be limits to the adaptability or adoption of Indigenous reflective frameworks to other contexts. The scope of this paper does not go beyond WIL as a discipline.

### Future directions

Further research is required to offer diverse insights into the intersection of Indigenous knowledge and Western reflective practice in WIL, which is a complex topic. These insights may come from co-partnering and co-creation, with Indigenous experts about reflective frameworks or the undertaking of case studies to further explore current and the future practice of Indigeneity in HE and WIL which is a worthwhile research area to pursue.

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