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The publication of the second edition of International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011b) provides us with a unique opportunity to consider the current situation of cooperative education (co-op)/work-integrated learning (WIL) and the main issues facing it at the present time. In this presentation we summarize the issues we think exist for co-op/WIL, based on the material presented in this handbook. We do not seek to be provocative nor do we necessarily agree with the views of the contributing authors either; what we present is our view of some of the issues in the new millennium. It is our intention that these ideas will stimulate thought and reflection about the nature and practice of co-op/WIL.

Keywords: compilation of literature, current issues in WIL and co-op, integration, terminologies, research.

Introduction

The first edition of the Handbook provided a chapter by Coll and Eames (2004) that sought to consider the ‘state of the art’ for co-op and WIL at the time of writing; this analysis being based on author contributions. Issues identified for co-op/WIL at the time were; identity; learning; the purpose and role; accreditation; generalizability of the practice and research; organization and support; and the publicity and marketing of co-op/WIL. Here we briefly summarize the analysis presented in the first edition and conclude with discussion of some emerging issues.

Prior status of cooperative education and work-integrated education

Grasping with the identity of co-op/WIL, Coll and Eames noted, consisted of attempts to define co-op and WIL, and these focused on the following issues:

The aims and objectives of the work placement program itself and how the work portion integrates within the program;
- The individual mainly responsible for finding the work placement;
- Whether or not students in these programs are paid a wage or salary for their work placement;
- Whether or not students in these programs should gain course credits towards their qualification for their work placement;
- What proportion of the program the placement comprises;
- Assessment of the placements; and
- The number and duration of individual (if multiple) placements.

Coll and Eames noted that the diversity was of concern, and expressed reservations about what might be labeled as co-op or WIL, especially if the amount of time, or level of interaction within the ‘workplace’, were very limited as appears to be the case for some programs (e.g., some report less than 30 hours across a whole program of study). They then argued that for co-op/WIL to retain or gain legitimacy it must comprise an educational endeavor, with student learning being a central focus. There also was a growing awareness of a need for sound educational theory underpinning work placement program design and curriculum. Of note was that current theories of learning allows for the diversity and contextualized nature of co-op/WIL programs, and were able to accommodate cognizance of the dual-sector nature. Coll and Eames also commented that assessment of learning and program evaluation still remains problematic, arguing that the purpose of work placement programs needs to go beyond mere production of work-ready graduates. Co-op and WIL is more than
a vocational-education program; we need graduates who are able to challenge the status quo, if ‘industry’ is to move ahead. Coll and Eames felt the research was probably in better shape than many thought at the time, depended on what you were comparing it with. They did note, however, a need for more research in learning and integration of learning. It seems that the diversity the practice is indicative of its value in terms of its generalizability, across disciplines, and that drawing upon diverse theories of learning could help us understand how co-op/WIL works in different contexts. The organization and support of co-op. Coll and Eames noted, is crucial, given its impact upon program development and implementation. A key component of successful learning is securing quality placements; this requires adequate support and investment. Publicity and marketing of co-op/WIL comprises internal and external marketing. They concluded by saying that we need to convince our colleagues in our educational institutions, our employers, and public authorities that co-op/WIL adds value to education programs and their outcomes.

Current status and future issues in cooperative and work-integrated education

Terminology and definitions of cooperative and work-integrated education

There has been a proliferation of terms used to describe, in board terms, what is essentially co-op or WIL (if, indeed, these two terms are to be taken as synonymous), and this proliferation appears to be growing. Some terms have a well-established history within some sectors, such as practicum, internships, cadetship, however, other terms appear to be newer, such as work-based learning, workplace learning, practice-based learning, industry engaged learning, career and technical education, collaborative education, industry-based learning, and work exchanges. Some of these terms have been created by institutions striving to be distinctive in their offerings, and represent an institutional term rather than reflect an established term in a particular subject sector. Recently, the World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) began using the term ‘work-integrated education’, rather than co-op or WIL, since the term ‘education’ is more holistic (viz., both learning & teaching), an argument that is convincing. The term ‘work-integrated education’ may present a useful umbrella term, overcoming the challenges presented by the diversification, and at times somewhat fluid use, of other terms. Groenewald, Drysdale, Chiupka and Johnston (2011) explore the definitions to co-op and WIL, and present a possible taxonomy of terms. This work is still ambitious ongoing work by Drysdale and Johnston. We would argue that the diversity and proliferation of terms has become so wide that it may perhaps be better to focus on defining features of co-op/WIL programs (or whatever term one chooses to use), allowing these programs to be known under a variety of guises and be identified by their defining features. These defining features may include: exposure to a professional and relevant workplace (community of practice), of a duration alongside practitioners (old timers) long enough for enculturation to occur (the ideal duration being a topic of much need of discussion), where the tasks undertaken are authentic, relevant, meaningful, and purposeful, where students are able to learn the workplace norms, culture, and understand/develop professional identity, and integrating that knowledge into their on-campus learning. Some staunch stalwarts of co-op may prefer narrow definitions of the terms; however, we would argue that it is important to remain inclusive. Narrow definitions have not been helpful and may have contributed to the proliferation of terms. It may also have restricted the realm within which co-op/WIL research is being undertaken, when much valuable and informative work is being carried out in the realms just beyond the narrow definitions of co-op.

Research in cooperative and work-integrated education

There often is much call for further research in co-op/WIL and certainly a tone that appears to resonates among the Handbook authors. However, co-op/WIL researchers and practitioners need to recognize that over the last 25 years a comprehensive body of literature advancing our understanding of co-op/WIL has been built up. A glance over the number of citations used in the first edition of the Handbook, amplified by the width and breadth of the expansion of the second edition, shows how comprehensive this body of literature has grown. There is no need to continue to be defensive about where co-op/WIL research is at. A further cursory look at several periodicals (e.g., Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships, Journal of Vocational Education and Training) indicates co-op and WIL research is alive and well indeed. The amount of literature cited in the chapters of the Handbook, much of which makes citations to research publications, is impressive. This is particularly true for the chapters discussing of the research about the benefits (Braunstein, Takei, Wang, & Loken, 2011; Crump & Johnsson, 2011; Dressler & Keeling, 2011), educational theory (Eames & Cates, 2011; Van Gyn & Grove-White, 2011), and the assessment of co-op/WIL (Cedercreutz & Cates, 2011; Hodges, 2011), whilst chapters on the practice of co-op/WIL also drew from a comprehensive literature selection (e.g., Baker, Caldicott, & Spowart, 2011; Cooper & Taylor, 2011; Zegwaard & Laslett, 2011). Of additional note is that two major reviews recently undertaken state that co-op/WIL now
stands on a solid body of literature with a sound theoretical base (Bartkus, 2007; Coll & Kalnins, 2008). We suggest that now it is important to have this knowledge compiled in a way that enables a better shared understanding, agreed upon by the whole co-op/WIL community. Hopefully the Handbook will go some way to fulfilling that need. A comprehensive shared understanding across the co-op/WIL community will help avoid recreating research and discussion around issues where there already is established understanding, and instead move research direction to new areas and to new levels. Four areas we see as being ripe for research are student learning, assessment of student learning, integration, and the nature of the relationships between the key stakeholders.

**Integration with on-campus learning**

A fundamental component of work-integrated education is the middle term, ‘integration’ (Coll et al., 2009). The term work-integrated learning/education automatically implies integration occurs for such programs. However, even though integration is identified as fundamental (Allen & Peach, 2007; Coll, et al., 2009; and others), there is uncertainty by practitioners about what is meant by the term, how we go about achieving this ‘integration’, let alone recognizing it when it has been achieved. Therefore, we believe integration, pedagogy, and curricular development is an area much in need of research and development. The chapter in the Handbook by Johnston (2011) provides a solid steer in this direction, as does the chapter by Coll and Zegwaard (2011a).

Of some concern is the unsupported notion that mere add-on work-experience program, tacked to the side of a degree or other program, constitutes co-op or WIL. However, for whatever reason, many of these programs exist. The erroneous assumption made by these programs is that learning will automatically occur by simply providing a workplace experience (therefore assumed to be adding value to student learning experience). However, this is unfounded and not supported by the literature. At best some random or accidental learning may occur; however, this is neither planned, structured, nor an expected outcome (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a; Eames & Cates, 2011; Garrick, 1998). The quality of the learning experience is not secured, and perhaps even the emphasis that the placement is a learning experience may not be present.

The slow drift of co-op/WIL programs at well-established co-op/WIL universities, particularly in the US, becoming centralized and service-focused has had particularly detrimental effect (Sovilla & Varty, 2011). A non-academic location for co-op/WIL within an educational institution is simply not conducive to the formulation of academic programs with rigorous curricular, that will result in desirable educational outcomes (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a; Freeland, 2007; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011). Centralization has resulted in a decrease in research active co-op academics and a shift towards staffing of general (and often part-time) contract staff. In a co-op/WIL program as conceptualize here, these practitioners are involved in education, not just the administration of a work-based learning program. As Coll and Eames (2000) and Eames and Cates (2011) argue, it is fundamental that practitioners see themselves (and be accepted by others) as ‘educators’, who must have familiarity with theories of learning and the learning process/education. We thus encourage researchers and curricular developers to focus on developing sound pedagogies that enable integration on the workplace experience into the on-campus learning and advocate for co-op/WIL programs to be central to the degree of study, supported primarily by educators not administrators.

**Conclusion**

The substantive scholarly literature cited in the Handbook show we have the evidence that cooperative and work-integrated education provides benefits for all parties, across a wide range of disciplines of enquiry, and results in a wide range of graduate attributes and competencies. We need to be encouraged that the endeavor we call co-op/WIL (or whatever term chosen to describe our work placement programs) is well-founded, effective, and provides positive and transformative life changing experiences for students that partake in our programs. The onus is on practitioners to market these substantive benefits to all key stakeholders; students, colleagues, and managers in their institutions, and external stakeholders such as officials and governments.
References


References


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