The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education

Karsten E. Zegwaard

Editor-in-Chief, Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education

Cooperative Education Unit, Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Waikato

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE) was founded in 1999, with the first volume published in 2000. The journal has adhered to the philosophy of creating freely and readily accessible information, and opted to be a free, fully online, open access journal. Over the last 12 years, the journal has grown and has become well-established in the cooperative (co-op) and work-integrated learning (WIL) community. The annual number of publications has increased and particularly the number of submissions has shown strong growth, especially in the last three years. APJCE articles are increasingly cited in other journals and significant book publications, and its author-base and user-base has increasingly become more international. This article will provide an analysis of the growth of APJCE, discuss the performance of the journal in the context of co-op/WIL literature internationally, and discuss some recent developments for the journal.

Keywords: publishing, literature, refereeing, citations, journal performance.

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE) was founded in 1999 by Prof. Richard Coll and hosted by the University of Waikato, with the first volume published in 2000. The founding of the journal was driven by several prominent factors at the time. At the end of the 1990’s cooperative education (co-op) and work-integrated learning (WIL) research seemed to be ebbing and waning, with little new research appearing in the literature. However, overviews of the regional and international conferences suggested that much research, albeit mostly program evaluation type research, appeared to be occurring. Furthermore, despite co-op research having historically a strong presence in the US and to some extent Europe, co-op research in the Asia-Pacific region was limited (mostly restricted to New Zealand and Australia), which contrasts to the strong growth of co-op programmes in the Asian countries. This suggested that research activity in this region was perhaps in its infancy, with practitioners engaged in co-op research having little experience in publishing their research in journals. Thus, APJCE set out with the intention of creating a developmental journal to encourage up-and-coming researchers to publish works often presented as conference papers but had struggled to advance this written work to become a published journal article or found the reviewing process discouraging. The journal took a hands-on, constructive approach to reviewing to better enable up-and-coming researchers to successfully publish their work, and not appear to be overly discouraging or critical.

Development and growth of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education

Initially APJCE sought five forms of manuscripts; research, topical issues or discussion papers, best practice, book reviews, and correspondence from the community. There have been no correspondence publications since 2003 and, as the journal has advanced, it is not something the journal now seeks. The prevalent forms of manuscript submitted have been topical issues/discussion papers and research paper submissions. There have been several book reviews published, however, will likely remain limited to two or three a year. Best practice papers were sought, as this tends to be where new researchers begin publishing, however is now discouraged unless it explores a particularly unique or unusual setting. Often best practice papers are encouraged to redirect the manuscript focus from the context (e.g., placement programme) to a particular unique or challenging aspect of the programme.

Generally, the state of the co-op/WIL literature worldwide has improved over the last 15 years. Bartkus and Stull (2004) described the co-op/WIL literature in 1997 as ‘sketchy, limited, and uncertain’, with a predominate focus on best practice. However, in 2011, Bartkus and Higgs pointed out that the literature has since strengthened (Bartkus & Higgs, 2011). The strengthening of the literature reflects the greater research activity that occurred over that period, particularly by Australian researchers, subsequently reflected in the growth experienced by APJCE. Of significance, an overview of the international co-op/WIL research community

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1 K.E. Zegwaard, Cooperative Education Unit, Faculty of Science and Engineering, University of Waikato, +64 7 838 4892, k.zegwaard@waikato.ac.nz.
shows that it has grown to a level that it can now sustain two central journals, the APJCE and the Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships (JCEI), which is an indication of the maturation of co-op/WIL over the last 15 years (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). A further indication of the maturation of the co-op/WIL literature is the increasingly co-op/WIL orientated literature being cited in discipline-specific educational journals other than APJCE and JCEI (Bartkus, 2007; Coll & Kalnins, 2009).

This strengthening of the co-op/WIL literature is reflected by the growth APJCE. At the beginning of 2010, the APJCE publication rate was at a volume that a copy editor was employed to undertake the tasks of preparing the manuscripts for publication and interacting with authors to clarify details. The original APJCE website was significantly updated and restructured to allow for better functionality and accessibility of what has grown to be a significant collection of articles (as of May, 2012, containing ~150 articles). The editorial board has expanded to reflect the increasing submission rate and now consists of 31 members from a variety of countries.

In 2010, APJCE was ranked by the Australian Research Council (ARC) as a B journal, which was particularly favourable in comparison to comparable journals. Since then, the journal has considerably advanced. Large international databases of eligible academic and scholarly journals such as Scopus, by Elsevier, and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) are currently reviewing eligibility of APJCE for inclusion. Inclusion in these sorts of databases will grant APJCE a higher profile and likely increase the number of citations its articles receives. Recently APJCE was added to the Cabell’s Directories, administrated by Cabell Publishing Inc.

**Reviewing process**

APJCE follows the editorial guidelines laid out by the International Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE). The journal undertakes a double blind peer review process, with all manuscripts reviewed by at least two members of the editorial board. Before the submitted manuscript is sent to members of the editorial board, the Editor-in-Chief conducts a review of the manuscript, usually to determine the relevance of content to the APJCE audience.

Manuscripts sent out for review are typically returned to the author with comments within two months. After amendments have been made and returned, an analysis is undertaken to determine if the editorial board’s comments have been reasonably addressed or responded to, and if so, the manuscript is passed on to the copy editor for preparation for publication. Publication of articles occurs as articles become available after preparation. With APJCE being a fully online journal, articles can be published as a rolling publication rather than when a full issue is available.

**Journal statistics**

APJCE maintains a database of all submitted manuscripts for tracking and statistical purposes, and along with data from Google Scholar (which provides citation statistics) and Google Analytics (which provides APJCE website visits, download statistics, users country of origin) a valuable insight of the journal performance can be obtained.

**Submission, rejection, and publication rates**

From somewhat modest beginnings, the number of publications per year grew in two stages, from 2000 to 2002, and particularly from 2006 to present (Figure 1a), with an increasingly wider international source of authors. The dip in 2005 reflects a decrease in the number of submissions in the previous year (Figure 1b). The increase in publication rate in 2009 was mostly in response to the special edition around the WACE Manly, Australia, conference, whilst the increased submission rate in the 2010, was in response to the special edition based on the theme of the 2010 ACEN conference and the 2010 release of the ARC rankings.
Figure 1. Where a) is the number of publications per year; and b) is the number of submissions and corresponding rejection rate, where ‘rejected’ means manuscripts with review outcome of ‘rejected’ and ‘major revision with resubmission’ which subsequently are not resubmitted.

Not all journals openly communicate their rejection rates, and appear to measure ‘rejection’ differently, rates of 40-50% appear common, with journals claiming to have a high impact factor reporting rejection rates well over 70% (Aarssen et al., 2008). APJCE uses a constructive approach to reviewing, with the aim of having as many manuscripts published as possible, on the proviso these are ultimately publishable manuscripts, thus does not see a high rejection rate as a measure of quality.

An outright rejection of the manuscript after review is unusual, however, some manuscripts require ‘major revision with resubmission’ (essentially a ‘fatal review’). Some authors, with support, do carry out this major revision and resubmit, and ultimately produce a publishable manuscript. For the purposes of reporting APJCE overall rejection rate in this article, the rejection rate is the sum of the number of manuscripts that are: 1) rejected prior to review, 2) rejected after review, 3) and a review outcome of ‘major revision with resubmission’ which subsequently are not resubmitted. The overall rejection rate for APJCE is ~30%, which recently tends to be slightly increasing largely in response to a growing number of manuscripts rejected before editorial board review, nearly always on grounds of relevance (Figure 1b).

**APJCE authors and website usage**

The initial intention of APJCE was to focus on the Asia-Pacific region. There were already established bodies of researchers in New Zealand and Australia, which is reflective of the current make up of the editorial board, there was little published research activity from Asia. There are articles published in APJCE authored by researchers from Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand), however, when analysing the country of origin for all APJCE authors (Figure 2a), the number of authors from Asia are comparatively few. Instead a greater number of authors based beyond the Asia-Pacific region have published in APJCE, particularly from Africa (mostly South Africa) and Europe (mostly the UK and Germany). Most APJCE authors are based in New Zealand and, particularly since 2009, Australia, which is reflective of the recent growth of WIL in Australia.

For the period between July, 2011 (when Google Analytics data collection commenced) and March, 2012, the APJCE website received 6,538 individual visits creating 11,798 downloads. The users that most often accessed the APJCE website were from the regions of Asia and the Pacific (the later consisting almost entirely of New Zealand and Australia), reflecting APJCE original Asia-Pacific focus, a further 42% were from outside the Asia-Pacific region (Figure 2b). In contrast to the limited number of APJCE authors from Asia (Figure 2a), the number of website users from Asia are vastly higher. This may indicate, despite the anticipated increase in articles from Asia not materialising, that APJCE is instead fulfilling a significant need for (free) literature resources in this region, and suggests perhaps co-op/WIL in this region may still be at developmental stages with few research active groups supporting co-op/WIL programs. Similarly, the low number of authors from

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1 Data covering the period of 10th of July (date of new website initiation) to 19th of March, 2012
the Americas (North, Central, and South America) contrasts to the amount of website usage from this region (mostly from the US and Canada). Unlike in Asia, Co-op/WIL has had a long and well-established history in North America, and the contrast between the two data sets may reflect that either researchers are publishing in other journals (e.g., JCEI) or that co-op/WIL is at a stage of maturity in this region where limited amount of research activity tends to occur. Whatever the reason for this difference, this region nevertheless appears to have an appreciable want for co-op/WIL literature.

Figure 2. Where a) is the country of origin of all APJCE authors, where \( n = 296 \) and is the sum of the number authors listed on each article (from volume 1 to volume 12, issue 2); and b) is the country of origin of all APJCE website users from 10th of July 2011 till 19th of March, 2012, where \( n = 6,538 \).

When analysing the website usage per country, significant volume was from six countries: New Zealand (16%), Australia (13%), the US (9%), the UK (6%), Canada (5%), and the Philippines (4%) – website usage from other Asian countries was evenly spread across a large number of countries. The top five of these countries are traditionally recognised as the ‘powerhouses’ in co-op/WIL research. Of particular note, the three of these countries are outside the Asia-Pacific region, indicating that APJCE has over time morphed into an international journal.

Nearly half of APJCE website users arrived using search engines. Analyses on key search words used by these individuals includes (in descending order) were; the journal title (expressed in a variety of combinations), APJCE, graduate competencies, achievement and work placements, Karsten APJCE, and then sentence compounds mostly using ‘cooperative education’ and ‘work-integrated leaning’ with modifiers such as; ‘importance’ ‘reflection’, impact’, ‘assessment’, ‘benefits’, and ‘employers views’.

Citations of APJCE articles

One measure of acceptance of any journal is the number of citations of its articles receives, in particular citations in other journals. Often citations tend to be within articles published in the same journal or self-citations in other journals, however, increasingly APJCE articles are observed being cited (which are not self-citations) in other journals (e.g., in Research in Science and Technology, Science Education International, African Journal of Business Management, The Qualitative Report, Asia Pacific Education Review, The Journal of International Agricultural Education, Industry and Higher Education, and Journal of Planning Education and Research).

The total number of citations of APJCE articles according to Google Scholar are also increasing, with the work by Rainsbury, Burchell, Hodges, and Lay (2002) being the most commonly cited APJCE article (Table 1). The method Google Scholar uses for counting citations tends to overlook citations in books unless these are explicitly made available online, and favours older publications as these have had greater time to be cited; however, some APJCE articles from post-2005 are included on the list of top 10 APJCE citations (Table 1). Increasingly APJCE articles are also being cited in scholarly books, for example the bulk of the post-2005 literature cited in the 2011 International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011) were articles from APJCE (Zegwaard, 2012).
TABLE 1. Top 10 cited APJCE articles¹, in descending order, according to Google Scholar™.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rainsbury, Burchell, Hodges, Lay (2002)</td>
<td>Researching perceived important graduate competencies from students and graduates perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hodges, Burchell (2003)</td>
<td>Researching perceived important graduate competencies from employers perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abeysekera (2006)</td>
<td>Curriculum design implications when incorporating WIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coll, Chapman (2000)</td>
<td>Research approaches and methodologies for co-op</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, Leberman (2005)</td>
<td>Exploring learning perceptions by students and supervisors after practicum experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleming, Eames (2005)</td>
<td>Work placement program structure impact on student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walo (2002)</td>
<td>Assessing how student competencies are enhanced by WIL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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¹ as for February, 2012.

Conclusion and the future

Since the founding of APJCE, the submission and publication rates have steadily increased. The journal now holds a substantive collection of scholarly literature that underpins current research work in co-op/WIL. As the wider co-op/WIL literature has matured, APJCE has carved out a well-established presence within the wider literature. For example, compare the numerous citations of APJCE articles outside the two central co-op/WIL journals, including journals that are subject-specific and general educational journals, and the 2011 International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education. The open access, online model that APJCE has adopted has been a particular strength for the journal, as it has allowed for free accessible literature to the wider community. The bulk of APJCE authors are from New Zealand and, increasingly, from Australia, with a significant contribution from Europe and Africa. However, APJCE users are internationally more evenly distributed than its author base, indicating that APJCE is fulfilling a need for co-op/WIL literature well beyond the Asia-Pacific region, indicating that the journal has morphed into an international journal.

As the submission rate has increased, the journal’s rejection rate has proportionally increased to 30%, largely because of a higher number of manuscripts submitted with content not relevant to the APJCE audience. With the restructuring of the website, APJCE is well situated for further growth. With APJCE being included into databases of scholarly journals, such as Scopus, the journal’s profile will likely rise and may drive this growth further. Reflecting on the past growth and the potential future growth, it is encouraging to both the editors of APJCE and the authors who have published in APJCE that the journal has carved out a successful and well-established presence in the co-op/WIL community.

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Submission process

Full details of the APJCE manuscript submission process are available on the APJCE webpage (www.apjce.org), particularly on the Manuscript Submission page (www.apjce.org/submitting-manuscripts). In brief, manuscripts are to be between 3,000 and 5,000 words (excluding abstract, references, and tables). Formatting details are available on the Instructions for Authors page (www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors); in general, APJCE uses Palatino Linotype font size 9, American English, and APA 6th edition referencing style. All manuscripts, as a .doc or .docx file format, are submitted directly to the editor via email (editor@apjce.org). All manuscripts are double blind reviewed by two or more reviewers. Typically reviewing takes four weeks,
after which notification of the reviewing outcome and required amendments will be provided to the author(s) by
the editor-in-chief.

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