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USING SIMULATED WORKPLACE LEARNING AND ROLEPLAYING IN TEACHING BUSINESS LAW IN PRACTICE

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I INTRODUCTION

Role-playing, group work and work-integrated learning ('WIL') have become major features of tertiary education. Each learning approach has a number of claimed benefits. This article explores the confluence of these learning tools in a unit which incorporates aspects of each, but with a twist. We examine these phenomena in the context of a recently re-designed law unit, Business Law in Practice ('BLIP'), in an undergraduate business law program at a Western Australian university. BLIP is the capstone unit of the University of Western Australia's undergraduate Business Law Major, which is available in the Bachelor of Commerce. The unit was updated in 2020 to allow for more interactive teaching, and to enable scaffolded learning in groups role-playing the establishment and operation of a business start-up. As such, the unit combines *group work*, the largely simulated aspects of *role-playing*, and the *workplace*-focused aspects of WIL. However, it stretches boundaries even further by stepping into a relatively new area of educational practice, which we will refer to as 'simulated workplace learning' ('SWL'). This article does not revisit the already rich literature on group work, role-playing, and WIL, but focuses instead on the SWL aspects of BLIP.

This article first outlines the design, educational objectives and background to BLIP (Part II). It then outlines the major features of group work, role-playing and WIL, before focusing on the unique contours of SWL, comparing those models to the bespoke compilation of BLIP.

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(Part III). We then reflect on the benefits of applying these tools in the specific context of BLIP (Part IV). We conclude with our perspective on opportunities for improvements and lessons learned (Part V).

II THE DESIGN AND BACKGROUND TO BLIP

BLIP attracts around 160–170 students annually, and is currently offered once per year. As a core capstone unit, BLIP builds on the knowledge embedded in the previous Business Law Major units, and draws them together to develop collaborative, cognitive, technical, research and communication skills relevant to business law.

BLIP was designed with the deliberate rationale of being interactive, practical, skills based, fun, informative and interesting. In 2019, we considered that Business Law Major students had consistently learned their units through traditional methods of mostly passive knowledge absorption, application of that knowledge in exams and assignments, before moving on to the next unit. We saw that students consequently lacked knowledge and experience about how the law applies to business *in practice*. To cure this, we designed BLIP. We posited that exposing students to the experience of devising, working in and running a business start-up in an environment mimicking the real world would be an excellent scaffold for students to apply the knowledge and skills they had learned throughout the Business Law Major. Due to the large number of students and the practical vagaries of diverse businesses, placing students as interns in real-world business environments was not practicable, and so their businesses needed to be simulated, and we would require students to role-play working in those businesses.

BLIP uses a blended learning design, combining online lectures and independent reading with a weekly two-hour mandatory face-to-face workshop. In the first week of semester, students are placed in a group of around 10 students based on student last name, and work together in that group throughout the 12-week semester in the workshops and other scheduled meetings to design and role-play running the simulated business entity conceived and designed by the group.

The students are given five portfolio challenges from various areas of business law and practice, which typically include: teamwork and leadership theory and skills; managing intellectual property; contract management and design; legal risk management; conflict and dispute resolution; and business engagement skills and strategies. For each portfolio challenge, two to three group leaders are allocated, and two to three record keepers, with all students taking their turn to act as group leader and record-keeper once per semester. Otherwise, the roles played by the students are determined by the groups themselves, and must adapt to the particular business the groups design, and the individual portfolio challenge.

Detailed instructions are provided for each portfolio challenge, which generally run for two weeks. Students must also conduct independent research specific to both their unique entity and each challenge. This is designed to facilitate the development of leadership, collaboration, communication, organisational and accountability skills, and a better understanding of law in practice.

At the end of each portfolio, the groups prepare a written report, with a shared mark, outlining how and why they navigated and resolved the challenge as they did for each of their businesses. To test their knowledge of the reading materials and lectures, students take 5 quizzes aligned to each challenge. Students also prepare two personal reflections on their learning and teamwork experiences during semester. These assessment items are individually marked. There is no exam. To promote accountability and a positive teamwork experience for each portfolio challenge, students must anonymously peer review their colleagues' performance, and prepare a report of the work they personally undertook in navigating the challenge. The group record-keepers must keep detailed records of meetings and workshops, and of task allocation and completion.

There is constant pressure in the unit to be working, drafting reflections and reports, researching, preparing for and attending workshops and meetings, and completing the quizzes by the deadlines. It is in this simulated high-pressure working environment, designed and run by the students, that the legal challenges are addressed through the semester.

III ROLE-PLAY, GROUP WORK, WORK-INTEGRATED LEARNING AND SIMULATION-BASED LEARNING IN LEGAL EDUCATION: OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

As mentioned in the introduction, BLIP is a melange of teaching and learning tools which combine the simulation features of role-playing, the collaborative nature of group work, and the workplace environment of WIL. In searching for a pedagogical 'home' for this unique combination, we encountered the relatively nascent topic of SWL. It is useful to first briefly revisit some of the chief characteristics of role-playing, group work, and WIL to identify whether and, if so, how BLIP aligns with those concepts, before turning to SWL and locating BLIP in that innovative educational territory.

Role-playing

Role-playing is difficult to define conclusively,¹ and it is not this article's purpose to do so. We employ the nomenclature of 'role-playing' in BLIP, while acknowledging its many guises

¹ See, eg, Shawna Shapiro and Lisa Leopold, 'A Critical Role for Role-Playing Pedagogy' (2012) 29(2) *TESL Canada Journal* 120, 121.

and changing shape over the decades, and BLIP's perhaps weak relationship to conventional role-playing models. Traditionally, the focus of role-playing in law has been the development of soft skills in the delivery or practice of the law and its related fields,² particularly in relation to mooting, dispute resolution and client negotiation and interviewing — however, role-playing extends across all aspects of education. As Soo et al note: '[r]ole-playing in education has been gaining popularity with recognition of its benefits and it has been applied in training a variety of professions. Apart from being used to teach courses on “soft” skills it is also used in a much wider and general context in education'.³ It is claimed to be a valuable learning tool:

In relation to the learning of soft skills, role-playing has several other advantages. It puts students into real-life problem settings and helps create more initiatives for active learning; when done in groups, it encourages team building and brainstorming among students, both observing and participating in the role-playing sessions; and it provides students with the necessary confidence for dealing with similar situations in their real-life work. More important, role-playing itself can also be fun for educators and students.⁴

Role-playing in legal education traditionally tends to go through the stages of briefing students, the actual role-play, and then debriefing.⁵ Usually, teachers sketch out some broad parameters, such as a fact scenario, allocated roles, and provide written instructions.⁶ Teachers usually attend, and even direct, the role-playing sessions. The role-playing tends to be a discrete episode in the teaching programme, perhaps for one or several sessions. The role-playing in BLIP differs in some significant respects. Teachers exert less pressure on the parameters in BLIP role-playing than in conventional settings. We allocate leaders and record-keepers, but leave it to students to determine how those roles are performed. We do not scrupulously script or structure scenarios, with the exception of the dispute resolution portfolio, which is co-written by two students and approved by teachers. Otherwise, we provide detailed instructions setting brief parameters for each portfolio challenge, but students must then interpret those instructions, determine what work needs to be done, and allocate roles to achieve that. Further, we do not physically attend the entire role-playing sessions. Rather, student groups work in break-out rooms, with teachers circulating through those rooms for each workshop, asking and answering questions and providing feedback. Finally, the role-playing in BLIP is not in isolated episodes. Rather, it is an integral feature of the unit, embedded in the unit's very DNA, and runs for the entire 12 weeks of the semester.

² Gary Soo et al, 'Role-Playing for Group Learning of Law in Engineering and Construction Programs' (2009) 1(4) *Journal of Legal Affairs and Dispute Resolution in Engineering and Construction* 169, 170.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Group Work

There is very rich literature on group work in tertiary education,⁷ which we will not revisit. We mention group work only to acknowledge that BLIP is essentially designed around it. As mentioned, students work together *as a group* in their simulated business start-ups, with shared marks for major aspects of the unit's assessment, and students peer review their colleagues' performances, including their teamwork and leadership. Group work, in its broadest sense, is usually also an essential component in the other two features of BLIP's design – role-playing and WIL, simply because students tend not to work alone in either of those contexts. Each of those contexts also have the same learning objectives as group work in developing collaboration, communication, self-reflection and teamwork skills.

Work-integrated Learning

WIL 'is an umbrella term referring to a range of practical experiences designed to give students valuable exposure to work-related activities relevant to their course of study'.⁸ It generally requires universities to partner with real-world employers to place students in internships and projects.⁹ WIL is said to be necessary to assist university graduates in being career-ready, and to prepare students 'to be flexible, adaptive and able to apply their technical skills to real-world situations'.¹⁰ WIL is the core of many professional training schemes, increasingly featured in university programs, and remains a cornerstone in establishing work readiness. This is reflected in the literature, including the re-naming of the previously titled 'Journal of Co-Operative Education' to the 'Journal of Work Integrated Learning' in 2018.¹¹ We recognise the value of important aspects of WIL, and the beneficial student attributes it can help develop. We acknowledge the perhaps compelling argument that *actual* workplace learning, through placements, projects and internships, is superior to any simulated cousin. The *real* pressures of a *real* placement might induce better incentives and learning outcomes than those achieved through a simulated alternative.

However, BLIP does not implement a conventional WIL design. While the primary reason is the practical challenge of arranging 160 placements, the simulated nature of BLIP's SWL also helps avoid the numerous challenges of WIL, including identifying suitable projects and tasks for students to complete, ensuring students have some decision-making capacity which they could learn consequences from, host capacity to supervise,¹² navigating relationships

⁷ See, eg, Martin Davies, 'Groupwork as a Form of Assessment: Common Problems and Recommended Solutions' (2009) 58 *Higher Education* 563.

⁸ Universities Australia, *Work-Integrated Learning in Universities: Final Report* (Final Report, 2018) 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ 'About the Journal', *IJWIL* (Web Page) <<https://www.ijwil.org/about-the-journal>>.

¹² Denise Jackson et al, 'Employer Understanding of Work-Integrated Learning and The Challenges of Engaging In Work Placement Opportunities' (2017) 39(1) *Studies in Continuing Education* 35.

between host organisations and universities,¹³ and fairly assessing student performance.¹⁴ It is not always practical, feasible, or even ethical, to place and fairly assess students in real environments. Even outside the serious challenges imposed by a pandemic, good WIL programs require meticulous planning and cooperation across diverse organisations. It is also sometimes highly doubtful whether students' placements actually result in real challenges and learning, or in the modern-day equivalent of coffee-making and photocopying. Moreover, even without these problems, internships as exploitative unpaid labour raise difficult ethical issues.¹⁵ Further, 'real' WIL would also compromise the collaborative aspect of BLIP that we value. While, as mentioned, working *as part of a group* is (usually) integral to a placement in a real-world workplace, students rarely work alongside, and in collaboration with, other students in WIL placements. Instead, we rely on students' responsibilities to other team members to simulate a pressure to do well, alongside the need to attract good marks in the assessment items.

In view of the challenges of WIL mentioned above, simulation of a workplace environment becomes an attractive alternative. In particular, the more controlled environment of SWL can be easier to moderate than the real-world vagaries of students' diverse experiences across potentially very different work environments, which in itself raises potential equity issues. It also ensures that any risks resulting from student activities remain theoretical rather than the potentially real risks that could be experienced by businesses as a result of hosting students. But what is SWL, and how does BLIP comport with that model?

Simulated Workplace Learning

As with role playing, and even WIL, there is no recognised definition of 'simulated workplace learning'. A version of the term seems to have originated in Margaret Jollands' 2016 article on chemical engineering students.¹⁶ Jollands observes that while work experience is generally considered the best way to develop employability, there are often too few work placements to meet graduate demand.¹⁷ To combat this challenge, Jollands developed what she labelled 'non-placement authentic work integrated learning'. Her module used a real chemical engineering project from a local STEM company, with rich complex resources. Students were co-supervised by Jollands and an engineer from the project company, who met with students every fortnight for consultation. The students also participated in a variety of

¹³ See, eg, Sarojni Choy and Brian Delahaye, 'Partnerships Between Universities And Workplaces: Some Challenges For Work-Integrated Learning' (2011) 33(2) *Studies in Continuing Education* 157.

¹⁴ See, eg, Judith McNamara, 'The Challenge of Assessing Professional Competence in Work Integrated Learning' (2013) 38(2) *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 183; Denise Jackson, 'Challenges and Strategies For Assessing Student Workplace Performance During Work-Integrated Learning' (2018) 43(4) *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 555.

¹⁵ See, eg, Jackson (n 14).

¹⁶ Margaret Jollands, 'A Non-Placement Authentic Simulated Work Integrated Learning Project For Final Year Students' (Conference Paper, Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, 21 August 2017).

¹⁷ Ibid 170, citing Calvin Smith et al, 'The Impact of Work Integrated Learning On Student Work-Readiness' (Final Report, Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, 2014).

bespoke workshops targeted at developing critical employment skills. Jollands noted the dearth of research showing whether learning outcomes are equivalent to real work experience.¹⁸ Jollands' research suggests that an authentic simulated WIL project is as effective as work experience in increasing students' confidence in their work readiness. We contend, at minimum, that it is certainly better than traditional learning alone, and refer again to some of the potential ethical and equity problems connected to WIL mentioned above.

Various nomenclature for SWL is used, and it takes different forms, both analogue and digital, in different settings. For example, 'workplace simulations' are particularly familiar in vocational education settings, where mechanics students might work in a 'garage', future cooks will prepare meals in a replica kitchen for real guests, and horticulture students will make bouquets in a room set up to look like a florist.¹⁹ Alternatively, the workplace simulations may be digital, including using games to teach students, such as flight simulators for training pilots.²⁰ As with many educators, we are beholden to the COVID-19 pandemic for accelerating our development of the online and flipped classroom in this unit. As recent literature has shown, the pandemic also furthered the adoption and greater acceptance of SWL in response to interns being unable to enter physical working environments during lockdowns.²¹ This prompted institutions to search for a range of innovative solutions and redesign their conventional placement-based activities or programs to enable students to meet graduate profile criteria through alternative means, such as virtual or simulated working experiences.²²

A 2017 United States Department of Education report explored the value of SWL, and compared various simulated work-based learning models, as captured in Table 1 below.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, eg, Helen Jossberger et al, 'Learning in Workplace Simulations in Vocational Education: a Student Perspective' (2018) 11 *Vocations and Learning* 179.

²⁰ See, eg, Judene Pretti, Jenny Fleming and Karsten Zegwaard, 'Refereed Proceedings of the 4th WACE International Research Symposium on Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, 2022, Kanazawa Institute of Technology, Japan' (Conference Paper, WACE International Research Symposium on Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, 2022).

²¹ See, eg, Selma lipinge et al, 'Using Simulations to Improve Skills Needed for Work-Integrated Learning Before and During COVID-19 in Namibia' (2020) 21(5) *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 531; Natarsha Tezcan et al, 'Scaffolded, Simulated Work-Integrated Learning in Design Education : Beyond the Live Project' (2020) 21(5) *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 521; Yvonne Wood, Karsten Zegwaard and Wendy Fox-Turnbull, 'Conventional, Remote, Virtual and Simulated Work-Integrated Learning : A Meta-Analysis of Existing Practice' (2020) 21(4) *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning* 331 ('Wood et al').

²² Ibid.

Table 1. Models of Simulated Work Based Learning

	Simulation Tools	Simulated Workplaces	School-based Enterprises
Motivation	Create safe opportunities to teach specific skills or tasks associated with a given job	Replicate a range of workplace environments designed to develop employability skills and increase student engagement	Offer students a holistic experience of running an actual business to foster entrepreneurial skills and deepen student engagement
Intended skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical thinking/ decision-making - Preparation/exposure to specific work scenarios - Confidence - Technical skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employability (on time, drug free, interviewing, safety, professionalism, dress) - Teamwork - Responsibility - Leadership - Career awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entrepreneurism - Critical thinking - Problem solving - Communication - Collaboration
Typical program elements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of common and emergency scenarios - Some clinical credits for simulation time (health care) - Debrief/reflection processes that allow for learning from mistakes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classes organised as student-led companies - Time clocks, uniforms, drug testing - Facilities resemble industry settings - Teacher serves as facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student-run businesses provide products or services for sale to other people - Businesses plan development - Teacher serves as facilitator
Required resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simulation tools - Operations and maintenance costs - Additional training for instructors or coordinators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Professional development - Employer partnership and input/guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipment for student businesses - Start-up capital - Additional training for instructors or coordinators

Note: This table is replicated from the United States Department of Education 2017 Report.²³

In adopting the taxonomy of this report, we could argue that BLIP fits most comfortably in the 'School-based Enterprises' model, while acknowledging that it shares features with the other two categories.

In their evaluation of the growth of SWL during COVID-19, Wood et al linked a number of observations and studies based on their review of literature analysing diverse models of work-based learning beyond conventional work placements.²⁴ They conducted a meta-analysis of these models to provide a compiled synthesis of existing practice from within the field.²⁵ The synthesis revealed that remote and simulated WIL traversed a wide array of

²³ United States Department of Education, 'Simulated Work-Based Learning: Instructional Approaches and Noteworthy Practices' (Report, August 2017) xii.

²⁴ See Wood et al (n 21) 335. The study specifically focused on publications in the International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning, Work-Integrated Learning in the 21st Century, the International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, and the conference proceedings of the New Zealand Association for Collaborative Education (NZACE) (1999–2019), Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) (2010–2018), and WACE — the international collaborative education association (2016–2019).

²⁵ Wood et al (n 21).

disciplines, and that there was greater acceptance of remote WIL placements, including the potential to work more closely with international virtual internship agencies, although it stressed the importance of the authentic inclusion of industry so that it is WIL, rather than a classroom activity. It also noted the potential of using both physical and virtual built workspaces and developing interdisciplinary collaborative simulated experiences. Finally, the report also identified that conventional and remote WIL sometimes overlapped through combinations of conventional, remote, and/or simulated WIL, resulting in hybrid or blended WIL spaces.²⁶

Ipinge et al recently explored Namibian students' perceptions of WIL readiness skills developed from an offline and online two-day business simulation course, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷ These simulation sessions reflect aspects of the BLIP experience, in that students working in a team are presented with realistic business scenarios. The team must analyse the given information and develop a strategic approach to solve the scenario within a specified time frame, allocating roles to each other such as leadership. Pre-COVID-19, these sessions were held physically on campus. During COVID-19, they were conducted online. The findings indicate that both versions of the business simulation sessions were able to inculcate WIL readiness skills in the students, and that students perceived the business simulation course to be an appropriate learning tool in developing the skills needed for WIL. Interestingly, the researchers concluded that key skills, including communication, professionalism, leadership, teamwork, analytical problem solving, critical thinking, assertiveness, time management, willingness to learn, attention to detail, diversity and accountability were more significantly developed in the offline business simulation than in the online version. They therefore recommend investigating further pedagogical and content-related strategies that can enhance online business simulations in order to improve actual workplace learning.

Chand et al have stressed a pressing need for engineering students to be work ready when they graduate,²⁸ with problem-solving and real-world skills that complement the necessary technical skills to function once in the workplace. Similar to Jollands' example, Chand et al examined SWL in a project-based engineering course. The lecturer functioned as a 'client', setting an engineering task. The students worked in teams to deliver engineered solutions to the 'client' brief. Chand et al posit that problems solved during the simulated learning process should be based on practical, real-world scenarios, and detail some assessment activities that provide a simulated work-integrated learning experience which ensures work readiness.

Many SWL models explored in the literature focus on the authenticity of the workplace environment (whether real or virtual), which is seen to be key to students learning

²⁶ Ibid 349.

²⁷ See Ipinge et al (n 21).

²⁸ See Praneel Chand et al, 'Using Simulated Work-Integrated Learning in Mechatronics Courses' (Conference Paper, IEEE International Conference on Engineering, Technology & Education (TALE), 2021).

effectively.²⁹ Also, like Jollands' model for example, the veracity of the learning project being harvested from a real-world business is important. A notable feature of these SWL models is the *authenticity* of the workplace environment or workplace-generated project as a key requirement. BLIP makes no attempt to replicate real physical workplaces, or even real projects. Our students are not learning hard, technical skills, such as suturing a wound or baking a cake. Instead, we want them to understand how the law applies to businesses in practice. We think this can be done effectively and efficiently by setting realistic challenges to students which force them to do research, learn something about the law, and about how businesses interact with real-world pressures. We therefore value the focus on realism that these SWL models incorporate. To that end, we endeavour to set realistic challenges, and our group assessment emphasises the realism of how students navigate the portfolio challenges we set them.

Even if BLIP departs from some key aspects of contemporary SWL models, the unit nonetheless draws on SWL's other beneficial aspects. In particular, BLIP reflects two aspects which are important to SWL, namely linking theory and practice and tailoring learning to learners' needs.³⁰ We recognise other benefits of SWL identified by Fatima Lateef in her early 2010 study of simulation-based learning in a medical practice context, where she outlined the educational utility of simulating real scenarios.³¹ There are many clear parallels between her position and ours. Lateef highlights how simulation-based learning can develop health professionals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, whilst protecting patients from unnecessary risks. We follow a similar ethos in BLIP. We require student teams to concoct a start-up business without having to worry about real financial or legal risk or actual commercial competition. Lateef also highlights the benefits of using simulation-based education as a valuable tool in learning to mitigate ethical tensions and resolve practical dilemmas. We have seen both ethical issues and practical problems come up in the running of BLIP businesses over the years, and it is a relief these issues did not occur with real-life consequences. We have also noted how the group dynamic enhances the experience of simulation-based training. By applying techniques, tools, and strategies in designing structured learning experiences, as well as tailoring assessment items as measurement tools linked to targeted teamwork competencies and learning objectives, we have seen a wider set of skills in professional conduct grow in our students. And, as Lateef points out, teamwork training conducted in the simulated environment may offer an additive benefit to the traditional didactic instruction, enhance performance, and possibly help reduce errors.³²

²⁹ See, eg, Jossberger et al (n 19).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Fatima Lateef, 'Simulation-Based Learning: Just Like the Real Thing' (2010) 3(4) *Journal of Emergencies, Trauma, and Shock* 348.

³² *Ibid.* 352.

IV REFLECTIONS ON THE BLIP SWL MODEL

While BLIP students are not placed in a real-world workplace, nor do they undertake projects generated by real firms, we consider that the students in BLIP mirror working in, and learning from, the real world of a business start-up in several important respects:

1. People who may not always know each other well may still come together to create or work in a start-up business;
2. They have considerable autonomy in designing the business structure, and determining the goods and or services that the business will provide;
3. They must work together in large groups to manage and achieve success in the business and record the business's operations and decision making;
4. They encounter situations that generate legal, ethical, practical, commercial and teamwork issues and must undertake research to understand, navigate and resolve those issues;
5. They must reflect on the success or otherwise of how those issues were resolved, and consider opportunities for change;
6. They must navigate and resolve real-world work situations such as: social loafing, a lack of acknowledgment of work, personality clashes, deciding how to allocate work fairly, accountability, and providing and receiving constructive feedback on work produced;
7. They are forced to work effectively with people they have not chosen as their colleagues;
8. They undertake different roles over time, reflecting sometimes shifting hierarchies of power in the workplace, and in the process develop various skills, including communication, teamwork, leadership, research and record-keeping skills;
9. They must learn how to manage time-sensitive deadlines as a group in an environment of constant pressure to complete tasks;
10. They learn actively by doing, which complements the more passive learning achieved through engaging with written or audio learning materials; and
11. They must be agile, adapting to unforeseen and unscripted problems, challenges and risks.

The BLIP experience also highlights several important life and workplace values, including the values of:

1. commitment to a group and teambuilding;
2. responsibility and accountability;
3. effective communication and constructive feedback;
4. reflective practice and identifying opportunities for improvement; and
5. supporting others in completing tasks.

Many of these positive and 'work-ready' aspects of BLIP are reflected in students' anecdotal summations of the unit, which stress the opportunity to extend group working skills, develop confidence in speaking up and voicing opinions, resolve disagreement and meet taxing deadlines.

Knowledge Retention

Our experience with BLIP suggests that the interactivity and practical application of the law through SWL enhances student learning by allowing students to better retain the knowledge developed during semester. Again, this is consistently reflected in student feedback, which highlights the increased opportunities to incorporate and apply in real life the learning achieved through the readings and teaching and the preference for this more interactive, experiential and on-going method of learning over end-of-semester examinations based on concentrated memorised learning which is quickly forgotten. Student feedback suggests anecdotally that the ability to understand the context behind the law, such as the reasons why a company structure was better than other options, significantly aided knowledge retention and understanding.

Group Work Skills

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of real-world WIL is the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills that will assist graduates to function as effective team members in groups with very different personalities and skills. While the group work in BLIP is one of the more challenging aspects of managing the unit, given the natural potential for conflict among humans, the strongest themes emerging from anecdotal student feedback are the benefits of working in groups, and the relevance of group work to work readiness. The communication, organisational and interpersonal skills acquired through BLIP, and required for a teamwork-ready student are consistently addressed by students, which illuminates how the unit is highly reflective of a real working environment in terms of relational learning and exposing opportunities to improve in conflict resolution, organisational, delegation and team-management skills, and develop as a professional and teammate by working for a long period with the same people.

Real-world Relevance

The relevance of the knowledge and skills learned through the SWL model of BLIP as it applies to real-world employment is a consistent theme in anecdotal student feedback, which illustrates how the practical tasks of doing the work in teams of diverse people develops knowledge and skills which students feel they will use in their everyday lives upon entering the workforce and possibly running businesses.

Learning by Doing

In our interactions with BLIP students, they have often identified the utility of the skills learned through the experiential learning aspect of BLIP, its emphasis on learning by doing, and the translation of those skills to the real world. This helps students to see the relevance of what they learn in context and not just as an academic assignment.

Agility

The agility required to respond to unforeseen and complex challenges in the real world is also developed in BLIP, and again is reflected in anecdotal student feedback which highlights how BLIP, as in the real world, presents situations which are not black-and-white and require the need to dynamically adapt thinking.

V CONCLUSION

WIL, group work and role-playing are important and beneficial features of contemporary legal education. Following the pandemic's restrictions on WIL placements, and with the increased use of electronic interfacing and learning tools, SWL has become a more normalised and accepted alternative to WIL. We look forward to continuing to utilise and develop BLIP's unique SWL model.

This symbiotic mesh of learning models through role-playing in groups, and in a fabricated workplace environment, intensifies and entrenches the development of soft skills, deepens students' understanding of the knowledge they gain and apply in the unit, and enhances their work readiness.

Of course, the defining features of BLIP's learning modes are the role-playing model it employs, and the *simulated* nature of SWL. Each year, we ask a graduating student to film a short video for their incoming peers the following year. Most urge prospective students to invest seriously in BLIP, and caution that they will get from BLIP what they put in. Nevertheless, role-playing requires cooperation and a genuine commitment from students to be fully effective and, of course, this is something that we cannot always control.

The very nature of *simulation* belies a suggestion that it is inferior to the real. There is a natural tendency to privilege the real over the fabricated, notwithstanding some of the problems associated with real-world WIL that we identified in this article. To test the competing merits of the real and the simulated, it would be ideal if we could run a controlled experiment, simultaneously running two versions of BLIP, one using its existing simulated model, and another placing students in the real world. However, some of the challenges posed by BLIP will not be easily resolved, due to the large number of students and the concomitant pressures on resources and teaching staff. Therefore, we are resolved to maintaining a simulated model of WIL. With their hunger for real-world immersion unsatisfied, this can result in some students not taking the exercise seriously, and in social loafing. There are consequences to how students run their simulated businesses, however they are ultimately consequences felt personally by the students in the marks they receive, and the feedback provided by their peers. Otherwise, students can shrug off anything that didn't quite work. There is no oversight by real-world business managers or mentors. There are no real-world consequences to businesses flowing from the decisions students make. To combat the risk of social loafing and poor engagement in SWL, we have bolstered the peer assessment mechanisms employed in BLIP to enhance accountability and encourage self-reflection. To encourage students to take the role playing seriously and emulate the features of a real business workplace, we include in our assessment rubric a realism criterion.

We encourage educators to expand and consolidate the scarce research on SWL, and share their successes and failures. We are always looking for opportunities to improve our SWL model. In particular, we see prospects to enhance the realism of students' experiences, while maintaining the essential features of the model. In 2025, we will introduce a new assessment item which requires students to prepare a real-world 'Business Law in Practice Report'. This will require them to compare their simulated business start-up with a real-world business. We envisage that this will help students test the realism of their start-up businesses, and learn important aspects from the real-world business that they choose to compare themselves against. In conducting the research for their report, we will encourage students to reach out to real-world businesses and speak directly with them as they answer the research questions we set them. Other possible methods for enhancing opportunities for students to interact with real businesses could be establishing business panels, at which students could ask questions, and be questioned by panel members.

We also see scope in developing some tools to assist students to embrace, enthusiastically and effectively, the SWL model of BLIP. We think students may benefit from further targeted guidance on how to role-play effectively, which we could introduce as a separate module for students to complete, or alternatively run as a discrete workshop.

In the meantime, we will continue to encourage our students to 'fake it 'til they make it'.