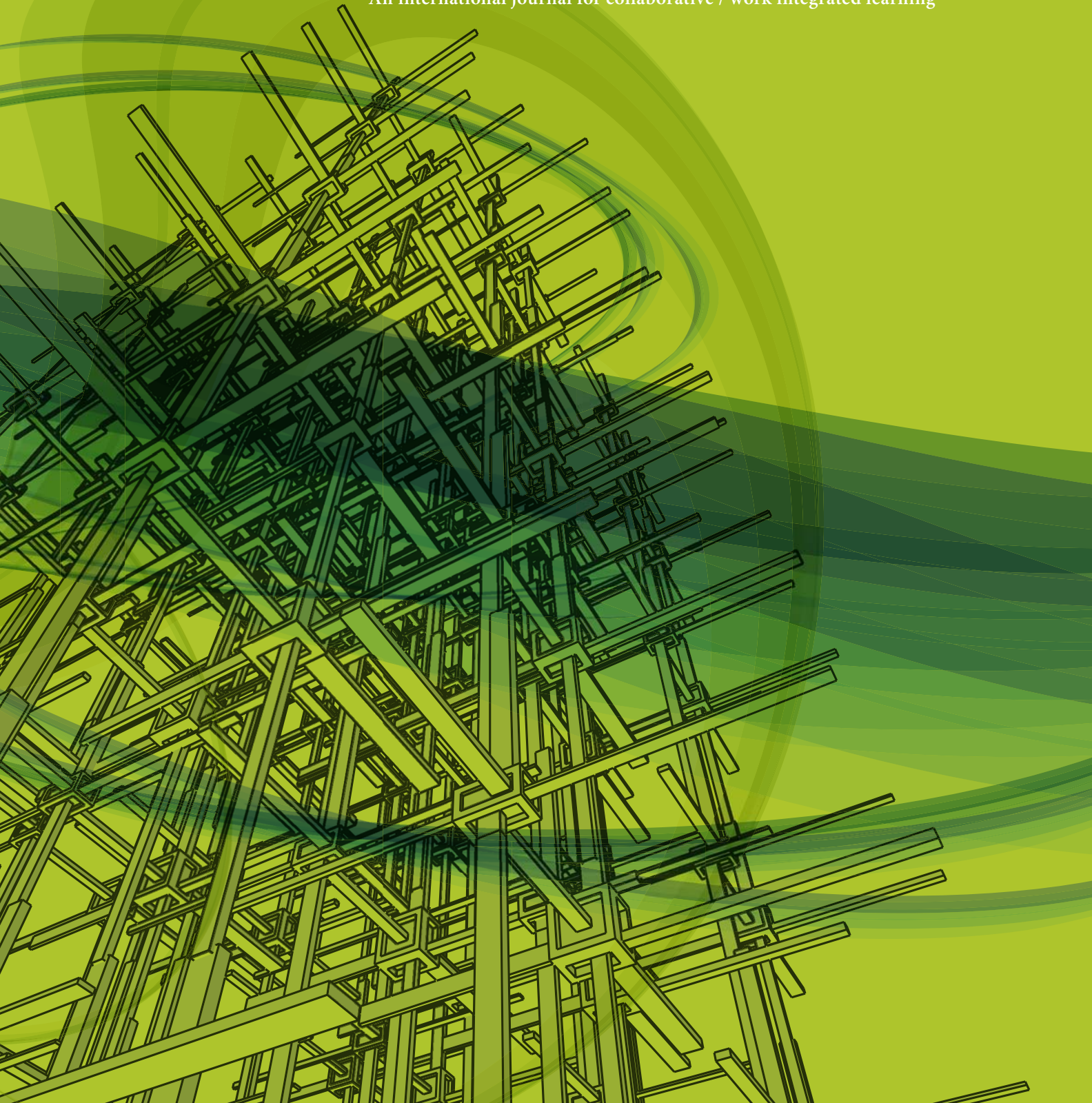


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- PAGE 04** **From the Editors**
- PAGE 05** **Guest Editorial: Measuring Work Integrated Learning:
The development of the Meta-competency Test**
ADAM USHER, Victoria University, Melbourne Australia
- PAGE 16** **Professional Experiences in Seminar Discussions**
PÄR ENGSTRÖM, Högskolan Väst (University West), Sweden
- PAGE 30** **Nursing Students' Experiences from Their First Clinical
Education — a qualitative study**
HANNA-LEENA MELENDER, VAMK, University of Applied Sciences, Finland
ELISABETH JONSÉN, Umeå University, Sweden
MARITA SALMU, VAMK, University of Applied Sciences, Finland
ANN-HELÉN SANDVIK, Novia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
YVONNE HILLI, Novia University of Applied Sciences, Finland
- PAGE 44** **Internships in Rural Schools: Post-Interns' Views**
EDWIN G. RALPH, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
KEITH D. WALKER, University of Saskatchewan, Canada
- PAGE 58** **Co-operative Education and Student Recruitment, Engagement
and Success: Early Findings from a Multi-Institutional Study in
British Columbia**
EARL ANDERSON, British Columbia Institute of Technology, Burnaby, Canada
NANCY JOHNSTON, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada
LARRY ILES, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, Canada
NORAH MCRAE, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada
NANCY REED, University of Victoria, Victoria, Canada
JULIE WALCHLI, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada
- PAGE 77** **A Review of Research on Unpaid Internship Legal Issues:
Implications for Career Services Professionals**
LESLIE SHULER SVACINA, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Wisconsin
- PAGE 88** **An Urban Experience: Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers
in an Inner City Charter School**
GINA G. BERRIDGE, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville
VELLA GOEBEL, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville
BRANDON EGGLESTON, University of Southern Indiana, Evansville



The Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships is dedicated to the advancement of work-integrated learning, to a strong focus on research associated with work-integrated learning, and the development of a global view of work-integrated learning through the publication of thoughtful and timely articles.

We are the leading international forum for the discussion of issues pertinent to work-integrated learning through cooperative education, internships, and other experiential programs. Researchers and practitioners will find these resources helpful and timely as we strive to disseminate research, best practice, and innovation in work-based learning. JCEI the flagship publication of the Cooperative Education and Internship Association (CEIA) in full-partnership with the World Association of Cooperative Education (WACE), the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN) and the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (CAFCE). Our organizations are committed in providing the best resources, both current and archived, on experiential learning.

So how can we, as a field, start to work together to move our scholarship forward? There is some important work going on right now that could be a step in the right direction. The World Association for Cooperative Education, WACE, is forming a research network under the able leadership of Dr. Maureen Drysdale from the University of Waterloo. This group is open to any interested scholar in the field so we, the Editorial Board of the Journal, strongly encourage all of our readers to become involved. If your areas of interest are limited to North America, there are two other scholars who are working on a national level by chairing Research Committees within the Cooperative Education and Internship Association (CEIA) and the Cooperative and Experiential Education Division (CEED) of the American Society for Engineering Education. Dr. Tracey Bowen and Dr. Sheri Dressler would also welcome your assistance so please contact any of these hard working and dedicated researchers to offer your services to advance our field.

Another important effort that is taking place is happening in Sweden at University West. They now offer the first PhD in Work Integrated Learning and are taking a leadership role in the scholarship of the profession. As such, they will be hosting a WACE symposium in June of 2014 that is dedicated solely to research. Not only will this be a wonderful opportunity to visit one of the most spectacular countries in Europe, but more importantly, the chance for scholars from around the world to come together and discuss how we can advance and mature the scholarship of our field. So we, the Editors, strongly encourage all of readers to come together in June of 2014 for this most important dialogue.

Together we can make the scholarship of work integrated learning something that our profession.

Regards,

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Measuring Work Integrated Learning: The development of the Meta-competency Test

ADAM USHER

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The practice of work-integrated learning (WIL) is rightly viewed as being important in the development of career ready students with identifiable graduate capabilities. Important also is its role in achieving the high level goals pertaining to positive social equity and economic outcomes through the development of lifelong learning outcomes. The value of WIL programs in these terms, however, remain difficult to quantify due to two major factors. The first factor is the difficulty associated with defining WIL and in identifying its *learning* value and form. The literature and practice highlights this as it accepts WIL as an ideal type; this has created difficulties for universities to quality assure and develop professional learning programs. The second factor, is the difficulty measuring the contribution of WIL to graduate capabilities. In response, this paper proposes the development not of a definition of WIL but rather of a *meta-competency test* for WIL.

The emergent challenge for work integrated learning (WIL) in a Twenty-first Century (21C) context is to establish itself as an explicit, distinctive and measurable form of learning for universities to demonstrate achievement against well articulated high-level Australian federal government and international OECD (2005) and UNESCO (Delors, 1996) goals. The goals charge universities with the responsibility of promoting greater numbers of graduates graduating with higher levels of employability and lifelong learning dispositions which are seen to be key to succeeding in the 21C new socio-economic paradigm and to achieving greater social equity. To meet this challenge, this paper proposes to reconceptualise the nature of WIL by understanding it as being an agent for the development of meta-competence (Crick, 2008) rather than as being a curriculum design (Smith, 2012) or a model set of rules or forms that govern student practicum. To that end, this paper suggests the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to WIL with units of study to be developed and tested against a learning principle or *test* rather than against a set of curriculum-related rules. It is argued that this will better assist educators to develop quality WIL programs, which are *demonstrably* consistent with the stated high level 21C goals.

The proposal of a meta-competency test is based on the premise that WIL should be recognized as being about both academic achievement and the development of the whole person. That is, based on the combination of the student achievement of professional knowledge and the mastery of actions and routines, and the development of the student as the whole person, which includes the ability to reconcile the professional with personal dispositions, attitudes, values, motivation, and passion. The recognition of the duality of WIL is critical to the development of the 21C life-long learner and one which aligns with the learning dimensions outlined in the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) (Crick, Broadfoot, & Claxton, 2011).

The ELLI categorises holistic learning in terms of seven dimensions: changing and learning as opposed to being stuck and static, critical curiosity as opposed to passivity, meaning making as opposed to data accumulation, creativity as opposed to being rule bound, learning relationships as opposed to isolation, strategic awareness as opposed to being robotic, resilience as opposed to fragility (Crick et al., 2011). This paper proposes these dimensions as measures of the impact of WIL programs on students as 21C lifelong learners and as markers of successful WIL experiences. Further, they are dimensions that are developmental for unit designers in terms of a backward curriculum design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2001) in designing learning experiences for students that prepares them for a rapidly changing 21C career paradigm.

The increasingly hegemonic global economy, coupled with the exponential increase in information communication technologies (ICTs) has meant that the 20C notion of training for a single vocation appears anathema. People are increasingly changing jobs, occupations, and industries over the course of their working lives with much greater frequency. Employability skills are not just relevant to success within one enterprise, but to career development and success throughout one's working lives (Australia Department of Education, Science and Training et al., 2004). The emergent reality and challenge for WIL, then, is to scaffold students to focus on careers, actual and/or anticipated, that involve particular competences rather than on the development of discipline or vocation-specific knowledge and or skills. It is in developing student competences as lifelong learners through WIL that universities should both measure and be measured.

Herrington and Herrington (2006) rightly highlight the disjuncture between WIL outcomes and 21C needs, suggesting that "it has become increasingly clear that university learning outcomes are lacking and no longer meet the needs of a dynamic and changing [21C] workforce" (p. 2). The authors suggest that the instruction that used to work no longer fits with the contemporary changes and demands. "what employers, governments and nations require are graduates that display attributes necessary for knowledge building communities" (p. 69). To meet the challenges of an increasingly fluid 21C paradigm, it is the ability of the graduate to meta-learn across different contexts and using different skills, knowledges, and values that will arm them with the capacity to develop and contribute to multiple professional knowledge communities, which is of primary importance in the 21C context.

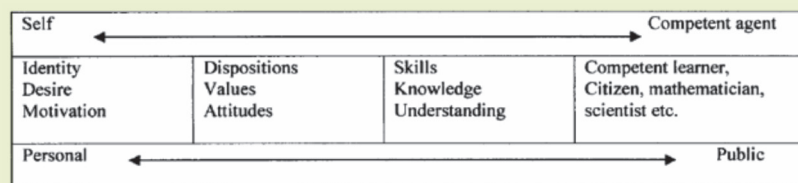
The OECD definition of competency is a useful one as it enables WIL to be characterized as being more than merely a vehicle for students to acquire knowledge and skills in particular vocational areas, but one that is critical in creating social and economic equity through life-long learning. By definition, competencies involve the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychological resources (including skills and attributes) across different contexts (OECD, 2005). For example, the ability to communicate effectively is a competency that may draw on an individual's knowledge of language, practical IT skills and attitudes toward those with whom he or she is communicating, which would be needed across disciplinary and vocational realms.

Crick (2008) describes competences as being the interface between the holistic conception of the person (student) and the demands of the real (professional) world, which is of critical importance to students developing attitudes, skills, and dispositions that will enable them to succeed in the 21C context (p. 317). The challenge, as suggested by Crick, is not so much choosing which competencies or whether particular learning should serve an economic or social goal, but in the design of experiences, assessment, and evaluation systems *for, as, and of* learning in formal settings and workplaces, which do justice to both the students' personal learning identity and dispositions. (p. 317). The critical value of WIL is its facilitation of students' movement between the reflection on themselves as people and as learners and on the professional role and the expectations, and on how that enables the development of their discrete skill sets, knowledge, understandings, and values. It is this movement that develops students' meta-cognition and why a conscious understanding of one's own learning process is critical for learning across multiple workplaces and in different fields, consistent with the 21C paradigm.

The conscious movement between the self and the competent agent that creates meta-competency is demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Competence as a movement between personal and public.



The facilitation of the self in this process is critical to redressing the prevailing practices that reinforce a power deficit for students and groups in education systems whose socio-economic and/or cultural status falls outside the society's majority. Foucault (1983) highlights the authority of the Western discourse and its historical and arguably contemporary use to silence other discourses. The development of a WIL practice that scaffolds meta-competence represents a form that redresses this as it is an inherently inclusive practice that places overt value in individual cultural and/or socio-economic contexts and

discourses and provides a structure within which it is valued and promoted. Importantly, too, it is one that employs individual cultural literacies to develop the lifelong learning dimensions that are critical to the 21C education paradigm.

The implications for WIL in the 21C context are that universities should continue to develop canonical learning but go beyond this to include dialogic and self-reflective learning that makes a sustainable impact on the students' lifelong learning capacity. Quality WIL programs should be identified as those that avoid the 20C behaviourist trap of creating static placements or vocation conceptions and build programs that are based on a fluid meta-competency conception that would enable students to apply learning across multiple existing fields and fields yet to be developed. Historically, the majority of WIL programs have been based on career-focused or behaviouristic models, which align with the programs that were developed as the WIL area emerged to meet the needs of production orientated organisations after World War Two (Engström, 2001). Curriculum designers of these programs understand WIL as supporting students' acquisition of new skills and behaviours but through the lens of a single set of environmental conditions. Data gathered from 84 students and employers over a period of 10 months in a study by Bandaranaike and Willison (2011) found, however, that both parties sought stronger lifelong learning outcomes from WIL programs, beyond the immediate work-based experience, consistent with the emergent 21C paradigm, emphasizing the need for WIL to be reconceptualised through a learning lens.

In Australia, the Business / Higher Education Roundtable (B-HERT) have recognized this need and have called for a greater emphasis on lifelong learning. The B-HERT policy statement (2001) was aimed at highlighting the significance of lifelong learning in the Australian context by drawing on analyses of lifelong learning policies and practices in Australia and other OECD countries. It suggested priorities for government, particularly in the areas of lifelong learning, business, and higher education and called for the development of infrastructures for learning in response to developments in the understanding of learning processes. It is the conditions which are needed for successful learning, and the advances in the technologies of learning, which create the potential for a new kind of learner and new kinds of learning more appropriate for 21C society (B-HERT, 2001).

Specifically, the B-HERT statement argued for the adoption of a multi-faceted approach to education policy to address the complex interplay of the three major aims of lifelong learning: lifelong learning for a more highly skilled workforce, for a stronger democracy and more inclusive society, and for a more personally rewarding life. This call is consistent with the international context, as articulated by Delors' Four Pillars of Learning (1996). Delors outlines how education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. Accordingly, Australian universities are challenged to respond to these goals through the development of quality, relevant, and measurable learning. WIL represents an appropriate and necessary vehicle

to develop students as holistic lifelong learners with a suite of learning dimensions and who are consciously able to build a satisfying working life across multiple career contexts. To meet this challenge, the notion of the meta-competence is critical.

The Australian government's goal of developing citizens with clear lifelong learning dispositions is a recognition that the development of competencies are prerequisites for a successful life and a well-functioning society. The Bradley review of higher education in Australia highlights how "it will be crucial for Australia to have enough highly skilled people able to adapt to the uncertainties of a rapidly changing future"(Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. xi.). Critically also, the report highlighted the Australian government's commitment to addressing the citizens' right to share in the benefits of the new global age and knowledge-based economy. (Bradley et al., 2008). The review, along with other government education imperatives as outlined in the Melbourne Declaration articulates the call for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The challenge for universities in Australia and globally to create WIL programs that have the ability to achieve and to measure achievement against these stated goals, however, is made more formidable as there is a lack of a shared understanding of WIL as a learning form. In Australia, the WIL report, a national scoping study, surveyed the range of terminology used to describe WIL and found a real discrepancy in the terms used to describe WIL (Patrick, et al. 2008). The data reflect Connor and MacFarlane's (2007, p. 7) observation about the lack of 'consistency or consensus' regarding the type of activities and words used to describe WIL. This lack of consistency reflects different perspectives and imperatives, which has caused confusion at universities and negatively affected their ability to identify, develop and measure the quality of WIL programs against high-level learning imperatives.

More broadly, the literature cites many definitions, but largely those that deal only with situational concepts rather than learning concepts. There is no discernable linkage with meta-competency or with lifelong learning. Reeders (2000, p. 205.) defined WIL as being "student learning for credit designed to occur either in the workplace or within a-campus setting that emulates key aspects of the workplace." The National Commission for Cooperative Education defined WIL as: "A structured strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals" (National Commission for Cooperative Education, cited in T Groenewald, 2005, p 17.). Patrick, Peach, Pocknee, Webb, Fletcher & Pretto (2008) adopt a formative, structural approach when it suggested that *work integrated learning* is an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum. It is characteristic of the view adopted across Australian universities that, similarly, focus on the development of formative outputs rather than learning outcomes.

A survey of the stated definitions of WIL and its imperatives as they appear on the majority of Australian universities' websites, reveals a common structuralist emphasis that highlights a primary focus on programs that involve elements such as location, assessment forms, and processes, rather than on WIL-specific *learning* outcomes. The sample group also uses broad umbrella terms such as *work* and *community* and *authentic* to describe WIL contexts and programs, which are not sufficiently sharp, in themselves, to support common understanding or measures of effectiveness. Nor, importantly, do they deal with the core value of WIL, which is the element of student learning and development of meta-competencies pursuant to lifelong-learning outcomes.

Victoria University, taken here as being a broadly representative example of current practice, employs a structural formative approach when it defines its Learning in the Workplace and Community (LiWC) WIL program as being assessment that falls into four broad categories: placements, simulations, industry/community projects and workers as learners. On the one hand this gives educators and students across disciplines a range of strategies to choose from when creating WIL programs. On the other hand, it limits the capacity and collective imaginations of curriculum designers to develop bespoke learning. It should instead be recognized that the structure of curricula that have the potential to facilitate high quality WIL outcomes are infinite, and should not therefore have a finite set of structures imposed upon them.

It seems, then, desirable rather than attempt a grand definition, to instead attempt a characterisation of WIL primarily in terms of positive learning axioms, from which its characteristic style, structures, and negations follow. The proliferation of different types of WIL structures and forms that are professed to constitute the phenomena of WIL impede the understanding of learning. The structures and curricula forms that may form to constitute WIL are infinite. It is thus unhelpful to attempt to define the learning in terms of structures; they become a meaningless infinity. What is needed, rather, is the identification of a unique learning element that transcends disciplines and vocations and prescriptive pedagogical forms to be identified. Critically, this element would enable both development and measurement of WIL and fill the research void that exists around the achievement of student learning outcomes and the impact of the outcomes on their future careers (Smith et al., 2009).

Definitions that primarily view WIL in terms of curriculum and/or vocational preparation contribute to this conundrum. A recent description of WIL as being a "curriculum design in which students spend time in professional work or other practice settings relevant to their degrees of study and to their occupational futures" (Smith, 2012, p. 247) perpetuates this conundrum as it reinforces the existence of an archetypal WIL curriculum design or "essential pedagogically relevant features" in curricula without providing clear WIL learning outcomes. These outcomes would be able to be measured across disciplinary contexts. Instead, at least implicitly, they encourage learning value to be viewed through a single disciplinary and/or vocational lens which has the effect of limiting the

pedagogical creativity and broader 21C lifelong learning outcomes to be both developed and measured, unnecessarily. In terms of Crick's meta-competence representation (Figure 1.), it only measures the knowledge quarter rather than the whole learning continuum.

As an *ideal type*, the attempt to define WIL, much less to measure it, is an attempt to perform a linguistic contortion. To define WIL is to attempt to account for the infinite number of learning forms and contexts, which, ultimately, only render the definition itself meaningless for practical purposes. The term ideal type refers to the status acquired by any generic concept, which is made central to an investigation of processes and events concerning human beings (Weber, 1964). WIL, in this case, is the generic concept. By using Burger's logic, accepting WIL as an ideal type is problematic as "before human consciousness acts upon the world to derive the meaning and values, which form the fabric of experimental reality, it consists of a 'meaningless infinity' of phenomena" (Weber as cited in Burger, 1976, p. 80). The argument follows that to perceive or know anything at all, the mind needs a filter capable of drastically editing this infinity, much in the same way as a camera needs a lens before it will photograph anything recognizable (Griffin, 1993). WIL is in need of a camera lens to make it recognizable and thus measurable. The contention of this paper is that that lens in WIL contexts should be centred on Crick's notion of meta-competency in the form of a *test* rather than a *definition*.

While it is true that WIL does broadly share common empiric characteristics, it is problematic that they should form the basis of a definition. That is, while characteristic assessments and typical unit structures can appear *prima facie* to form a definable core, there are significant inconsistencies in using students' physical presence in a workplace in any definition inclusive of multiple vocations and/or discipline areas. There are many examples of successful experiences that do not fit easily into neat categories that should also qualify as WIL. Further, while particular forms assessment can be useful indicators of WIL, assessment forms in and of themselves do not constitute proof of learning, which is central to WIL and to the achievement of stated national and international goals.

The implications, then, for WIL are great. How to give account of, measure, or make a single sense out of learning experiences that emanate from the interaction of hundreds and thousands of lives in countless disciplinary areas across WIL programs, globally (Usher, 2012). This is not even to mention the impersonal or structural forces, which affect them. There is a need to give account to the learning experiences that emanate from the interaction of hundreds of thousands of lives in countless disciplinary areas to act as Griffin's camera lens. According to regulation theory, this should be achieved through the development of a principle test, rather than by the identification of a series of specific rules and/or curriculum structures. Haste's metaphor from jazz music is apposite as it describes the ability to draw on established forms and structures to innovate and recreate in authentic contexts" (Haste cited in Rychen, D. and Salganik, 2001). Importantly, this is critical in providing the camera lens in the form of a test with which to better understand WIL, identify, articulate, and measure its value pursuant to the achievement of the high level national and international goals.

A textbook example of a WIL form that is deemed to be effective is the preservice teacher practicum. This form aligns closely with widely accepted understandings of WIL such as Smith's as it facilitates "students spending time in a professional . . . setting relevant to their degree of study and to their occupational future" (Smith, 2012, p. 247). Further, it is ostensibly authentic by virtue of being physically located in a school. It contains integrated learning supports by virtue of students being paired with mentor teachers, it facilitates supervisor access to both student and mentor, students having been prepared and inducted and have their experience directly assessed through aligned teaching and learning activities. At this level, then, all students participating in this course would have an equally valuable WIL experience, as the rules governing unit structure and supporting policies comply directly with the prescribed measurements.

How, then, are assessments to be made on the students' learning as opposed to their participation? Smith's research (2012) highlights reflective journaling, the creation of a commercial product, the conduct of research or other discipline or profession-appropriate means as examples of effective WIL activities. In the case of the pre-service teacher, reflective journaling occurs, as does action research, in addition to the actual teaching practice. These forms are most commonly assessed against praxis criteria; that is, the extent to which the student is able to recognise how pedagogical theory and teaching practice comes together and is able to demonstrate this. Importantly, this example of a widely recognized WIL context, relies on assessment of the preservice teacher's knowledge and actions in an education context and not on the extent to which the WIL experience has developed the student's meta-competency or as a lifelong learner equipped to be successful in 21C society, pursuant to the high level national and international goals. For this to occur, an assessment would be made of the extent to which the unit developed the students' meta-ability to develop and adapt learning, be curious about learning, make meaning from experiences, be creative, act interdependently, be able to strategically manage their learning process, and to be resilient.

The measures of authenticity, learning supports, and alignment of teaching and learning activities and assessments with integrative learning outcomes, to a large extent, all beg the question, is there learning that course designers desire students to acquire that falls outside their disciplinary sphere? Indeed, is there a desirable WIL learning form in all WIL contexts or is the learning in WIL different in each different context? If it is the latter, WIL would suffer from a lack of Griffin's camera lens. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to view WIL, in all its range and complexity, clearly enough to derive any broader meaning. If it is the former, then it must be both broad enough to be applicable in all disciplinary contexts, but sufficiently sharp for genuine meaning to be derived across all disciplines. This paper suggests that the lifelong learning dimensions contained in the ELLI and the notion of meta-competences represent useful and accurate measures that would form an appropriate principle on which to base WIL practice.

It is instructive to view the dilemma in terms of regulation theory. According to Braithwaite (2002), precise rules more consistently regulate simple phenomena than principles. However, as the regulated phenomena become more complex, such as in the regulation of WIL, principle has a greater chance of delivering more consistently than rules. The reason for this is that rules prescribe relatively specific acts; principles prescribe highly unspecific actions. For example, a legal principle of environmental regulation like *continuous improvement* can imply an infinitely creative range of action possibilities; a rule preventing the dumping of chemical X relates only to that action. In terms of WIL, specific rules are important in terms of structures to ensure equity, safety, and professionalism; however, without a supporting learning principle, the core value goes unattended and unmeasured.

An instructive legal case in the United States that highlights the importance of principle over rule is the Riggs versus Palmer case that was heard by a New York court toward the end of the 19th century. The case involved a grandson who requested a court give him possession of his grandfather's inheritance, which was in accordance with New York State inheritance rules. The case was complicated, though, by the fact that the grandson was his decedent's murderer. This was a reality that was not mentioned as a reason for exclusion from hereditary succession by the applicable inheritance rules. Thus, in accordance with the applicable rules, that circumstance had to be regarded as irrelevant. Ultimately, however, the court ruled to deny the grandson possession of his grandfather's inheritance on account of a principle that people should not be able to profit from their own wrongdoings (Beehler, 1990).

In direct relation to WIL, this logic would dictate that it would be wrong to primarily view the value of a WIL unit in terms of its compliance with an archetypal WIL design or set of rules. By applying the rule approach of the Riggs versus Palmer case, to a WIL context, the broader notions of learning would and should have no bearing on the assessment of WIL. Instead, by taking a principle approach, the core value of WIL, pursuant to national and international 21C learning goals, relates directly to the quality that the learning experience scaffolds and the quality and quantity of learning that the students achieve as a result. The principle, which can be defined in terms of the meta-competence element, takes priority over the rules, which aim to support it. WIL components such as authenticity, learning supports, and supervisory guidelines should not obscure the core of WIL, which is the creation of meta-competences. The effective measurement of WIL, therefore, should be a measurement of learning, then, as opposed to structures. To achieve this, learning needs first to be conceptualized and then applied as a principle to support positive outcomes for students. The proposal, as articulated by this paper, then, is that the value of a WIL unit should be measured against a test of its potential to scaffold the development of students' meta-competency. It suggests that universities adopt an outcomes-based approach to WIL with units of study developed and tested against a learning principle or test rather than against a set of curriculum-related rules and outcomes measured against the ELLI learning dimensions.

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Professional Experiences in Seminar Discussions

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Abstract

Professional knowledge involves both practical skills developed through and in a job, and general theoretical assumptions about activities at work. The latter arise from a theoretical study of the subject. Studying the relationship between knowledge derived in these two processes will contribute to understanding and resolving tension between practice and theory in professional education. This study has examined how child minders, who are about to start vocational training to become preschool teachers, use both their practical experience and their general assumptions in discussions of ethical dilemmas in their work. The results show that the child minders can incorporate general assumptions and perspectives into these discussions with relatively few problems, while they do not compare the different perspectives with each other. Tensions between these perspectives are, therefore, not made visible.

Keywords: ethical dilemmas, first speaker, general assumptions, joint construction, professional experience, seminar discussion.

The work presented here focuses on how working experience is verbalized in seminar discussions. One point of departure, therefore, is the concept of *professional experience*. This concept deals with what the participants have learnt through working in their profession. However, the reaction of these experiences is affected by assumptions and theories. Moscovici's research, for example, has shown how scientific concepts and ideas in psychoanalysis are incorporated into everyday language and thinking (Farr & Moscovici, 1984). This study is, in this way, a special case of Work Integrated Learning (WIL). Previous studies in WIL have revealed tensions between theory and practice in education (Dimenäs, 2010; Eriksson, 2009; Leinhardt, McCarthy Young, & Merriam, 1995). Students in seminar discussions, for example, find it difficult to apply abstract theories to events that have occurred and impressions they have received during their internships. They tend to discuss events as one topic and theories as a separate topic (Malmbjör, 2007). I have studied participants who have not yet started professional education as preschool teachers, but this study is related to the same phenomenon: How do participants relate events they have experienced to general assumptions about their work.

This author has studied child minders who are in the process of changing their profession, and are studying to become preschool teachers. The child minders who participated in the present study had completed upper secondary school education and had at least three years' experience of working in preschool. The education of child minders and that of preschool teachers differ, as do also the areas of responsibility. Both child minders and preschool teachers expect that child minders focus more on caring than on learning, and that preschool teachers focus more on learning than on caring (Gustavsson & Mellgren, 2008). The first course in preschool teacher education that the child minders in the present study underwent involved validating their work experience. The seminar that was recorded was a part of this validation procedure, during which the students described and discussed ethical dilemmas in their work.

Another point of departure for the present study is the area of seminars and group discussions. Studies in group and seminar discussions with relevance for WIL concern, among other things, the learning processes that occur during such discussions. Tan (2003) showed that participants in these discussions only rarely develop new ideas. The creation of new ideas is preceded by the participants summarizing preceding discussion. This summary compares similarities and differences, making it possible for the participants not only to generalize but also to clarify the preceding ideas (Tan, 2003). These results are compatible with those from Wilhelmsson's study (1998) of group discussions among participants from different levels of childcare and childcare management. Wilhelmsson identified certain circumstances that impede learning in these discussions, such as an inability of the participants to switch from a concrete to an abstract level, or when the conversation either is too confrontational or too confirmative. Overlapping talk is another phenomenon that makes it difficult for participants to develop the topic of conversation (Gibson, Hall, & Callery, 2006). A study of seminar discussions has shown that the subject matter "is largely determined by the categorizations and descriptions the first speaker is given during the presentation stage, i.e. when the participants language sets and describes their observations and perceptions" (Malmbjer, 2007, p. 228). In another study the authors argued that the seminar leader controls the dialogue by defining the discussion task and by justifying the limits of the talk (Benwell & Stoke, 2002).

This study focuses on the concept of professional experience and on processes that occur in seminar discussions, and seeks answers to three interrelated questions:

- 1) How are dilemmas raised during the seminar, and what solutions are suggested?
- 2) How can the descriptions of dilemmas and the proposed solutions be related to the professional experiences of the participants and to their general assumptions and theories?
- 3) What is the nature of interaction patterns during the conversation, and how can this pattern be related to the descriptions and proposed solutions?

Theoretical Overview and Method

The theoretical points of departure for this study were taken from two theoretical frameworks. One framework deals with the concept of professional experience, the other framework deals with processes that occur in face-to-face conversations.

Professional experience is related to Aristotle's concept of *techne*, which can be translated as skills that people have developed through and at work. Another way of expressing this is: "We understand what we do by doing it" (Gustavsson, 2000, pp. 104-105). Another dimension of the concept of experience is based on the Aristotelian term *fronesis* which can be translated as *practical wisdom*. Josefsson (1998) discussed this concept and argues that the ability to discriminate, the ability to see the unique case, is a central aspect of practical knowledge. This knowledge is developed by a professional when he or she uses the senses to *read* a patient, learning to make judgments for each unique case. Josefsson showed that this ability is an adjunct to general scientific knowledge.

Practical knowledge is expressed through action: Is it also expressed in words? The concept of *tacit knowledge* is used to express this dichotomy, where tacit knowledge describes the case in which "a person does not have words for what she knows" (Gustavsson, 2000, p. 108). Some of this tacit knowledge, however, can become visible through reflection and conversation, and spoken language is a central tool in this process. Colnerud and Granström (2003) divide professional language into three types: everyday language, pseudo-meta-language, and meta-language. In *everyday language*, the external features of concrete events and processes are described with no explanation of why they are present. *Pseudo-meta-language* contains abstract concepts that can describe the imagined aspirations of the person carrying out an act, while the cause-effect dimension is missing. *Meta-language* is used to illuminate and explore cause and effect, propose actions, and so forth. Meta-language can, to some point, be compared with Abbott's (1988) model of professional knowledge. This model describes three stages in which knowledge is obtained. The first stage is to investigate and make a diagnosis for a patient, client, situation, operation, and so forth, under investigation. The second stage is to draw conclusions about the measures that are appropriate to take in the particular case, based on the diagnosis. The third stage is to find the right treatment or action.

Colnerud and Granström's language types, Abbott's model of professional knowledge and the concepts of *techne* and *fronesis* all lead to a theoretical framework that includes two dimensions. One dimension relates to the causes of and solutions to dilemmas encountered in a profession. This dimension concerns how the participants describe the dilemmas and what solutions they put forward. The second dimension relates to the concrete-abstract, and examines how events that are experienced in the profession relate to abstract theories or beliefs.

A third dimension based on processes in conversations will also be considered. Some theoretical elements borrowed from Linell's (1998) version of a dialogue perspective were used to analyze processes in the seminars. One such element is that conversation is a joint

construction. This means that when a seminar participant speaks she does it in a social context, and other participants influence what is said through various feedback signals. The fact that conversations are joint constructions means also that the participants present their contributions to the other participants, and together they build upon, question, and develop what has been said. Linell described these processes using the concepts of *initiative* and *response*. The *response* part of an utterance looks backward, while the *initiative* part takes the dialogue forward. Linell saw an initiative as an element in a process of becoming self-conscious. "This also generates intentionality, the ability to take initiatives with an awareness of their possible interpretations. It is the basis for becoming self-conscious, not only conscious" (Linell, 1998, p. 168). Initiative may involve posing a question, introducing a new topic or an aspect of a topic, or some other technique. Another element of a dialogue perspective is that the utterances, or turns, are organized sequentially, and the interactional significance and meaning of an utterance depends on its positioning in the sequence.

The analysis presented here was based on a recorded seminar. This seminar was a part of a validation procedure that child minders applying to take teacher training were required to undertake. Participants prepared for the seminar by keeping a diary of dilemmas in their profession during a preceding week, taking into consideration not only ethical aspects but also child and adult perspectives. These dilemmas were presented and discussed during the seminar. This discussion could relate to both Colnerud and Granström's (2003) concept of meta-language and to Abbott's (1988) model of professional knowledge, in that participants collected information about various dilemmas, seeking causes and suggesting solutions and actions.

All participants were women, six child minders and a seminar leader (who was a teacher at the university where the education was to be given). The ages of the child minders ranged between 28 and 56 years. Their experience of working with child care ranged between 3 and 19 years. A total of 1 hour and 57 minutes of seminar discussion was recorded.

During the transcription the turn-taking of the participants has been identified in order to facilitate the analysis of the interaction and processes in the seminar. A turn can be defined as "a continuous period in which a person is called upon to speak. To speak means that the person (for now) disposes the opportunity to speak and has the right (and perhaps the duty) to express one's opinion" (Linell & Gustavsson, 1987, p. 14).

With a turn as the basic unit, this author has studied the development of a dilemma, how a participant's contribution is responded back to previous contributions and/or is an initiative to bring some new aspects or perspective of the dilemma. This also includes an analysis of both dominance in the interaction and indicators of shared experiences among the participants.

Another analysis consists of a categorization of the content of the participants' contributions. This categorization is based on the two previously presented dimensions. The causes of and solutions to the dilemmas in categories related to conditions at the preschool or outside

preschool have been divided. Moreover, the participants' contributions have been categorized based on the way they refer to their own sensations, such as something they do, see or hear, or whether they refer to general assumptions, perspectives, etc. outside the concrete experience.

In the results section the author has reported under the heading *Causes and solutions* a combined analysis of the two dimensions and under the heading *Interaction patterns and problem descriptions* the focus is more on an interaction analysis. Quotations from the seminar have been simplified here, the spelling generally follows linguistic rules for written language, for example. Fictitious names are used.

Results

Causes and solutions. All dilemmas that were raised during the seminar concerned the task of care in the work of the child minders. Five dilemmas focused on a child's behavior and how the staff should deal with it, while one dilemma focused on a colleague.

The dilemma that focused on a colleague concerned a temporary employee whose conduct was considered to be unprofessional. The description of this child minder was that she equated her work with that of being a mother, not a child minder. The participants did not seek causes for this behavior, but proposed various solutions. One solution proposed was that the person in question be accepted onto the training she had applied for, in order to gain a different perspective.

Participants did seek causes of children's behavior in the presented dilemmas. These causes can be classified into three categories. One category sought the causes in conditions outside of the preschool, in the parents' behavior, for example.

But then, I've noticed that mom and dad do not put their foot down. He's still the little one you should protect. . . . Then it helps if parents can confirm what we do in preschool and tell him that he must not do that. (Karin in Dilemma 2)

Since the cause of the dilemma was the parents' behavior, the participants proposed that a solution is that parents change this behavior, they should say "No". This solution may then be combined with the actions of a preschool teacher or a child minder.

And we've talked a lot about it in the team and tried to apply the same treatment, tell him concretely and put him on the couch and talk first, then go off and make sure he sits there for a while, go back and talk about it. (Karin in Dilemma 2)

The proposed solution was, in this case, to encourage the boy to change his behavior by talking to him, and by giving some form of punishment (sitting on the couch for a while).

A second category of the causes of dilemmas concerning a child's behavior was found in the child himself or herself. These causes included, for example, the age of the child, or a diagnosed mental health problem.

This child I'm going to talk about has some tics (inaudible) and, in addition, she acts out terribly, and is self-destructive, hitting herself. The problem is what to expose the child to. How much is she exposed to when we go down to the other after-school? (Maria in Dilemma 3)

Maria describes the dilemma as being that the girl will feel comfortable when she gets to the other after-school center, but is sensitive to movement. One solution put forward was that the girl need not go to the other center. It was pointed out that she did not need to go out for activities at all, on the grounds that she has no social needs. Another solution put forward was to take the girl out on activities but avoid places at which the girl acts out. In contrast to Dilemma 2 the solution here did not involve encouraging the child to change behavior, it involved the way in which staff act in relation to the child. This may be related to the fact that the girl had a diagnosed mental health condition and that the people around her did not, therefore, expect her to act in a *normal* manner during a common activity (see, for example, Hjørne, 2004; Persson, 2007).

A third category of causes concerned conditions at the school, such as that a child had changed department, or that staff turnover was high. Here is an example of the latter.

We have had at least 15 different stand-ins since January and this obviously affects the children's group. They do not know what applies because it is different from day to day... And then there is one boy who is 2 ½ years old who has distinguished himself during the last two weeks. He has started pushing and pinching. (Jenny in Dilemma 4)

The solutions proposed to this dilemma did not primarily concern encouraging the child to change behavior, but changing the conditions for the staff. This may, in turn, lead to changes in the child's behavior. One solution put forward was to establish routines, such as providing a folder of important information for stand-ins, in an attempt to achieve continuity.

The results showed that there is a relationship between how the problem is described, what is considered to cause it, and the proposed solutions. If the cause was believed to be located outside the preschool, such as parents' behavior, the proposed solution also tended to focus on conditions outside the preschool; while if the behavior of staff was described as a part of the problem, the proposed solution also tended to focus on personnel actions. Participants used both their past experiences and general assumptions in these discussions. Their own experience dealt both with concrete descriptions of the dilemma, such as "he bites", and with how the staff handled the dilemma, such as "put him on the couch" or "make him wait

The results showed that there is a relationship between how the problem is described, what is considered to cause it, and the proposed solutions.

until last to get his sandwich" (Karin in Dilemma 2). The participants were able to develop the topics of the conversation here, and provide examples of how they handled similar dilemmas at their workplace. Katarina, for example, suggested role play as a solution to Dilemma 2.

General assumptions were often used in descriptions of the causes of the dilemma, one example of which is the belief that the mental health diagnosis of the girl in Dilemma 3 caused her to act in a certain way. General assumptions or theories can also be discerned in the descriptions of staff behavior, one example of which are the glimpses of behaviorism that we can see behind a choice of punishment (such as wait until last) for undesired behavior (see, for example, Säljö, 2000). General assumptions may be left unchallenged or contested during the discussion. An example of the latter is the statement made by Katarina and Lena during the discussion of Dilemma 3 that children with this particular diagnosis do not have social needs. Maria questions this, leading to Katarina and Lena supporting at a later stage the idea that the girl should go out on activities. It is clear that interaction between participants affects the descriptions of problems.

Firstly, the initial description set the framework for the discussion of the dilemma, a framework that the other participants may relate to when making their contributions to the discussion.

Interaction patterns and problem descriptions. The participant who presented a dilemma generally came to dominate the discussion of that dilemma. This dominance was expressed in two main ways. Firstly, the initial description set the framework for the discussion of the dilemma, a framework that the other participants may relate to when making their contributions to the discussion. Malmbjer (2007) has seen the same effect in a study of seminar discussions. Secondly, the first speaker dominated in terms of the volume of contributions. The dominance ranged from about 50% (Dilemma 3) to about 80% (Dilemma 2) of the time spent discussing a dilemma. This time dominance may be partially due to the fact that the first speaker had prepared her description and was expected to present it. The role of the seminar leader was principally to bring the discussion of a dilemma to a close. The seminar leader ensured also that the participants began to talk about the next dilemma. She did not (visibly) affect the development of the problem descriptions and solutions. I will illustrate the pattern of interaction and its effect on the development of the descriptions and solutions by showing the development of dilemmas one and six.

Interaction patterns and the development of dilemma one. The description of dilemma one begins, like the others, with the seminar leader turning to a participant and asking her to talk about her dilemma. Lena begins to tell about a boy who is 4 years old and very angry. She is here talking about aggressive behavior.

Lena: But now it has started again and it's very often. It happens every day. He knows that he can't keep up in the language. He can't keep talking before he gets angry and throws himself onto the others. He pulls other children down, and he pinches and he bites. He is so angry, he is so terribly angry.

Lena starts describing her dilemma at a concrete level from her experiences and sensations. She gives several examples of the boy acting violently towards other children, such as he “throws himself onto the others,” he “pulls other children down,” “pinches,” and “bites.” Lena

explains the dilemma by assuming that the aggressive behavior is caused by the fact that “he can’t keep up in the language”. She suggests that a lack of linguistic competence causes this aggression.

Karin: Does he have Swedish as his mother tongue?

Lena: He has Swedish as his mother tongue, but he has a father who comes from another country so they speak (another language) and Swedish and he is very ambivalent there. Then there is the culture and social, it’s also different education in different countries.

Karin influences the development of the problem definition by asking a question. Lena answers and at the same time takes an initiative, explaining the implied linguistic shortcomings of the boy with reference to the parents’ different language use. She suggests also that the parents are bringing up the child according to principles that differ from those commonly applied in Sweden, and this affect the boy directly. This explanation is based on a general socio-cultural assumption that social environment has an impact on a child’s development and behavior (Säljö, 2000).

So far, Lena has directed the discussion, and she develops the dilemma further by describing how the boy became alone in the group and that this in turn had affected the boy. Lena also mentions how the staff had acted, and introduces the term *punkta* “he just threw himself headlong back and was going to bite another child’s throat, it looked like, and yes we ‘punktar’ almost. Unfortunately we’re understaffed, but we knew then that we had to ‘punkta.’”

The other participants are expected to know the term *punkta*. It seems to refer to some kind of shared best practice, describing how one of the staff constantly observe one child in a situation like this, to protect the other children. (The other participants start to use the term as the seminar progresses.) The solutions being proposed at this stage of the conversation concern greater personnel resources, management action, and contacts with outside specialists. However, Lena brings the conversation back to a linguistic explanation, and suggests that this holds the solution to the dilemma. She argues that “it usually passes when they master speech and language properly and intellect, when they grow.” We can here discern a general assumption about developmental psychology; that age is the underlying variable that affects language and intellect, which in turn affect the occurrence of aggression (Tallberg Broman, 1995).

The first solution proposed is directly related to personnel actions, and is introduced by Maria who refers to her own experiences.

Maria: We may often get those children. Then I think of the boy, what’s he good at? Is he good at drawing? When do you get reactions from adults? You get reactions from adults when you do something stupid, so such children act in such a pattern only.

Lena: But we are turning and turning and we are positive.

Maria: But it doesn't help?

Lena: No.

Maria: For still reacting when they do it.

Lena: Yes, and we have to.

Maria: You have to act.

Lena: We have to act.

Maria: But it's not necessary, we don't have to act in that way.

Lena: No, but we need to protect the group. We have to protect the other children.

Maria tries to introduce the actions of the personnel into the description of the problem by arguing that the boy gets reactions from adults when he does something stupid. She points out that the staff don't have to act the way they do, and suggests a solution in which the staff break the vicious circle by producing and responding to things the boy is good at. Lena says that they have done that ("we are turning and turning and we are positive"), and then defends her actions and those of other personnel by arguing that they "have to protect the other children." She receives support on this point from other participants in the conversation. This seems to be built on some form of common experience of the participants, in which an individual child's action is weighed against the protection of other children. The previously presented term *punkta* comes into play here, as a way of keeping other children safe.

The conversation at this stage is revolving around two conflicting views; on the one hand, Maria's description and solution, which both involve personnel actions, and on the other hand, Lena's description which states that the cause can be found either at the boy's home or in the boy's age. These conflicting views lead onto a third track: a suggestion to keep the boy apart as an individual, or keep him as a member of a small group. This would not only protect other children, but also give the boy the opportunity to do what he is good at, and thus get a positive response from staff. This proposal, however, turns out to be impractical since the premises are not suitable.

The conversation continued as the participants responded to previous contributions and tried to bring something new to these, such as Anna took up again the socio-cultural perspective by suggesting that the father would come to the school and provide information about the boy's background. However, when the dilemma is to be summarized, Lena has the last word. Lena: "Something I've considered is that there may be a small conflict that is the cause. I think the mother treats him like a little baby and the father treats him like the four-year-old he is."

Lena says that the parents treat the boy differently, and that this may cause the problem. She suggests also that 4 year-olds act in a certain way, revealing that she believes that age affects a child's behavior more than the environment.

An overview of Dilemma 1 suggests that the problem description shifts on the collective level during the conversation, with competing causes and solutions being put forward. These causes and solutions were, however, not compared with each other or examined in a deeper way. Lena, the first speaker, appears to be applying a stage-divided understanding of the dilemma; 4 year-olds act in a certain way and the aggression they use disappears as they grow and as language develops. Lena also expresses a socio-cultural explanation to some extent.

Interaction patterns and the development of dilemma 6. Anna begins the description of her dilemma by telling about a boy who wants to be first.

Anna: We have a boy who is 5 years old. Whatever we do, he wants to be first in everything. He chases and pushes through. For example, as we sit and eat, we have a system where you pour the milk in one direction around the table. Then he can say that if I sit here, I am not the last today (to get milk). . . . But sometimes I get frustrated and think, today, you should be the last no matter how you count.

Anna's framing of the dilemma was to focus on a boy's competitive spirit and how she handled this. In the first stage of the discussion the boy's behavior and reasons for this was in focus. Anna said that his competitive spirit caused problems for him and for his environment in which some of the children copied his behavior. Anna suggested initially that the boy's school situation could be a cause, that the boy was concerned that he was soon going to change department and start with the 6 year-olds. However, none of the participants responded at this. Instead, the focus shifted to the boy's home environment, including descriptions of the boy's relationships with his siblings and parents. Lena: "But he is actually a typically second born out of three. He is not the oldest, and he is not the youngest and he can be blamed for everything really."

Lena refers to a general assumption about children with both younger and older siblings. This assumption in turn refers to some form of psychodynamic perspective in which the boy responds unconsciously to unresolved problems in his life history (Karlsson, 2012). Anna develops this further by giving concrete examples of both how the boy acts and how his younger sister acts. After discussing the boy's home environment for a while Katarina takes up again the boy's school situation as a possible explanation.

Katarina: And just that they have a role perhaps when they are 5 years-old and the oldest at preschool. That now you are 5 and the oldest at preschool.

Anna: Yes, it's clear that he has. And it may not always be said in a positive manner.

Katarina: Perhaps the staff have certain expectations of him, I mean. And then it might be a little wrong in his actions.

Maria: It's difficult to know.

Katarina refers to a general assumption about staff expectations for 5 year-olds. This assumption could in turn be placed under a social-psychological perspective and role theory, role conflict (Karlsson, 2012). However, this perspective was not examined in a deeper way. Instead, the focus shifted again.

Katarina: But how do you feel about it, that you're mean to him when you think so?

Anna: Yes, I do. I do because he has figured out the order when we serve milk. So really, he is very talented.

By her question Katarina points out that Anna's feelings can also be a part of her dilemma. Anna confirms this and says that the boy also learns things with his actions. The focus, however, is soon shifted back to the boy.

Karin: You can also turn it around and be one step ahead. Just this to be last, is it so dangerous? What happens?

Maria: That you make it into something positive.

Katarina: Yes, one can sit and have some simple math with these 5 year-olds.

Karin's proposed solution aims to play down the order in which children get something, e.g., milk. This would in turn encourage the boy to change his behavior. Katarina develops this further by proposing simple math exercises.

When the dilemma is to be summed up, the seminar leader wants Anna to clarify her dilemma.

Seminar leader: Yes, I think we should start rounding this up. Could you develop your reasoning a little bit about what is your biggest problem. Is the dilemma about the moral of wanting to compete or is it if you're doing right or wrong when you want to stop him?

Anna: That if I'm doing right or wrong when I stop him. I am a sports loving person so it's not that. It's how I will be able to limit him so that he will not cause harm to himself and his surroundings with his competitive focus.

During the discussion Anna seems to have experienced two problems in her dilemma. First it was the boy's behavior that was in focus, then her own actions, and finally the boy was again in focus. Participants also seemed to be agreed that the solution is to encourage the boy to change his behavior. The suggested reasons for the boy's actions involve different psychological perspectives, e.g., a psychodynamic and a social-psychological perspective. As in dilemma 1 the perspectives were not compared with each other.

Discussion

The present study had two interrelated points of departure: To examine how professional experiences are verbalized, and to examine processes in seminar discussions. The participants in this study verbalized professional experiences and gave several examples of

equivalent professional experience, primarily in how they had dealt with concrete situations. The use of the verb *punkta*, for example, to denote a constant observation of an aggressive child allowed the participants to discover that they had shared experience of such a situation. The participants expressed their professional knowledge also by general assumptions about their work. These assumptions often referred to the causes of the dilemmas they described. The causes of a child's behavior, for example, were sought in the child's social context outside of preschool, in the child itself, or in the conditions prevalent in the preschool. Participants in this way expressed conflicting theoretical perspectives, such as a socio-cultural perspective and a developmental psychological perspective and also different psychological perspectives. These perspectives, however, were not problematized, compared with each other, or examined in other deeper ways.

The participants used everyday language (Colnerud & Granström, 2003) when describing specific aspects of their dilemmas, such as how a child acted, and they used a variant of Colnerud and Granström's conceptual meta-language when looking for causes and solutions to the dilemmas. However, the lack of problematization and clarification of the perspective being adopted showed that these approaches have become part of everyday thinking in the same way as Moscovici's analysis of psychoanalytic theories has (Farr & Moscovici, 1984). It seems that the participants in the study had adopted these perspectives unconsciously. This, in turn, means that participants who have work experience and are about to begin an education tend to have a different approach to general assump-

This, in turn, means that participants who have work experience and are about to begin an education tend to have a different approach to general assumptions and perspectives than students who have less or no work experience and are given training.

tions and perspectives than students who have less or no work experience and are given training. So instead of a tension between the experience during an internship and theoretical concepts as the participants expressed in Malmbjer's study (Malmbjer, 2007), the participants in this study have incorporated theoretical perspectives into their descriptions of activities with relatively few problems. The cost of this is that the tensions and differences between the perspectives are not made visible.

This study has shown that there is a correlation between interaction patterns in a seminar and how the topics are developed. The description given by the first speaker, for example, sets a framework for the other speakers' contributions. The role of the first speaker has been observed in other studies (such as Malmbjer, 2007). In the study presented here, the first speaker had prepared her presentation and was given the opportunity (and obligation) to summarize her presentation. This meant that the first speaker had a relatively complete understanding of her dilemma before the seminar, and that the other participants' contributions were given a secondary role when the dilemma came to be summarized. This hampered the opportunity for collective learning during the seminar. Tan (2003) has shown that a prerequisite for such learning is that the participants sum up the thoughts that the conversation has generated, and then make comparisons and weigh the similarities and differences among themselves. It is possible that a different arrangement of the seminar, such

as giving the seminar leader a more active role, or asking the participants to summarize each discussion, would have produced a different result.

It is possible that the participants were affected by the fact that their participation in the seminar was to be graded, but it is difficult to determine whether this was the case. The development of the dilemma that concerned the conduct of a temporary worker was influenced by the expectations of the participants about the training they were to begin. They expressed what they considered to be professional and unprofessional behavior, and the importance of education in promoting professional behavior. This suggests that the participants were at a turning point between their old work as child minders and their vocational training to become preschool teachers. It is unclear how their professional experience as child minders would later affect what they adopted from the education. The extent and manner in which their education would affect their views on various dilemmas at work is also unclear. A third question concerned how they would deal with a changing professional role — from being child minders to become preschool teachers. How would they experience caring and learning in their new professional role? These issues will be addressed in a future study.

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Nursing Students' Experiences from Their First Clinical Education — a qualitative study

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Abstract

This article describes the experiences of 137 nursing students from their first clinical education. The material was collected with four open questions and was analyzed through qualitative content analysis. The descriptions focused on students' experiences in general as well as their clinical education circumstances and learning experiences. They reported on the characteristics of their preceptors, the feedback, and the preceptorship culture on the ward. The students assessed their own learning from the perspectives of activity level, nursing procedures they had practiced, and personal development. Taking responsibility for their own learning was manifested as responsibility for learning according to the learning outcomes, an experience of having taken only a small amount of responsibility, and a desire to take part in all things possible.

Keywords: clinical education, learning, nursing education, nursing student, preceptor

Learning in clinical practice is a type of experiential learning and its importance is considerable within professions such as nursing (Warne et al., 2010). However, there are variations in students' clinical placements (e.g., Midgley, 2006). Preception of nursing students implies facilitating learning experiences through the creation of supportive learning environments in order to activate the individual student's learning process. Moreover, it comprises the strengthening of professionalism through the development of their professional attributes and identities, which, in turn, will successfully develop the students' professional competence within nursing. (Jokelainen, Turunen, Tossavainen, Jamokeeah, & Coco, 2011.) According to CINAHL Headings the term *Preceptor: Student* refers to "assisting and supporting learning experiences for students providing care to patients". Also for example terms *Clinical Supervision* and *Student Supervision* are used in association with clinical education of nursing students (CINAHL Headings, 2012) .

This article is a part of a Nordic joint project with the aim of developing the clinical preception of nursing students during clinical education and promoting students' learning process. This is in line with the Bologna declaration to develop the quality system of educational programmes (Keeling, 2006). The partners in the project are one Swedish university (hereinafter referred to as SWE) and two Finnish universities of applied sciences (hereinafter referred to as FIN1 and FIN2). In Sweden, the scope of nursing education is 180 credits, and in Finland 210 credits. According to European Council Directive (Council Directive 89/595/EEC), clinical education should comprise 50% of the nursing education.

The project is a follow-up study that charts the experiences nursing students gain from their clinical education during their nursing education. This article focuses on one section of the survey, the open questions. The results from the quantitative survey are presented in another article (Sandvik, Melender, Jonsén, Jönsson, Salmu & Hilli, 2012).

Literature review

In various studies, students have often been satisfied with clinical education (Saarikoski, Isoaho, Leino-Kilpi, & Warne, 2005; Saarikoski, Marrow, Abreu, Riklikiene, & Özbicakci, 2007; Warne et al., 2010), but on the other hand, they have also pointed out deficiencies in the clinical education arrangements. Finnish and British students have been especially satisfied when they have had a designated preceptor and dissatisfied when they have not (Saarikoski, Leino-Kilpi, & Warne, 2002). In a study covering nine countries by Warne et al. (2010) in which Finland and Sweden also took part, the most satisfied students studied at university colleges and had a clinical education period of at least seven weeks, during which they had an individual relationship with the preceptor.

As a learning environment, clinical education provides the opportunity to learn how to link theory with practice. For this to work successfully, clinical education requires that the preceptor will arrange learning situations whereby students are able to plan and carry out

theoretically justified work. This is done together with discussions whereby the students can critically evaluate what they have perceived and experienced (Jokelainen et al., 2011; Laitinen-Väänänen, 2008).

Effective preception of nursing students during clinical education in health-care units consists of an individual mutual relationship between the nursing student and the preceptor (Jokelainen et al., 2011). A supportive yet challenging professional relationship between the preceptor and the student is an important factor contributing to professional development. This is a relationship built on mutual respect and openness to learning needs (Severinsson & Sand, 2010). The preceptor plays an important role in creating interaction during preception. By using preception initiatives, she or he can direct the student's attention to specific issues during clinical education and discussions (Laitinen-Väänänen, 2008).

In a study comprising eight countries by Saarikoski, Marrow, Abreu, Riklikiene, and Ozbicakci (2007), most of the students evaluated their relationship with the preceptor as being positive. The students who had a designated preceptor as a mentor (Papastavrou, Lambrinous, Tsangari, Saarikoski, & Leino-Kilpi, 2010) and a functioning perception relationship were most satisfied with the clinical education on the whole. In the study, only the occurrence of preception was associated with the overall satisfaction of the students. In a study by Jonsén, Melender, and Hilli (2012) the nursing students described good quality in clinical practice, which included, for example, stimulating and visible preceptors providing a sense of safety and security and a permissive atmosphere which allowed the student's self confidence to develop. In a review by Papastavrou et al. (2010), neither the atmosphere at the ward nor leadership was important for learning.

Hunter (2010) has assessed the experiences of nursing students in clinical practice by referring to a six-part *senses framework* presented by Brown, Nolan, Davies, Nolan, and Keady (2008). The framework comprised the following six senses: *security*, meaning the freedom to learn and explore roles and competencies within a supportive but enabling environment; *belonging*, meaning feeling part of a defined group with a clear and valued role to play; *continuity*, meaning the ability of nursing students to link theory and practice; *purpose*, meaning having something meaningful and important to aim for, identifying important personal and professional goals; *achievement*, meaning the fulfilment of professional goals and development of nursing competencies; and *significance*, meaning the recognition by nursing students that they have made important contributions to care delivery.

Löfmark and Wikblad (2001) investigated facilitating and obstructing factors for the development of learning in clinical education. In their study, the students emphasized responsibility and independence, receiving feedback, and opportunities to practice different tasks as facilitating factors.

During the preception process, students have the opportunity, for example, to take the initiative by asking questions, thus directing and deepening their own understanding. Identifying initiatives and responding to them during preception strengthens student-oriented learning (Laitinen-Väänänen, 2008). As students are allowed to take responsibility and initiative, their self-confidence increases, and when they succeed and receive feedback, this gives them occasion to reflect on their own development, which may contribute to increased self-confidence (Löfmark & Wikblad, 2001).

In Hunter's (2008) study, the nursing students' goals were directly linked to the learning outcomes set by their university, whereas in a study by Tupala, Tossavainen and Turunen (2004), only a slight tendency towards a profound level of competence emerged in the objectives that public health nursing students set for their own clinical education. There was little conscious effort towards the subjective handling and formation of knowledge, and there were no objectives whatsoever related to a critical contemplation of various issues. Although learning by participation and the acquisition of experiences were emphasized in the objectives of experiential learning, there was not much inclination towards internalization and reflection. During clinical education the students can also reflect upon their career choices and explore areas that they might not have previously considered (McKenna, McCall, & Wray, 2010).

Because it is well known that experiential learning is so important for nursing students and that there are differences in their experiences concerning clinical education, there was a need to explore the phenomenon qualitatively among the students involved in this project.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to describe the nursing students' experiences of their first clinical education period. The aim was to gain knowledge that can be utilized in the development of clinical education.

Methods

Description of the material. During the first phase of the project, in spring 2009, a total of 139 students from all three universities were asked to write down their experiences of their first clinical education period. This was done by answering four open questions. All in all, 137 students took part in the survey (FIN1: 44, FIN2: 20, SWE: 73). The students had completed their first clinical education period in long-term care, geriatric nursing, or on internal medicine and surgical wards.

The learning outcomes of the students in all of these three universities involved being able to create a caring relationship to a patient, to understand the special characteristics of an individual patient, and to identify the basic needs of the patient and to meet the patient's needs. Moreover, the students were supposed to take part in the pharmacotherapy under the preception.

The students were asked to describe their experiences of the following themes:

- 1) The clinical education period as an experience.
- 2) The clinical preception from their own perspective.
- 3) The learning during the clinical education period.
- 4) How responsibility was taken for individual learning during the clinical education period.

The students' background information was collected with separate questions.

Analysis of the material. The answers to the open questions were analyzed with an inductive qualitative content analysis, by analyzing the replies from the viewpoint of the material. All in all, five researchers participated in the analysis. At each institution, the institution's own material was coded first. After that, the materials were combined and the analysis was continued until everyone agreed on the results. By coding expressions that were significant for the research purpose, the material was reduced. The reduced expressions were grouped together on the basis of similarity of the content and abstracted into subthemes and themes (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). An example of the coding procedure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

An example of the coding procedure: how the subtheme "Useful learning experiences" was produced.

Examples of the substantive material	Key words or phrases	Subtheme
"...so good to come to the clinical placement and practise the things learnt in theory."	good to practice the same learned in theory	Useful learning experiences
"I gained a lot of confidence and unequalled competence."	a lot of confidence unequalled competence	
"My knowledge and skills deepened during the period."	knowledge and skills deepened	

The results have been reported by the questions (Table 2), and quotation marks show authentic quotations from the students' writings.

Table 2.

Questions asked of the students and themes formed in the content analysis.

Content of the open question	Theme	Subthemes
Clinical education period as an experience (n=24)	Experiences in general	Satisfied with preception Dissatisfied with preception Technical approach to nursing Atmosphere in the ward
	Clinical education includes diverging learning circumstances	Few learning opportunities Many learning opportunities Application of theory into practice
	Positive learning experiences	Attractiveness of nursing Useful learning experiences
Clinical preception as experienced by the students (n=121)	Characteristics of the preceptor	Pleasant preceptor Safe preceptor Different antitheses (Table 3)
	Preceptors' feedback – supportive or not?	Constructive feedback giving support Non-constructive feedback not giving any help
	Qualities of preceptorship culture	Preceptors' interest in preception Giving responsibility to the student Focus on learning outcomes
Learning during the clinical education period (n=126)	Components of students' own activeness	Very active Less active
	Fluctuated attending in nursing procedures	Many procedures Few procedures
	Personal development of the student	Development as a nurse Development as a human being
Responsibility for one's own learning (n=116)	Responsibility for learning in the direction of the learning outcomes	
	Little responsibility	
	Desire to take part in as many things as possible	

Trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness of the study involved credibility and transferability. In order to ensure credibility, an effort has been made to describe the analysis of the material and the results as clearly as possible, so readers can assess the strengths and weaknesses of the study from the perspective of both the analysis process and the results (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Except for the first question, a large number of responses to the material were obtained from the students. They were fairly brief but very descriptive as far as content was concerned and, mostly, clear themes could be formed. An example of the coding procedure is presented (Table 1) in order to provide readers with an illustration of the thought processes in the analysis.

Experienced researchers took part in analyzing the material and discussed the analysis until they agreed on the results, which enhances the validity of the analysis. Since the material originated from three institutions — each of which coded their own material — one researcher coded all of the material and made sure that the results described the entire collection as a coherent whole. She was a faculty member of one of the institutions involved in the study. Although all the five researchers were experts in clinical education didactics, none of them were involved with the clinical education of the student groups participating in this study. There is a minor possibility that the experiences and other knowledge of the researchers would have affected the analysis. The researchers were, however, aware of this possibility and in order to prevent this, kept on identifying and withholding any preconceived opinions and beliefs about the phenomena under investigation.

At first, the students were asked to evaluate the clinical education as an experience. The intention was to discover how students answer when the question is this open. It was noticed that this question produced remarkably less writings than the other questions which were more specific. The results produced from the responses of the first question were, however, analysed separately, in order to show the unique insights of the students.

Transferability indicates how largely the results could be transferred to some other context (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). For such a review, an attempt has been made to describe the context of the study as carefully as possible. The results could be transferred to other contexts in the teaching of nursing. Quotations of students' writings presented in the report of the results are typical extracts from the original material (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Ethical considerations. Research permits were obtained from each institution. Students were informed about the study in advance through both oral and written information. When the material was collected, the students received information about the study once again. They were informed that participation was voluntary, and that they had an opportunity to drop out of the study at any stage. The students gave their informed consent by participating in the study (Burns & Grove, 2009).

Since this was part of a follow-up study, each student was given a personal code number that was used to process the replies. At each institution, one researcher was aware of the identity of the owner of each code number. The results have been reported in such a way that an individual respondent cannot be identified.

Results

Description of the informants. The average age of students participating in the study was 22.1 years. Of these, 80% were between 19 and 24 years of age. A total of 86.1% (f=118) were women and 13.9% (f=19) were men. Of the respondents, 80.5% (f=107) had been in gainful employment at some type of job before they started studying. A total of 19.5%

(f=26) of respondents had no work experience. Of the participants, 60% (f=78) worked during their studies whereas 40% (f=52) did not. The duration of the students' clinical education period varied from three to ten weeks (FIN1: 10 weeks, FIN2: 7 weeks, SWE: 3 weeks).

Clinical education period as an experience. First, the students were asked to describe the clinical education period as an experience. Descriptions were received from 24 students. They reported on their *experiences in general*, on *clinical education including diverging learning circumstances*, and on their *positive learning experiences* (Table 2). As an *experience in general*, some of the students were satisfied with the preception "It was great to have an experienced person with whom you could change thoughts and ideas", whereas some were dissatisfied. Some were satisfied with the clinical education placement, the preception received there, and/or with their own learning. Experiences of dissatisfaction arose from the nature of the clinical education placement "I have learnt a lot, but I would have wanted to learn more... Another clinical placement could possibly have offered me more challenges." Moreover, actions by the teacher did not promote learning by one student. Several students had a "technical approach" to nursing, manifested in their writings as training of various procedures and often as a description of the number of procedures taken. "I was happy to learn a lot, but I would have also wanted to do more myself, e.g., procedures, but in my clinical placement there were not so many procedures." Some students said there was a good atmosphere at the clinical education placement; others had found it to be poor, particularly in the relationships between the head nurse and the personnel. The students' situation was difficult if the atmosphere was not good. "I fell into a difficult situation with some staff members, because the atmosphere was so very bad between the staff and the head nurse."

Clinical education including diverging learning circumstances refers to matters related to how the student learnt nursing. The students described these circumstances from a quantitative perspective: some felt they had few learning opportunities, whereas others thought there had been many of them. Those who felt that they had had few training opportunities considered the clinical education period to be too long. "The clinical education period was unnecessary long. During the last weeks I was able to work totally independently." Application of theory into practice emerged as students' experiences of how they could deepen the knowledge learnt at school during their clinical education period.

Learning experiences were mostly *positive*. Nursing was seen as an attractive job: "It was more interesting than I had thought . . .", even though the students had noticed that it was mentally and physically demanding. In the students' opinion, the clinical education had provided them with useful learning experiences, as one of the students stated: "I gained a lot of confidence and unequalled competence."

Clinical preception as experienced by the students. Descriptions on clinical preception were written by 121 students. They were formed into three themes (Table 2): *characteristics of preceptor*; *preceptors' feedback — supportive or not?*; and *qualities of preceptorship culture*. The preceptor was *characterized* as a pleasant preceptor, as a secure preceptor and through various antitheses that described the differences between the preceptors. The antitheses, which became the third subtheme, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.

Subtheme describing the preceptor's characteristics as different antitheses.

Skilful at preception – not very skilful at preception
Secure at preception – insecure at preception
A good role model as a nurse – not a good role model as a nurse
Gives support – does not give support
“There” for the student – not “there” for the student

Feedback given by the preceptor was either constructive feedback giving support, or non-constructive feedback not giving any help. Constructive feedback was received regularly throughout the clinical education, and it addressed both the student's strength and issues that required development. The latter was given in a way that the students still did not need to feel like they failed. “Both preceptors in my clinical education placement have guided me and supported me and given feedback in a good way.” Students also had experiences of non-constructive feedback. “She was competent in her work, but not personal and not pedagogical. Poor feedback.” At its most negative, the preceptor's feedback made the student feel like she or he was a bad person. Some students had received only positive feedback and wondered whether there was nothing to improve. Several students expressed that they did not get enough feedback. They felt that they needed more constructive feedback to promote their learning process.

Qualities of preceptorship culture described the preceptors' interest in preception, the assignment of responsibility to the student, and the focus on learning outcomes. Preceptors' interest in perception varied. Some were very well prepared for it, received the students well, and were available to them. On the other hand, some students had experiences of completely opposite situations. “The preception involved pretty much following the preceptor. The preceptor often did not explain why something was done like this or that.” Another student described: “It could have been planned better and more profoundly.”

Students were given varying levels of responsibility. Mostly students felt they had received appropriate or too little responsibility, but some thought they had been given too much responsibility. There was variation in the focus on learning outcomes. A majority of the students who described issues related to it said that the preceptor had supported them

in achieving their learning outcomes which supported their learning process. However, some reported that the preception was fragmented and not based on the learning outcomes and students' starting level. ". . . (the preceptor) informed if something "interesting" happened."

Learning during the clinical education period. Students were asked to assess their own learning during the clinical education period with a verbal description of their learning. Descriptions of their own learning were written by 126 students. They were related to the *components of students' own activeness, fluctuated attending in nursing procedures*, and the student's personal development (Table 2). The first two themes were characterized by opposing views when seen in the quantitative descriptions made by the students. Own activeness was described as an experience of oneself as either a very active or less active person. "I was open and ready to learn, I tried to work in a calm manner and learn from my mistakes." The very active ones had worked hard, taken initiative, studied independently, asked a lot of questions, listened to the preceptors and learned their lesson, experimented, and utilized the feedback they had received. "...I have received knowledge from my preceptor but I have also actively sought information."

There were fewer students who described themselves as less active. These students stated that they could have been more active during the clinical education, because there would have been opportunities for learning. ". . . sometimes I felt like I needed a kick in the backside."

Fluctuated attending in nursing procedures consisted of the subthemes "many procedures" and "few procedures." A high number of procedures were often connected to good learning, whereas a small number of procedures were often deemed a factor that prevented learning.

The students described their *personal development* mostly as development as a future nurse "This feels like the right career for me", but some experienced that they had also developed as human beings. Development often involved experiencing an increase in self-confidence.

Responsibility for one's own learning. A total of 116 students wrote descriptions of how they had taken responsibility for their own learning. The material was illustrated by three themes (Table 2): *responsibility for learning in the direction of the learning outcomes, little responsibility*, and *a desire to take part in as many things as possible*. Some students stated that they had taken their *own responsibility* for studying on the basis of their *learning outcomes*: for example, by attending to the needs of patients, acquiring more theoretical knowledge about issues that came up during clinical education, and by keeping a learning diary. The experience of having taken *little responsibility* emerged as students' reflections on how they could have been more active in acquiring learning experiences and, for example, talked more with the patients. The *desire to take part in as many things as possible* was the strongest phenomenon in the answers to this question. "I showed an interest in

the nursing procedures that were performed and I wanted to take part in everything.” It consisted of expressions where the students repeatedly described taking responsibility as a constant interest in everything and participation in everything. “I tried to be as visible as I could and wanted to take part in everything where I was given an opportunity.” . . . “By taking part in as many nursing procedures as possible.”

Discussion

Reviewing the results. There was variation in the students' descriptions of how the clinical education was implemented, as also Midgley (2006) has reported. Various students often had opposing experiences with regard to many different issues. It is evident that variation exists between the clinical education placements, but the students might also have had varying expectations of clinical education.

Some students reported having been able to apply theory into practice. This is an important learning experience described also by Hunter (2010). According to Laitinen-Väänänen (2008), clinical education provides an opportunity to learn linking theory and practice through arranged learning situations. When this is planned, it is important to consider the student's learning outcomes and discuss them enough so that the student, preceptor, and teacher share an understanding of what kind of learning the student should aim for during the clinical education period.

Descriptions showed that students were both satisfied (Saarikoski et al., 2005, 2007; Warne et al., 2010) and dissatisfied with the clinical education. By reference to the students' verbal accounts, the quality of the preception varied a great deal.

Some students told that they had found nursing as an attractive, yet demanding job. McKenna et al. (2010) have previously reported about the students reflecting on their career choices during clinical education. This is an important lesson to learn: in order to recruit new personnel, every nursing work-place should offer high-quality clinical education opportunities, showing the students a realistic, but supportive learning environment.

According to the students' descriptions, good preceptor qualities included skill and security at guidance (Hunter, 2010; Jonsén et al., 2012), being a role model, providing support (Hunter, 2010; Jokelainen et al., 2011; Severinsson & Sand, 2010), and “being there” for the student (Saarikoski et al., 2007). The descriptions also gave rise to opposing experiences on the part of preceptors with regard to these factors. Since several students wanted more feedback, the importance of it became evident. Löfmark and Wikblad (2001) report that receiving feedback gives the students the possibility to reflect on their own development. This was also experienced by those informants who had received constructive feedback and felt that it supported them, while non-constructive feedback did not give any help.

It has been previously stated that the atmosphere in the ward and leadership are not important with regard to the student's learning (Papastavrou et al., 2010). However, a permissive atmosphere does increase one's self confidence (Jonsén et al., 2012). In this study some students were sensitive to the atmosphere of the ward and it affected their learning.

Some students described their personal development, a thing that also Hunter (2010) has reported, as the fulfilment of personal and professional goals and the development of nursing competencies (Jokelainen et al., 2011). This is also closely linked to the goal-orientation of preception (Severinsson & Sand, 2010), about which some students in this study had good experiences of, and some did not.

Students' descriptions often focused on nursing procedures. According to Jokelainen et al.'s (2011) systematic review, facilitating the attainment of stipulated clinical skills in preception includes training the student to improve both hands-on clinical nursing and communication skills in interaction with patients. McMillan and Shannon (2011), who have studied nursing students' and medical students' attitudes toward empathy in patient care, say that empathic communication skills are critical in providing high-quality nursing care. When students' learning outcomes are set and learning experiences are planned, it is important to take the training of the patient-nurse relationship into account, as the experiences of some students in this study show.

While there had been deficiencies in the focus on learning outcomes in the preception, the same phenomena had been present in some students' attitudes. Many students had "tried to take part in all things possible." Similar results were found in a study by Tupala et al. (2004). "Taking part in all things possible" may seem like a desirable thing for a student, but preceptors and teachers should emphasize the learning outcomes of the students' clinical education period and the fact that one does not have to, nor is one able to, learn everything during one clinical education period. When students take responsibility for their own learning, it includes an understanding of the purpose of the clinical education period in question and preparation for their own learning outcomes accordingly. When preceptors assign students responsibility (Löfmark & Wikblad, 2001), they must know the student's background and learning outcomes at the time.

Conclusion

There is great variation in how nursing students experience their clinical education. Even in written evaluations, students may describe their clinical education and what they have learned in it through the quantity rather than the quality of their learning experiences. Clinical education is not necessarily always focused on the acquisition of learning experiences according to the expected learning outcomes. In the students' opinion, being satisfied or dissatisfied with clinical education may involve the total number of varied, unconnected events in clinical education.

Clinical education needs to be developed in order for the preception to have a more uniform quality. In the future, studies on how students and preceptors understand the significance of learning outcomes in clinical education and how implementation of the clinical education is planned should be conducted.

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Internships in Rural Schools: Post-Interns' Views

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Abstract

This study extends earlier investigations conducted by the authors in one Canadian province regarding the views of post-interns in a teacher-education program who completed their 16-week extended-practicum in rural schools. The authors summarize interns' responses to a survey soliciting intern perspectives of the advantages, disadvantages, and advice to prospective interns with respect to doing their internship in rural settings. The authors compare the current findings with those from the previous studies, and found similarities between the views of the earlier and later cohorts.

For example, both cohorts identified many of the same positive aspects (e.g., the tangible sense of community; the supportive and relaxed atmosphere; and the ease of becoming acquainted with their students and students' families). Likewise, the two cohorts generated similar listings of negative aspects (e.g., the expense incurred, the lack of professional resources, and the separation from family/friends). However, the authors also report variations between the sets of findings from both cohorts, in that percentages of respondents from the two cohorts were not identical for each aspect. The authors draw implications from this synthesis for stakeholders from any discipline, with an interest in enhancing the professional practicum in rural settings.

Keywords: Experiential learning; extended practicum; internship; rural schools; student teaching.

The internship experience forms a key component of the pre-service preparation of practitioners across almost all professional disciplines (Domask, 2007). During this practicum/clinical phase, prospective practitioners are placed within real-world settings under the guidance of mentors/supervisors, who help the protégés develop their professional knowledge and skills (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2010). With respect to internships in teacher-education, neophyte teachers learn to teach during an extended-practicum session, which in the case of this study was a four-month period from September to December. These internships occur within actual school environments, under the joint-mentorship of a classroom cooperating-teacher and a university-based

advisor, variously called a supervisor, facilitator, coach, or mentor (Cochran & Zeichner, 2005). However, because limited research exists regarding internships in rural schools, the authors hoped to reduce this gap. The studies conducted spanned a 13-year period, in which the views of several cohorts of post-interns who had completed an extended practicum in rural schools in a Western Canadian province were solicited and analyzed. This internship was the key experiential-learning component (Kolb & Kolb, 2005) of their teacher-certification program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to gather data provided by one cohort of post-interns who completed their extended-practicum in 2011 (identified as the *recent* cohort), and for which one of the authors was the college-based facilitator (or mentor/supervisor). At the conclusion of their internship experience the post-interns were invited to respond in writing to three questions: (a) What were the positive aspects you experienced in the rural internship? (b) What were the negative aspects? and (c) What message/advice would you offer future interns regarding rural practicum placements? The responses were analyzed and compared to similar data that had been previously collected from five groups of post-interns that had completed internships between 1998 and 2002, identified as the *earlier* cohort. The findings were presented to

Both cohorts identified many of the same positive aspects (e.g., the tangible sense of community; the supportive and relaxed atmosphere; and the ease of becoming acquainted with their students and students' families).

the university-based and school-district (or school-division) stakeholders, who participated in the internship program offered through the College of Education at the university where these studies were conducted. The stakeholders may use these data to help inform their efforts toward enhancing future rural internships. This research may also assist school-district administrators seeking to improve their teacher recruitment/retention efforts and thereby advance the overall quality of education offered in rural schools.

Review of the Literature

In previous years, Canada's Prairie Provinces have witnessed increased urbanization, substantial governmental financial cutbacks, economic downturns in the agricultural and related sectors, and the consequent decline of rural populations. Until recently, a rural-urban gap existed in that rural areas, compared to their urban counterparts, had experienced declines in employment opportunities, new housing, economic expansion, school enrolment, student achievement, teacher recruitment, and high school course availability (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006). Consequently, educational stakeholders in these provinces have attempted to deal proactively with these issues. For instance, provincial governments have adopted legislation and modified policy to support the consolidation and amalgamation of school divisions (Noonan, Hallman, &

Scharf, 2006). Also, rural school divisions have sought to adjust by creating multi-grade classrooms, closing the smallest schools, re-aligning school bus routes, or incorporating itinerant staff assignments (Kirk, 2008).

More recently, however — especially in the province of Saskatchewan — there has been an increase in economic activity and a related reduction in this urban/rural gap, which in turn has led to a reversal of the decline and a resurgence of expansion in some rural areas (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011). The need to hire teachers in both rural and urban divisions will continue because of the following factors: the number of teachers reaching retirement age is increasing and will need to be replaced; the number of teacher-candidates entering teacher-education institutions is not increasing; and the majority of graduating teachers typically favouring teaching positions in larger metropolitan centres, more than those in rural areas (Ralph, 2003). Consequently, both rural school divisions and teacher education institutions will be prudent to encourage neophyte teachers to apply for teaching jobs outside of the urban centres.

Previous research. The amount of research regarding rural internships is scant. For instance, a recent search of the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database on the topic of *rural internships* identified 20 possible sources, only four of which were somewhat pertinent to the present study in examining the experiences of student-teachers doing their practicum in rural settings. The few earlier studies were found to yield similar results. For example, Borys et al. (1991) reported nine key benefits accruing to rural school divisions, to the faculty of education, and to practicum students, as a result of participating in one collaborative school-university partnership that jointly delivered an effective practicum program. Two of these benefits were that student teachers received bursary support and assistance in finding housing in their placement, and that the school division capitalized on this collaboratively conducted practicum to recruit new teachers for its schools.

Furthermore, Hemmings, Kay, and Kerr (2011) conducted research for several years in remote rural schools in Australia, which showed that student teachers were generally positive about both their rural teaching and living experiences, and that they were willing to teach later in similar locations. Also in Australia, Meiklejohn and Barrett (1994) found that novice teachers in rural communities witnessed the close relationships that develop between rural teachers and their students.

North American research on rural practica has not been extensive (Khattari, Riley, & Kane, 1997; Ralph, 2000). However, that situation seems to be changing, as shown by subsequent events that have emerged in the field, such as: (a) the call for more widespread research on preparing new teachers for rural teaching (as exemplified in the website focusing on rural education recently created by Wallin (n.d.) from the University of Manitoba); (b) a growing interest across the professional disciplines in the importance of experiential learning and practicum programs (Goodnough, & Mulcahy, 2011; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2010) and in the mentoring/coaching process accom-

panying such programs (Ralph & Walker, 2011); and (c) the increased interest shown by such groups as the Canadian National Congress on Rural Education, now in its 17th year (National Congress, 2012).

In studies of teacher-interns completing their extended-practicum in rural schools in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, Ralph (2000, 2002, 2003) reported that several advantages and disadvantages of rural teaching cited by the interns were similar to those expressed by urban interns. Most of the concerns identified were common to all beginning teachers, regardless of their placement. These concerns typically reflected novice teachers' levels of concern revealed in previous research on beginning teachers' experiences (Ralph, 2002; Smith & Sanche, 1992). These three general stages were: (a) concern for "self" ("Will the students like me?"), (b) concern for "task" ("Will I have effective classroom management?"), and (c) concern for "others" ("Will the pupils learn what I am teaching them?").

The elements that Ralph (2000, 2002, 2003) identified as being distinctly "rural" were often related to non-school factors, such as interns being able to secure suitable living accommodations for the practicum, interns incurring extra expenses for travel to and from the rural location during the practicum, or the lack of access to instructional resources and/or cultural/leisure/entertainment venues, compared to the ease of access in the urban areas. This present study explores some of these issues a decade later.

The Provincial Demographics

The present study was conducted, as were the earlier ones (Ralph, 2000, 2002, 2003), under the auspices of the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, one of the two university teacher-education institutions in the province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is the sixth largest of Canada's 10 provinces in terms of population, having approximately 1.1 million people--about 180,000 of whom are students in the Province's K-12 school systems (Government of Saskatchewan, 2011; Saskatchewan Ministry, 2010).

Approximately 37% of Saskatchewan's citizens live in rural and remote areas, while the remainder resides in its 13 cities (urban centers with a population of 5,000 or more). Fifty-four percent of the approximate 720 K-12 schools in the province are located in the rural and northern areas (in towns, villages, hamlets, or on aboriginal/band lands) enrolling approximately 47% of the province's total student population. The urban areas, which contain approximately 46% of the province's schools, hold nearly 53% of the total student enrollment (Saskatchewan Ministry, 2010).

The Extended-Practicum

Each year the College of Education, which the teacher candidates mentioned in the present study attended, places approximately 350 teacher-interns in provincial and band-controlled K-12 schools during their final year of the teacher education program.

The teacher-interns are placed in urban and rural schools in the province to complete a four-month extended practicum under the joint mentorship/supervision of a classroom cooperating teacher and a college-based facilitator. Each faculty facilitator/mentor works with several pairs in a specific geographical location. Past placement statistics from the College indicated that approximately 54% of teacher-interns do their extended-practicum in urban schools and 46% are placed in rural schools each year.

Method

Subjects. The recent cohort of interns surveyed in this present study, as well as the five cohorts in the earlier studies, completed the extended-practicum in rural schools under the mentorship of one of the authors in the fall semesters, respectively, of 2011, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002. The recent (2011) cohort members were placed in 14 rural schools in five school districts, while the five earlier cohorts had been placed in 43 different schools located in 33 rural communities throughout the province. The recent cohort consisted of 21 females and 4 males, while the earlier five cohorts had 68 females and 18 males, which altogether yielded a female/male ratio of approximately 4:1. Each cohort in the studies was representative of the College's annual enrollment of the approximately 350 interns completing their internship. The cohorts were also representative of the total College student population, in terms of the variety of grade levels and subjects taught, the mix of the interns' major and minor teaching specializations, and the range of sizes of school in which they interned.

Procedure

At the completion of the practicum, post-interns were invited to complete a written survey that consisted of three open-ended questions: (a) What were the positive aspects of interning in a rural school? (b) What were the negative aspects? and (c) What advice would you give new interns regarding doing the internship in rural schools? Confidentiality was preserved, because they were asked to place no identifying demographic information on the surveys.

The responses were collated and analyzed using the "constant comparative" technique (Mills, 2010) in which an inductive analysis of the data was conducted (Best & Kahn, 2006). Using this approach, a process was engaged in of systematically categorizing and re-categorizing the responses according to emerging patterns or themes from the data. These evolving categories gradually formed a framework for communicating the essence of how the interns perceived their practicum experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2009).

In order to help verify the validity of these data, a triangulation procedure was incorporated in which the survey results were compared with data derived from other relevant sources (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). These additional sources were: (a) the oral comments noted among interns and teachers during school post-conferences and in

informal conversations with the authors; (b) the college mentor's regular observations of, and participation in, casual conversations between/among several interns and/or cooperating teachers that occurred at the internship in-services and at the interns' schools; and (c) previous related research (Davidson, 2011; Meiklejohn & Barrett, 1994). The data were summarized in tabular format, as described in the following section.

Findings and Discussion

Advantages of teaching in rural schools. The values in Table 1 summarize the views of the recent cohort and those of the five earlier cohorts surveyed a decade earlier. Although both groups identified a similar listing of advantages, one key difference is observable. This difference was that the percentages for most of the recent cohort were considerably higher than those for the earlier group. This higher agreement among the recent interns may be indicative that both the College and the rural school divisions have been recently seeking to strengthen rural internships than they had been a previously (Lemisko & Ward, 2010; Ralph 2000, 2002, 2003).

Table 1.

Summary of Post-Interns' Responses Identifying Advantages of Interning in Rural Schools.

Advantages	2011-2012 (n=16)	Cumulative (n=101)
1. Tangible sense of community	100	62
2. Supportive, relaxed climate among staff/community	100	60
3. Close acquaintance with students	65	67
4. Low enrollments	44	20
5. Opportunity to engage in variety of activities	44	21
6. Close acquaintance with families	38	23
7. Opportunity to secure a rural teaching position	13	5
8. Time for professional reflection/preparation	13	2
9. Inexpensive accommodation	6	1
10. Few discipline problems	6	10

Note. Values are rounded and represent percentage of respondents who identified advantages in their written comments. The cumulative sum includes five previous cohorts mentored/supervised by one of the authors during the 1998-2002 period, as documented in Ralph (2000, 2002, 2003).

With respect to the values for item #3, this advantage was presumably deemed by both cohorts to be evident and highly esteemed. For item #10, the 2011 cohort did not apparently rate that aspect as important as the earlier group did. This change seems to be in accord with recent American research that has shown that parents, for instance, have tended to rank the maintenance of student discipline in school as being gradually less problematic than had been the case in previous years (Bushaw & Lopez, 2010).

As the content of Table 1 shows, the interns were in strong agreement regarding the function of the phenomenon of “the smaller community.” For instance, one intern stated: “The town was very welcoming, and I liked the close-knit community that accepted me.” Another intern wrote: “I had lots of community connections, and had a good relationship with the parents.”

Because of the close-knit community relationship that tended to emerge in rural areas, where people meet both in formal and informal settings, nearly all of the respondents commented that the increased social interaction and community participation promoted knowing the students and their families better, which in turn led to bolstering mutual school-community support, as illustrated by these comments: “I learned a lot about students who grew up on farms, and how their lifestyle was different;” and “I saw exactly where students lived or we walked by students’ houses on an outing. The kids loved this!”

Furthermore, regarding “knowing students” and “low enrollments” several interns connected the two aspects, as illustrated by these statements: “I found the smaller class sizes made it easier to help students when they needed it; and they had an easier time could opening up to the teachers;” and “The small classes made it possible to have easier interaction with the students and helped build close relationships among the staff.”

Twice the rate of post-interns from the recent cohort than from the earlier one highlighted the opportunity of being involved in a variety of diverse activities, as shown by the following responses: “I had lots of chances to get involved in extra-curricular activities;” “I got to meet all the parents; I got to build close relationships with all the students and staff; and I was able to teach some in K, Grades 1, 2, 5, 6, and in a variety of subjects in high school;” and “I had tons of opportunities to be involved and I felt a strong sense of belonging.” Regarding item #8, one respondent wrote: “I had fewer distractions (friends, going out, etc.)”; for item 39 another respondent stated: “The cost of living was cheap.”

The two cohorts generated similar listings of negative aspects (e.g., the expense incurred, the lack of professional resources, and the separation from family/friends).

Disadvantages of teaching in rural schools. The values shown in Table 2 summarize the views of cohorts of post-interns regarding the negative aspects of rural internships.

Table 2.

Summary of Post-Interns' Responses Identifying Disadvantages of Interning in Rural Schools.

Disadvantages	2011-2012 (n=16)	Cumulative (n=101)
1. Expenses for travel, accommodation, etc.	69	40
2. Lack of professional resources/services	63	65
3. Isolation from support groups (family, friends)	31	29
4. Invasion of privacy	19	47
5. Work overload (split grades, extra-curricular duties)	13	12
6. Inadequate living accommodation	13	14
7. Feeling "distanced" from staff/peers	13	9

Note. Values are rounded and represent percentage of respondents who identified disadvantages in their written comments. The cumulative sum includes five previous cohorts mentored/supervised by one of the authors during the 1998-20032 period, as documented in Ralph (2000, 2002, 2003).

As was the case for the data shown in Table 1, both sub-groups identified similar aspects; and for nearly two-thirds of the items, both cohorts registered similar percentages. We provide illustrative comments from the recent cohort for these aspects, many of which had also been identified by the earlier cohorts.

- Lack of professional resources/services: "There was a limited amount of resources and technological access compared to the city, e.g., bookstores, supplies, and IT."
- Isolation from support groups: "I was really far away from my friends, family, part-time job, and lifestyle that I was used to; it was extremely boring outside of teaching;" and "It was too quiet with not many places to go during week-ends."

- Work overload: “Long days. Left home at 7 and would get back anywhere from 5 to 7 pm;” and “I found that teaching was already a long day, plus the long drive. I first had to drive across the city to my carpool and then travel out of town, and then repeat it all at the end of the day.”
- Inadequate living accommodation: “I do wish I had more assistance finding living accommodations;” and “Living in a stranger’s basement may be a negative.”
- Feeling distanced from staff/peers: “Limited contact with other interns” (indicated by an intern who had been placed in a community with no other interns at the school); and “Sometimes the closeness can be a cause for ‘drama.’”

Regarding the other disadvantages shown in Table 2, a wider margin between the values of both cohorts was evident. For instance, nearly 70% of the recent group wrote comments like: “The travelling and gas expenses were negative because I lived an hour and 15 minutes from my school;” “I found commuting everyday costly and time-consuming;” and “The long drive and the excess finances were a drawback, because we already had to pay tuition to do the internship, and some of us either had to drive a long way or we had to re-locate and pay more rent — all with no reimbursements.”

By contrast, despite the fact that the percentage for the recent cohort, who identified “invasion of privacy” as negative, was considerably lower than that for the cumulative average, typical comments from the recent group were: “Don’t let your personal life get in the way of your school work” and “You have to be more cautious about what you say and to whom you say it. The spotlight is always on you.” With respect to “lack of diversity,” a few post-interns in the earlier groups had mentioned that they found some of the rural schools/families/communities to be somewhat closed or narrow-minded in their worldviews.

Advice for future interns. In Table 3, the advice offered by post-interns to future interns is summarized. For “becoming involved,” sample comments from the recent group were: “You will enjoy getting to know the students, parents, and community in a closer way than you would in a city;” “Embrace the uniqueness of this opportunity;” and “If you want a support network from all the staff and community helping you every step of the way, rural schools are the way to go.” Interestingly, the “seeking car pool arrangements” results may indicate that more teachers are choosing to live in larger centers and to drive to their rural workplace than was the case a decade earlier (O’Connor, 2011).

Table 3.

Summary of Post-Interns' Advice for Future Neophytes Placed in Rural Schools.

	Advice	2011-2012 (n=16)	Cumulative (n=101)
1.	Become involved in variety of school/community activities	100	46
2.	Be conscientious about teaching activities	25	31
3.	Communicate with other colleagues	25	15
4.	Seek car-pooling arrangements	19	0
5.	Be open-minded about the rural placement	13	19
6.	Become familiar with community beforehand	6	1

Note. Values are rounded and represent percentage of respondents who offered advice in their written comments. The cumulative sum includes five previous cohorts mentored/supervised by one of the authors during the 1998-2002 period, as documented in Ralph (2000, 2002, 2003).

Below, sample comments are presented, illustrating the four other categories of post-intern advice shown in Table 3.

- Be conscientious: “Get involved in sports, arts, and other activities to become part of the community;” “Make connections with the community;” “Be aggressive in participating in the community and extra-curricular;” and “Get your sleep.”
- Communicate with colleagues: “Reach out to other interns, the staff, and your facilitator if you need advice on adapting.”
- Be open-minded: “If you attended urban schools, take interning in a rural setting as a positive growth experience;” “Give it a chance and wait until you start the experience. It is often different than you originally think;” and “I was not going to even do my internship because I was placed so far from home, but I am glad I did. It’s not as bad as you may picture it to be.”
- Become familiar: “Get to know the area before you begin. There could be some great resources within your community, but once you begin interning it is hard to take the time to meet people outside the school.”

These data in the three above tables substantiate previous research findings documented from three sources: (a) previous studies conducted regarding this same College's internship program (Ralph 2000, 2002, 2003); (b) studies conducted with teacher-education internships in other jurisdictions (Davidson, 2011; Dunaway, Bird, Flowers, & Lyons, 2010); and (c) research from other professional practicum/clinical programs outside of teacher education, such as engineering (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2009b); and nursing (Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2009a). Many of the findings across all four sectors were similar.

Implications for Stakeholders

This study has confirmed that, in general, rural placements for the extended-practicum are viewed positively by post-interns who experienced them. Several implications for the college of education and the school districts involved in the study may be drawn from the findings.

First, the educational leaders involved need to continue to collaborate to maintain the positive aspects of the rural internship as identified in Table 1. Because teachers will thus need to be recruited for these rural areas, it is logical to assume that the university and the rural school divisions must sustain the positive features of the internship in order to attract prospective teachers to rural districts. In fact, recent efforts have been initiated by both parties involved in these studies, such as: the university initiating closer college-school integration of pedagogical preparation in pre-internship student teaching sessions (Lemisko & Ward, 2010), and rural school divisions conducting preliminary job interviews with all interns placed in their schools, for possible future teaching positions (E. Brockman, personal communication, December 20, 2011). Furthermore, the university and the school divisions may need to provide additional support in areas they may not have typically viewed as under their jurisdiction, such as considering subsidizing the rural internship by providing all interns with a monthly stipend to help defray additional expenses.

A second related implication for school division and university leaders is that they would need to continue to cooperate at eliminating the perceived drawbacks indicated in Table 2. For example, in order to continue to help remedy the lack of availability of instructional resources, both parties could continue to develop electronic communication connections between/among the schools and the university to distribute curricular and instructional resources, or subsidize a temporary courier or pick-up-and-delivery service to operate between/among the school divisions, the university, and various libraries (Ralph, 2003).

Furthermore, to address the problem raised by some respondents related to the securing of adequate living accommodation in certain rural communities, renewed efforts by each school to alert the whole community of this need each year could help alleviate this problem. Also, to deal with the concern of feeling isolated from the staff, all school

One intern stated, “Coming from a big city my entire life, I found it kind of scary and unsettling when I read [the rural location] on my internship placement. I found I had to be open-minded about the placement. I would never have experienced the closeness and support of the community or culture in this way at any city school. It is amazing!”

personnel could be encouraged to welcome interns by offering personal and professional support and encouragement, particularly during the initial weeks of the extended practicum. Such strategies have been identified in previous research, as having been shown to be mutually beneficial to all stakeholders in a practicum program (Borys et al. 1991; Ralph 2000).

An additional caveat attached to the findings of this study is one that the authors believe needs further research. This caveat relates to the several variations between the percentages of each cohort who identified the respective aspects. Although the two cohorts identified similar lists of advantages, disadvantages, and advice, several aspects differed in the proportions of respondents from each cohort by which they were identified. Those variations may have been due to a variety of factors that would warrant deeper investigation, such as: recent demographic changes in the province where the studies were conducted, an apparent desire among rural teachers to reside in metropolitan areas and thus to commute to the rural schools, broader social/economic/cultural trends, or changes in a new generation of neophyte professionals entering the workforce.

A final limitation of this study, common to all qualitative research, is the lack of generalizability to other situations (Hittleman & Simon, 2006). One could simply not generalize to other jurisdictions with any degree of technical certainty, because the sample size of the recent cohort was substantially smaller than that of the earlier cohort. However, a more tenable approach, as recognized by many research experts in the social sciences, would be to assert that this generalization difficulty could be re-framed in terms of *transferability* (Donmoyer, 1990). Transferability means that leaders in similar settings would examine the findings presented in this present study in order to gain possible insights to help them inform or interpret the functioning of their own programs (Best & Kahn, 2006).

In conclusion, it is the authors’ hope that all post-interns, at the conclusion of their respective rural extended-practicum programs, could endorse what one respondent from the recent cohort stated:

*Coming from a big city my entire life, I found it kind of scary and unsettling when I read [X school in rural location] on my internship placement. I found I had to be open-minded about the placement. I would **never** have experienced the closeness and support of the community or culture in this way at any city school. It is amazing.*

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Co-operative Education and Student Recruitment, Engagement and Success: Early Findings from a Multi-Institutional Study in British Columbia

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Abstract

This paper represents the early findings of an original survey of Co-operative Education students across 12 post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. The survey and this paper were undertaken collaboratively by a team spanning 5 BC Universities, Colleges, and Institutes. The study explores the role Co-operative Education experiences play in students' decisions to attend a post-secondary institution, complete their degrees, and their engagement in the educational process. Informed by George Kuh's work on Student Engagement and the 2008 NSSE survey, it concludes that co-operative education plays an important role in enhancing student engagement and success and suggests the value of further exploring the role workplace learning programs can have in student success.

Keywords: Co-operative Education Program, Student Engagement, Student Experience, Student Recruitment and Retention, Student Success

Administrators have found that the recruitment and retention of students attending post-secondary institutions in North America has become an increasingly important agenda item in recent years. Strategic enrollment management approaches have been adopted in response to a changing demographic landscape that make recruitment and retention of students to the post secondary environment increasingly competitive. Savvy administrators are looking for programs, strategies, and services that enhance student engagement¹ and ultimately student success², as well as programs that give their institution a competitive edge in recruitment.

This study examines the model of Co-operative Education³ (co-op) with respect to its role in institutional recruitment and retention and its role in student engagement and academic enhancement by analyzing data from a survey of British Columbia (BC) Co-op students in 12 public post-secondary institutions in BC undertaken by the Research Committee of the Association for Co-operative Education-BC/Yukon in Fall, 2008.

Despite a high proportion of co-op programs in BC post secondary institutions and growing participation within Canada in both the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE) and the College Survey on Student Engagement (CSSE) assessments, co-op has not been specifically studied, vis-a-vis, its contribution to enhancing the student experience⁴. This study seeks to begin to address this gap by exploring the role that co-op-based workplace learning can play in recruitment, retention, and the student experience.

This research presented unique opportunities and challenges as a result of the newness of the area studied (no specific existing measurement tools), the large number of institutions involved, and the desired connections to the current Student Success and Strategic Enrolment Management institutional discourse. As a result, the project team made decisions to utilize a recognized theoretical framework (i.e., NSSE) to guide the format and language used in our survey questions, to engage all interested institutions in the project (resulting in collaborating with 12 provincial colleges, universities, and institutes), and to model our commitment to research in the field by sharing early findings widely.

We also experienced many learning outcomes that extended beyond the research questions including developing a better understanding about the limitations of our survey tool, the challenges of conducting research in this field, the process of collectively writing up our early findings and the limitations set by our volunteer resources on our ability to conduct further, deep level analysis on the data. In acknowledgment of this latter limitation we have chosen to present the results using general descriptive statistical analysis. It is our belief that these early findings highlight many interesting and significant issues in the field that warrant further discussion amongst both practitioners and researchers. This paper presents those issues which emerged after a first level of descriptive analysis in hopes of informing ongoing practitioner conversations and provoking further research investigations.

1 **Student engagement** refers to students' participation in educationally effective practices, both inside and outside the classroom. It is characterized by two critical features: 1) the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educational activities and 2) how an institution deploys its resources, organizes curriculum, and supports learning with services and programs that lead to experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, success, and completion. A common measure of student engagement in post-secondary education in North America is the National Survey of Student Engagement, or the NSSE.

2 **Student Success** refers to a student's academic success or remaining in "Good Academic Standing" at their institution as well as their sense of having met their overall goals for attending the institution.

3 **Co-operative Education Program** means a program which alternates periods of academic study with periods of paid work experience in appropriate fields of business, industry, government, social services and the professions.

4 **Student Experience** refers to the overall view a student has regarding their time at a post secondary institution. This relates to both classroom and non-classroom based experiences, the students' sense of value, and connectedness to the University. Student experiences have clear implications for student recruitment and retention, institutional reputation, and alumni support.

Study's Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether a relationship existed amongst enrollment, engagement, and retention issues in post-secondary education and the participation of students in co-op programs. The study had three main objectives:

1. What role does co-op play in a student's decision to attend an institution (recruitment) and in their level of engagement with their institution (retention)?
2. What factors influence a student's decision to participate in a co-op program?
3. How does participation in a co-op program relate to student engagement?

Literature Review

Survey questions were informed by a review of key literature regarding student engagement, recruitment and retention. The following themes emerged: 1. engagement, 2. recruitment, 3. persistence/retention.

Engagement. Student engagement is a key element in post secondary education and is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Kuh, 2001). Kuh (2003) demonstrated that the more students study a subject, the more they learn about it; the more they practice and get feedback on their performance, the more adept they become. Thus, he established a direct correlation between student engagement and educationally purposeful activities (Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2003; Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001). Parscarella (2001) found that what students gain from their post secondary experience depends on the quality of effort students devote to educational activities and, as such, educationally purposeful activities contribute to overall student engagement in their undergraduate experience.

The NSSE, an instrument designed to gauge the level of student participation in post secondary institutions, established five benchmarks for student engagement:

1. Level of academic challenge,
2. active and collaborative learning,
3. enriching educational experiences,
4. student faculty interaction,
5. a supportive campus environment (Kuh, 2003).

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates (2005) suggested that enriching educational experiences, including internships and field work, provide students with opportunities to synthesize, integrate and apply their knowledge. Brint, Cantwell, and Hanneman (2008) found experiences that focus on activities outside of the classroom contribute to personal and intellectual growth and thus enhance student learning. Opportunities such as volunteer work, student clubs, community service, and co-op experiences are all examples of enriching activities.

For example, Nasir, Pennington, and Andres (2004) indicated that classroom learning is enhanced by students who have spent time in the workplace. Brint et al. (2008) found that study enhancement activities, including internships, mattered greatly to students. Hu and Kuh (2002) found that what students think about the utility of their studies positively affects their interaction with different groups at an institution and positively affects their overall engagement. It appears that hands-on learning enables students to engage with concepts that they learn in the classroom and apply these to real-world situations.

Recruitment. There is limited research on what factors influence students to choose programs that offer a co-op option. Martin (1997) found that the outreach and recruitment program of an institution is helped by the existence of a co-op program. Skledar, Martinelli, Wasicek, Mark, and Weber (2009) found that the vacancy rate in the pharmacist program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre decreased from 27% to 4% with the introduction of an internship program. Somers (1986) collected data that indicated co-op programs attract students and those students tend to persist to graduation. Although it is somewhat apparent that participating in co-op can influence students' choices to remain in school, there has been a lack of evidence of the role of experiential education in recruiting students to post-secondary programs.

Persistence/Retention There is some evidence that suggests students who are involved in educationally purposeful activities are more likely to persist in their studies through graduation. Students involved in *educationally meaningful activities* such as co-op, internships, and other experiential learning tend to demonstrate higher levels of persistence, and ultimately higher levels of completion (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2007; Somers 1986). More specifically, Avenoso and Totoro (1994) found a relationship between early co-op participation and student retention⁵. And Tinto (1988) suggested that *front loading* institutional action in the form of educationally enhancing activities may be a strategy to reduce the early incidence of student departure. While no specific studies examining co-op and non-co-op students with respect to retention are found, it is reasonable to assume that programs such as co-op, which intentionally engage students in new learning environments, have a positive impact on student academic persistence and completion.

Method

This study looked at all registered co-op students attending a public post-secondary institution in BC. To be included in the study: 1) institutions had to have received ethics approval for participation, 2) institutions needed to have representation within the membership of the Association of Co-op BC/Yukon, and 3) participants had to be registered as co-op students by their schools. Twelve institutions participated and resulted in a potential sample size of 14,000. The study utilized a convenience sample and chose to reject the use of a control population. The researchers determined a non-co-op control group would result in unusable data given the design nature of the survey instrument.

⁵ **Student Retention** describes the flow of students through the university over a set period of time and is typically measured in two different ways: 1. the number of degree completers versus non-completers, and 2. the number of persisters vs. drop outs from term to term, year to year.

Research to date has not explored the specific relationship between the model of co-op and student success indicators. In the absence of any pre-existing instrument, and with most institutions familiar with the NSSE framework as a measure of student engagement, the researchers opted to design an original survey instrument. Forty-two questions concerning students' perception of their academic engagement and program persistence were informed by the survey format of George Kuh and the NSSE (2008). Survey questions were framed in a typical affirmative/negative format, included demographic data and utilizing a 5 point Likert scale.

Prior to inclusion in the study and receipt of the survey tool, each member institution was required to provide the researchers with evidence (in the form of an email response) of their institutions' research ethics approval. Of the 15 potential institutions, 12 obtained ethics approval prior to the deadline. Upon confirmation of ethics approval participating institutions were provided, by email, a preamble that described the research study and a link to an electronic survey tool. Participating institutions were diverse, and ranged from large research intensive universities, to smaller colleges and technical institutes.

During the Fall of 2008, participating institutions identified a contact within each co-op program who distributed the preamble and survey to their registered co-op students; students were offered an incentive of \$25 by their institution to complete the survey. Students were given 14 days of access to complete the on-line survey and were allowed to participate one time only. Students choosing to participate were provided with an informed consent form at the entry point to the on-line survey. All responses were anonymous. This approach yielded an overall response of 2,737, a rate of 19%.

All data was gathered electronically using the Vovici system, a web based on-line survey tool. The data was stored on a secure Canadian web server location, not at the participating institutions. All student responses were anonymous with only the subjects' attending institution identified. Independent variables of the study were identified as the number of work terms completed, institution attended, gender, domestic, or international status. The Vovici system was queried for descriptive statistical reports of the demographic data and surface statistical analysis of all other survey data.

This article reports on the early findings resulting from this survey level analysis.

Early Findings

Preliminary analysis of the data consisted of descriptive statistics and frequency distributions enabling the researchers to establish a general understanding of the student responses. In addition, many questions had the option for respondents to add comments. These comments were transcribed and themed to provide additional findings. See Appendix A for a demographic breakdown of respondents including: gender, type of credential they are seeking, and number of work terms completed at time of completing the survey.

Early analysis of the data yielded four initial findings. Specifically, participation in cooperative education:

1. Clarifies academic pathways,
2. links school and career,
3. provides “educational enhancement”,
4. assists in recruitment to the institution and is influenced by several factors.

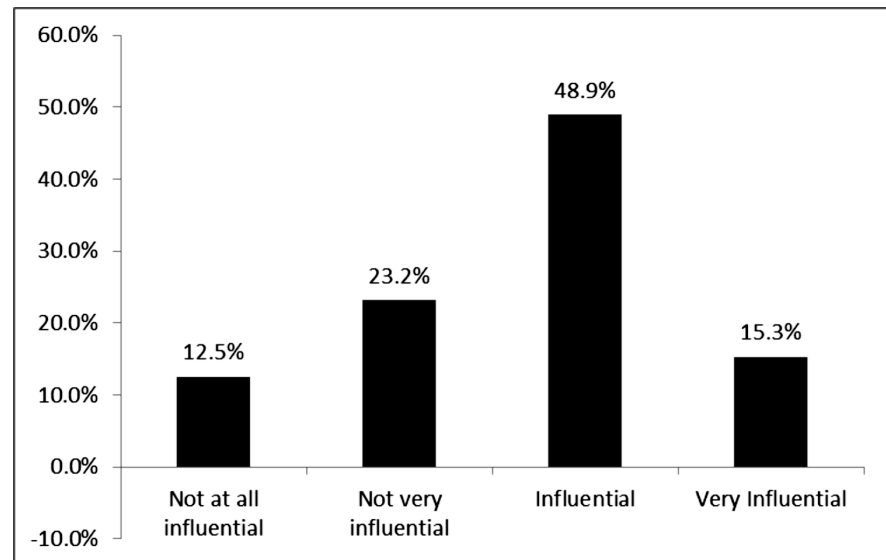
A majority of responses from co-op students demonstrated that work experience either confirmed their academic choice or provided new learning which caused them to change their academic direction.

Participation in Co-op programs clarifies academic pathways. Co-op practitioners have long recognized the role that participation in a co-op program can play with respect to a student’s subsequent academic program choices. This research provided ample evidence to support such a claim. A majority of responses from co-op students demonstrated that work experience either confirmed their academic choice or

provided new learning which caused them to change their academic direction. As shown in Figure 1, over 64% of respondents indicated that their co-op experience was either influential or very influential with respect to affecting their academic choices.

Figure 1.

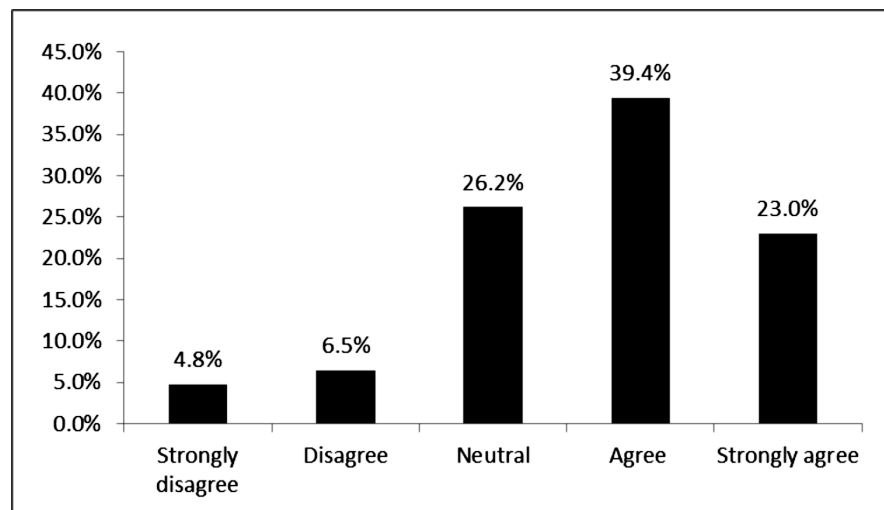
To what extent have your experiences in Co-op influenced you in your choice of academic area of study?



One student commented, “I changed majors after my first co-op, although I had been considering it prior to starting my co-op”. Another student found that their work term clarified what profession they did not want to pursue: “[my co-op work term] made me realize that engineering is not my passion, and will likely not be my choice of career in the long term.” These results suggest that students who participate in work terms that are related to their studies or career options will be more engaged in the educational experience and are more likely to persist through to graduation.

Further student comments ranged from “Co-op has helped me figure out my educational goal for the future” to more specific comments such as “Working in a world company in my last co-op semester has prompted me to take more foreign language courses because I realized it was such an asset . . . in a diverse and multi-cultural work force.” Respondents’ participation in co-op programs either confirmed their academic choices — “[Co-op] reinforced my desire to get at least a business major”— or changed them. Results from the question regarding the role of co-op in confirming selection of academic program shows that 62.4% of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that co-op confirmed their selection of academic program (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.
My participation in co-op has confirmed my selection of academic program or area of study.

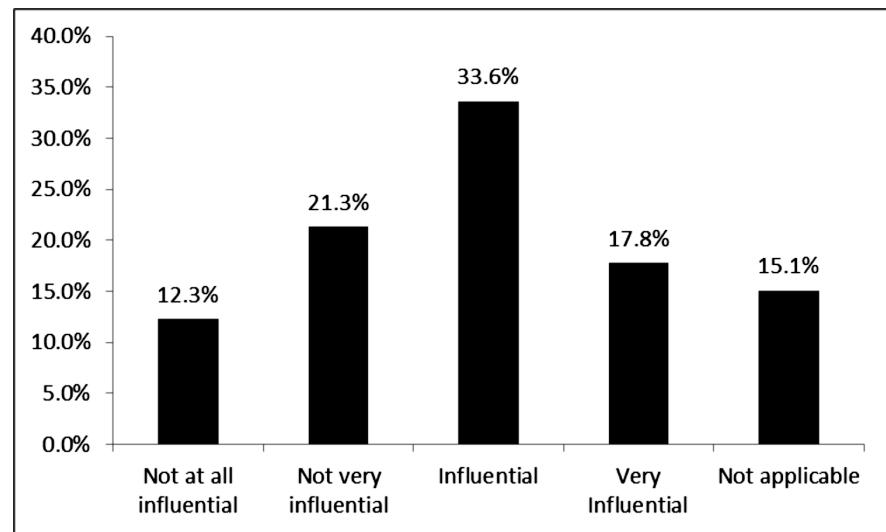


Of interest to both academic and co-op faculty and staff is the relationship between participation in co-op studies and a decision whether or not to pursue graduate studies. As Figure 3 shows, 51.4% of respondents stated that their co-op experience was influential or very influential in their decision to pursue graduate studies. While this could be interpreted to mean that students were either positively or negatively influenced to proceed to graduate studies, qualitative responses were positive in nature. Several respondents added that their co-op experiences either inspired them to attend graduate school (for example, one student

wrote “[Co-op] has strongly confirmed my choice of academic program and shown me a ton about potential graduate directions”) or clarified which graduate programs were of interest (“Although I am still undecided on exactly which field I want to go into for graduate studies, I’m pretty positive it will be directly related to medical physics . . . I had two Co-op jobs in this field”).

Figure 3.

To what extent have your experiences in Co-op influenced you in your choices for post graduate studies?



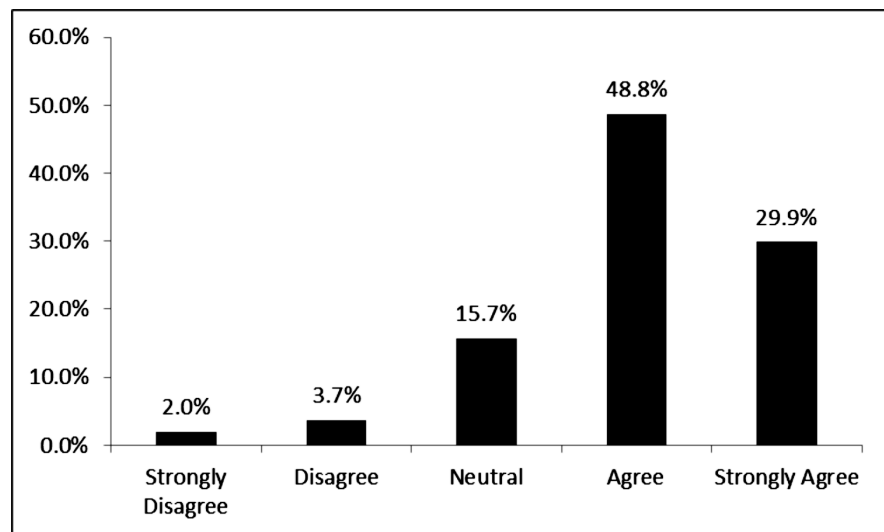
Together, these three findings can be seen as examples of how participation in work terms encourages students to be engaged in their educational experience and clarify their academic pathways

Participation in co-op helps link professional and academic careers. One of the major claims of co-op programs is that co-op students link the world of academia to the world of work, providing advantageous opportunities for students to link their classroom studies to professional careers. Of the respondents in this survey, 78.7% agreed or strongly agreed with this claim.

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), work experience that occurs during a student’s post-secondary experience and relates to their studies has a positive impact on career choice. The career decision process is enhanced by working in an environment where a student can interact daily with the duties of the field they are considering. Pooley (2006) viewed the co-op experience as one where a student can “taste test” a field to see if it is what they want to continue in. Rodger et al. (2007) suggested that students who participate in workplace education work terms before they graduate are more likely to have career goals that are closely aligned with the opportunities in the organization for which they are working. This is

further corroborated by a recent survey by the Canadian survey-based market research group Ipsos Reid (2010), which found that 79% of co-op grads felt that their co-op program influenced at least somewhat their decision about what career they would choose. Results of the study can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4.
Co-op helped me understand the link between academics and the real world



Statements such as “I feel more confident in my classes and can see more clearly how the different aspects of my education are actually preparing me for the *real world*,” and “Co-op has given me insight about what it is to work in the real world, and how different that is from school”, underscore the nature of these connections. Additionally, student comments repeatedly articulated the differences between students’ academic and co-op experiences, indicating the important role co-op participation plays in students learning — comparing and contrasting the different kinds of knowledge that are gained and valued in each setting.

It would appear that participation in co-op programs serves to augment those links and to align students’ academic and career goals, thereby enhancing overall student success.

For example, one student wrote “consulting engineering work is almost nothing like the engineering coursework. Engineering coursework is far too concerned with digital systems and theory.” Another student reflected that “as clichéd as it sounds, the ‘real world is different from what you learn in the classroom. Office politics and dealing with angry customers is not something you can learn from text books.” Both the students and the student

retention literature reinforce the importance of such connections and suggest the importance of aligning programs of study and future career goals as a key strategy for student academic

success and completion (Tinto, 2001). It would appear that participation in co-op programs serves to augment those links and to align students' academic and career goals, thereby enhancing overall student success.

Participation in Co-op serves to enhance the educational experience. Of significant interest to the researchers in this study was gaining a better understanding of the impact of co-op on academic engagement and learning. As one might expect, student engagement constitutes a constellation of institutional processes that add value to student learning. Participation in programs such as co-op may not only provide for important complementary learning experiences but also impact upon a learner's engagement when they return to campus. Students who participate in educationally enriching experiences outside of the classroom where they are exposed to different practices, beliefs, and theories tend to have a higher level of academic engagement (Brint et al., 2008; Kuh et al., 2005).

This survey asked four questions specific to the notion of engagement and provided an opportunity for students to add their comments. Overall there was a general sense that participation in co-op enhanced students' levels of academic engagement, as well as their classroom experiences once they returned to campus. As Figure 5 shows, 64% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that participation in co-op helped them analyze theories, ideas, and experiences gained in the classroom. Over 70% of respondents stated that co-op experiences helped them assess and judge the importance of information received in the classroom and 68% thought it helped them apply concepts or theories learned in the classroom to practical problems.

One student commented, "sometimes I learn something in class and I may not get it because the concepts are just words to me. I'm working at a company right now and everything falls into place and makes a lot more sense. The information is more meaningful." It can be suggested, therefore, that participating in Co-op experiences helps students better learn once they return to the classroom and use their classroom-based learning well in workplace contexts.

Figure 5.
Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following workplace-based statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Apply concepts or theories I learned in the classroom to new situations or practical problems	3.0%	7.9%	19.1%	39.3%	28.7%	2.0%
Assess and judge the importance of information I received in the classroom	2.6%	6.1%	19.4%	42.0%	28.4%	1.6%
Analyze theories, ideas, or experiences I learned or gained in the classroom	3.4%	10.3%	20.2%	44.3%	20.0%	1.8%

The researchers also analyzed comments specific to how students felt their work terms related to their classroom learning. The 112 related comments were sorted into five distinct themes:

1. Classroom not teaching real world skills (44%).
2. My work term helped theories in the classroom make sense (24%).
3. Jobs not linked to any course work (17%).
4. Skills learned are valuable but not directly relevant (10%).
5. I observed that the workplace has a different learning style (5%).

In the first theme, many students reported a disconnect between what they were learning in the classroom and what they reported needing in the workplace. In other instances, students found that the experience in the workplace helped them better understand the theory they had learned in the classroom. The third theme related to a disconnect between the work term and their academic program which was continued in the fourth theme where students valued the skills gained on the work term, but did not see the connection to skills needed in the classroom. Finally, students noted differences between learning in the workplace and learning in the classroom.

Additionally students often recounted how the co-op experience allowed them to understand a concept learned in an academic context in a more meaningful way. Examples include: “I learned and understood concepts during work that I couldn’t understand in school” and “Co-op helped me become more outgoing and confident in my knowledge. It helped me see how textbook knowledge is different than applied knowledge, and that you must have a solid base of textbook knowledge in order to succeed and apply it properly.” A particularly eloquent student summed up his or her sense of how the co-op experience allowed him or her to gain a perspective critical to learning:

Going to a work term as an intern, you enter with nothing but your classroom-based ideas as your foundation. Although you may be able to compare some theories, ideas or experiences from previous work terms, an intern student generally does not have enough experience to judge importance of information. Generally information is thought to be overly valuable. However, you do use the theories and ideas you learned from school synchronously with new knowledge in order to apply them to the new situations and problems at work.

Literature in the area of student success suggests there is a reasonable correlation between student engagement and academic persistence (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2007). It is apparent that the more students participate in educationally enriching activities, the better chance they will persist through their studies and complete their degree (Kuh, 2003). Avenoso and Totoro (1994) also found a relationship between early co-op participation and student retention. As noted earlier, students who have a clear idea of why they are in school and are involved in related activities (such as co-op) also tend to persist in their studies more

than those who are not as engaged (Kuh et al., 2007). Overall, it can be suggested that participation in co-op enhances classroom learning, facilitates a student’s engagement, and by extension, the likelihood that they will persist and complete their academic programs.

As the NSSE framework guided these survey questions, the researchers also looked at the ways in which participation in co-op may or may not influence other co-curricular choices that are known to be positively linked to student engagement and success. To that end students were asked about their participation in co-op and how this choice influenced other co-curricular choices. These results were split, as shown in Figure 6, with approximately 50% of respondents indicating that Co-op participation had encouraged them to become more engaged outside of the classroom and 50% indicating it had not.

Figure 6.
My participation in Co-op has . . .

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Encouraged my participation in practica, internships, field experiences, and other forms of learning outside of the regular academic classroom	5.6%	12.7%	33.0%	39.0%	9.7%
Influenced me to do community service and/or volunteer work	8.1%	17.9%	40.0%	26.9%	7.1%
Encouraged my participation in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, sports, etc.)	8.2%	19.8%	40.6%	25.0%	6.4%

Examples of student comments include: “Co-op has definitely gotten me more involved in my community,” and “Working for four months away from the classroom does not inspire me to change my habits as either a student or a citizen.”

It appears that participation in co-op serves to enhance the educational experience of many students, an outcome shared by the 2010 Ipsos Reid poll which reported that 84% of Canadians who enrolled in co-op programs felt that their work terms assisted them with the academic learning (Ipsos Reid, 2010).

Co-op and recruitment: To the institutions and into co-op. Several of the survey questions explored the relationship between co-op and institutional recruitment. Two factors addressed include the role that co-op might play with respect to a student’s choice to attend a particular institution and factors affecting a student’s choice to participate in a co-op program if it was not a mandatory part of the student’s academic program.

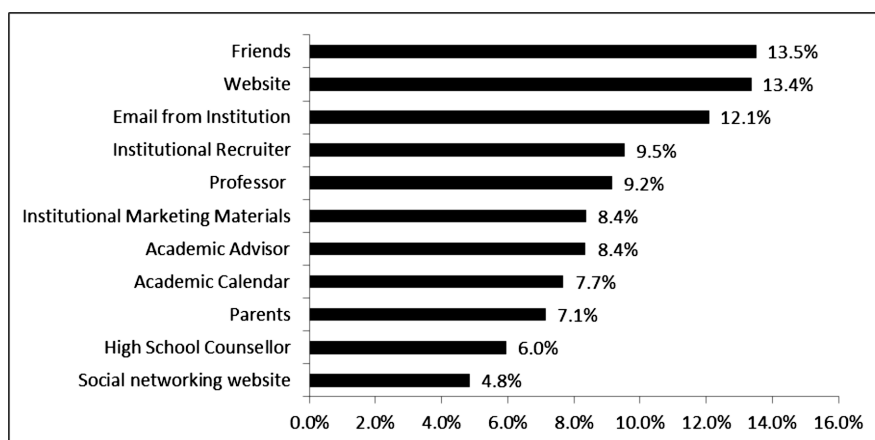
Approximately 50% of respondents indicated that availability of a co-op program was a factor in choosing their post-secondary institution.

Co-op and institutional recruitment. Approximately 50% of respondents indicated that availability of a co-op program was a factor in choosing their post-secondary institution. One student commented, “I specifically came to SFU because they mentioned career jobs that I could attain with my degree. Co-op provided the link between school and career.” Of the respondents who did not consider co-op when selecting their institution, 55% stated they knew about co-op but that it did not influence their choice of school. It is noteworthy that this data was collected in BC, a province where almost all of the public post-secondary institutions offer co-op; therefore, the availability of co-op may not have been a differentiator among the provincial institutions of choice.

Many of the findings indicated that the value proposition of co-op may require further articulation, especially in the case of non-mandatory programs. For those not initially drawn to the institution because of co-op, several factors influenced that decision. Eight percent of respondents were in programs where co-op was mandatory so the choice of institution was based upon the overall academic program (which included co-op) and 10% did not know the school offered co-op options at the time they were choosing a post-secondary institution.

Recruitment into co-op. As seen in Figure 7, when students were asked how they first heard about co-op, many cited friends (13.5%), institutional websites (13.4%), and e-mail from the institution (12.1%). Of interest within the context of the research on millennial students, which indicates a strong parental influence on decision making, only 7.1% of respondents noted parents as their source for information. Additionally, it was somewhat surprising to see social networking sites representing only 4.8% of the overall sources of information. This may be accounted for by the fact that data collection took place in Fall 2008, slightly in advance of most post-secondary institutions fully or effectively utilizing social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

Figure 7.
How did you hear about co-op?



When asked what attracted them to co-op, 95% of respondents noted that they were interested in participating in co-op so as to ensure a “good job” after graduation.

As Figure 8 indicates, when asked what attracted them to co-op, 95% of respondents noted that they were interested in participating in co-op so as to ensure a “good job” after graduation. This is consistent with recent Canadian post-secondary recruitment data which notes that “obtaining a good job” is the single biggest reason cited for pursuing post-secondary education (Donaldson, 2008).

Survey respondents also noted that exploring career options was a close secondary reason for participating in co-op (94%) and “safely” exploring career options ranked third (90%). Interestingly, 85% of students noted that they engaged in co-op in order to “learn a different way,” which speaks to the growing expectation among students for access to more diverse pedagogies such as experiential opportunities, particularly those that are work integrated in nature. Additionally, but less frequently, comments included the promise of better entry level positions upon graduation, opportunity to live in a new place, potential to work with other students, opportunity to hone job search skills, assist in being accepted into graduate school, and help to determine their field of study.

Figure 8.
What attracted you to co-op?

	Unimportant	Less Important	Important	Very Important
The potential to obtain a good job after graduation	1.0%	3.8%	26.8%	68.4%
It could help me find a range of career opportunities related to my field of interest	1.6%	4.4%	35.2%	58.8%
The ability to safely explore career options	2.2%	8.0%	37.8%	52.0%
Access to job opportunities that were only offered through co-op	3.4%	9.4%	37.4%	49.9%
The opportunity to build a network	2.0%	11.4%	38.3%	48.3%
The opportunity to learn in a different way	2.9%	11.9%	41.9%	43.3%
The ability to finance my degree	10.4%	27.9%	30.2%	31.6%
The opportunity to work internationally	21.7%	33.6%	25.4%	19.3%
It could help me improve my marks at school	33.3%	37.7%	20.2%	8.8%

When students were asked what else would have attracted them to co-op, 61% said that receiving academic credit for successful completion of work terms would have been the single most influential factor. As well, 40% cited the inability to end their studies while completing a work term (part of Canadian accreditation requirements) as a barrier to participation. Although survey questions regarding co-op fees did not yield a high percentage of students citing finances as a barrier, further analysis of the student comments suggests that lowering the co-op fee at their institution was desirable.

Conclusions

In conclusion, with respect to participation in co-op and post-secondary students in British Columbia we can state that:

- Participation influences students' academic choices to better align with career choices, thereby enhancing student retention and success;
- participation in a work term has a positive impact on students' academic engagement — an “enriching educational experience” — a contributor to overall institutional student satisfaction and success;
- the ability to participate in Co-op was a factor considered by approximately 50% of Co-op students when they chose their post-secondary institution
- recruitment into optional Co-op programs is greatly influenced by friends, family and institutional web-based outreach;
- more students would consider Co-op if they could obtain credit for work terms towards their academic degree and complete their degree requirements while on a work term.

Implications for Practice

From the early analysis of this research it is evident that participation (including at least one work term) in co-operative education programs in British Columbia contributes to Kuh's notion of an “enriched educational experience”. This in turn has a positive impact on students' academic engagement which is tightly linked to greater levels of student retention and completion. In part, it is apparent that co-op serves to align students' career and academic choices and assists students in making greater connections between their studies and the application of those studies in new environments such as the workplace. By understanding the importance of making these connections early in a student's academic career, student affairs professionals may wish to consider linking with co-op staff/faculty more intentionally with respect to career and academic goal alignment versus simply promoting co-op as a job exploration program. It is interesting to note that in an article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Kuh (2010) calls attention to the benefits of linking workplace learning more tightly to students' degree programs: “it's high time we look for ways to use the work experience to enrich rather than detract from learning and college completion” (para. 3).

Co-operative Education and career services (increasingly now being administered under one umbrella at many institutions) could be more closely linked to the institutional retention agenda and better integrated into *transition* in activities such as orientation and academic planning activities.

Additionally, we know that approximately 50% of students applying to BC institutions do so because there is a co-op option available. Recent research regarding why students pursue post-secondary education indicates that fully 99% of 200,000 students responding to a 2010

academic survey in Canada chose either “career preparation” or “career advancement” as a key reason for attending post-secondary education (Brainstorm, 2010). Recruitment professionals in the area of Student Affairs could consider the potential for fully utilizing co-operative education programs for recruitment purposes. Given findings from this study indicating the important influence family and friends have on the decision to choose a co-op program, one could imagine creative recruitment campaigns that integrate career relevance and family experiences.

Finally, early analysis indicates that many more students would consider participating in co-op programs if they could obtain credit for work terms towards their academic degree and complete their studies while engaging in a co-op term. Professionals in co-op programs may wish to bring these findings to the attention of provincial and/or Canadian accreditation bodies and/or professional associations to inform discussions regarding accreditation criteria. Additionally, leaders of institutions which do not currently award degree relevant credit for co-op courses may want to begin a dialogue with their academic colleagues regarding co-op credit if increased participation in experiential education is a strategic direction they wish to take.

The findings of this study suggest co-op programs can be seen as a critical feature of institutional student retention and engagement strategies.

The findings of this study suggest co-op programs can be seen as a critical feature of institutional student retention and engagement strategies. It appears that students who participate in Co-op are better able to navigate their educational journey as co-op experiences help them determine which courses and programs will lead to the knowledge and skill development they are seeking.

This enhanced navigation leads to a more efficient and effective pathway through post-secondary education and a smoother transition to the world of work post-graduation. Not only should this result in higher levels of student satisfaction and success, but it could have a significant impact on the costs of education — both for the student themselves and for post-secondary institutions. Investing in co-op programs makes sense.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABOUT CO-OP STUDENT RESPONDENTS

Figure 9.

Is your Co-op program optional or mandatory to your degree completion?

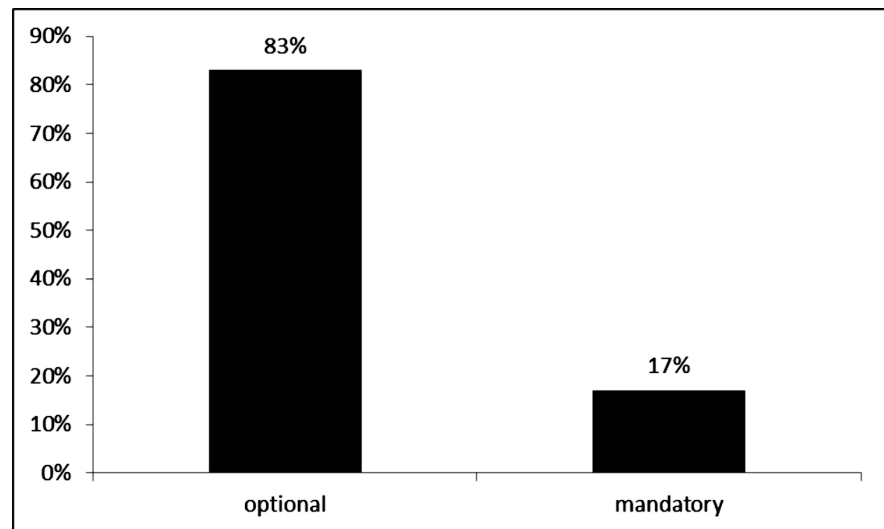


Figure 10.

Demographic information.

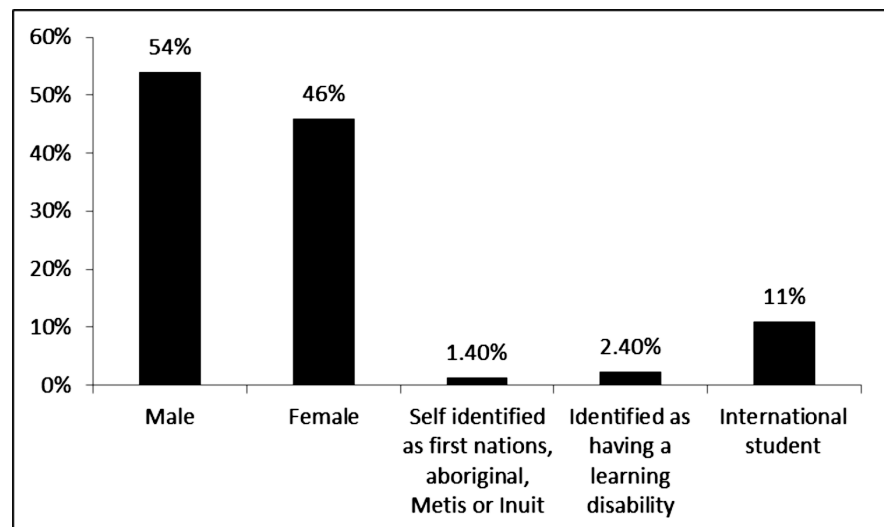


Figure 11.
What type of credential are you currently seeking?

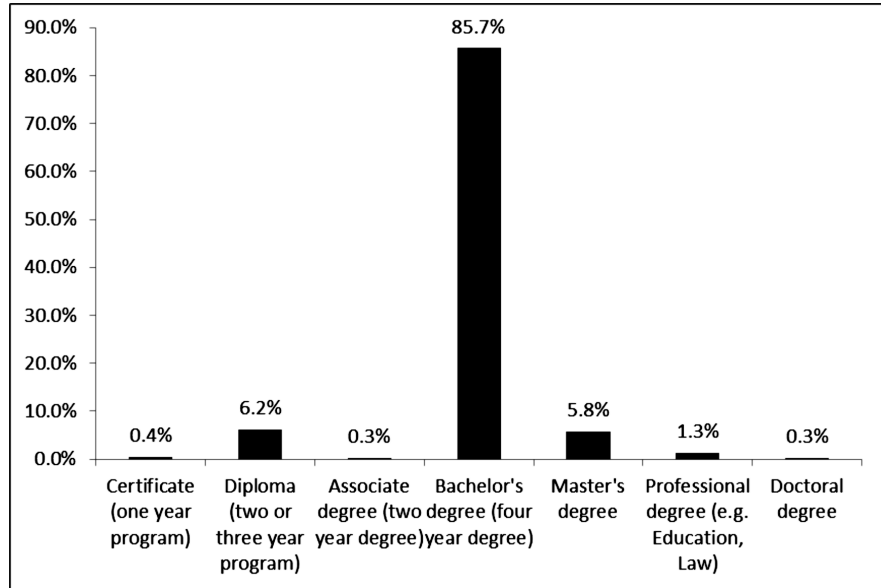
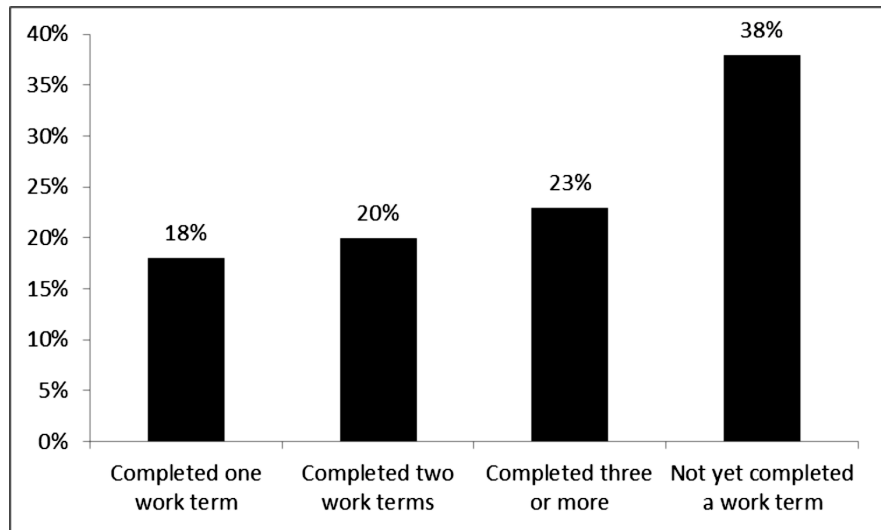


Figure 12.
How many work terms have you completed so far?



A Review of Research on Unpaid Internship Legal Issues: Implications for Career Services Professionals

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Abstract

Many college students are willing to gain professional experience through unpaid internships as a way to increase their employability after graduation. However, unpaid internships present a number of legal concerns. Very little research has been done to examine the complexity of these legal issues. This literature review analyzes related research and government policy associated with unpaid internship experiences, including compensation, lack of employment protections, possible consequences for international students, and university liability. Recommendations are provided to assist university/college career services professionals and internship supervisors in preventing and managing legal issues related to unpaid internship experiences.

Keywords: Compensation, employment protections, international students, legal issues, liability, unpaid internships

Internships are valuable experiences for college students to apply their academic studies to real workplace situations, while gaining professional occupational experiences. Employers find these experiences to be just as valuable. Michigan State University's annual Recruiting Trends report indicated that 45% of employers' new hires completed their internship with the company, while another 39% of new hires had internship experience elsewhere (Collegiate Employment Research Institute [CERI], 2004). Some employers have even indicated they would not hire a recent graduate who did not complete an internship (CERI, 2008). Since employers are setting such high expectations, it is no surprise that college students are desperate to work in an internship before graduation. In fact, some students seeking this experience are often willing to work for free and still pay hundreds of dollars for academic credit (Gregory, 1998). It is estimated that about half of students completing internships are doing so for no pay (1998). A recent National Association of Colleges and Employers (2010) survey indicated that 95% of colleges are "relatively open in allowing their students to take unpaid internships" and post such positions on their job board; most often these positions are with nonprofits or government agencies (p. 2).

At the surface unpaid internships just appear to be a simple solution for students to gain professional experience and build their resumes. However, unpaid internships present a number of legal concerns; in particular, the exploitation of student workers.

At the surface unpaid internships just appear to be a simple solution for students to gain professional experience and build their resumes. However, unpaid internships present a number of legal concerns; in particular, the exploitation of student workers. One of the most well-known unpaid interns was Monica Lewinsky, who represented the “classic, exploited unpaid white-collar intern within the class complex political bureaucracy” (Gregory, 1998, p. 228). Although Lewinsky’s situation is not typical of all unpaid interns, her situation is an example of how employers looking for cheap or free labor may abuse unpaid interns. Gregory (1998) even went as far as comparing unpaid interns to child labor: “Unlike the more blatant forms of labor exploitation, student intern labor is more subtle, but perhaps equally persuasive, manifestation of the contemporary exploitation of labor in a capitalist political economy today” (p. 229). The exploitation of unpaid interns is likely hidden due to several reasons. First, there is a misconception that unpaid interns are safeguarded under employment protection laws because they work for an employer (Rubinstein, 2006). Unfortunately, unpaid interns are caught somewhere between discrimination protections as a student and as a professional employee. Additionally, students are so desperate for work experience and for building a professional network, they may be apprehensive to raise concerns about a behavior, such as sexual harassment, for fear their own professional success may be hindered (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000).

While legislation and case law related to unpaid interns have been minimal, the U.S. Department of Labor (2010) recently issued a fact sheet with guidelines to help determine if interns providing services to *for-profit* employers must be paid under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The release of the federal fact sheet has drawn a tremendous amount of attention from national media, including the *New York Times*, Fox News, *U.S. News & World Report*, *Wall Street Journal*, CBS, and NPR, among other outlets. As expected, the report and the flurry of media attention have also caused university career services professionals to take a closer look at the implications of the unpaid intern. This literature review examines the legal issues related to unpaid internships, including compensation, lack of employment protections, possible consequences for international students, and university liability. Additionally, the author proposes recommendations to assist college and university career services professionals and internship supervisors in preventing legal issues with unpaid internships.

Compensation Issues

The first legal issue is whether student interns are to receive pay. The employment protection concerns addressed later in the article are dependent upon whether an internship is paid or unpaid. The U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division

recently issued a fact sheet outlining a 6-part test to determine whether an intern qualifies as an *employee* of a for-profit employer under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and should receive compensation (2010). Interns at a for-profit employer are usually considered employees, unless all of the six criteria are met:

1. The internship, even though it includes actual operation of the facilities, is similar to training which would be given in an educational environment;
2. The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern;
3. The intern does not displace regular employees, but works under close supervision of existing staff;
4. The employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the intern; and on occasion its operations may actually be impeded;
5. The intern is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the internship and
6. The employer and the intern understand that the intern is not entitled to wages for the time spent in the internship. (U.S. Department of Labor [USDOL], 2010, par. 4)

The six criteria are based on the Supreme Court ruling in *Walling v. Portland Terminal Co.*, and have been used by many courts to “determine if an employment relationship exists for employees in training programs” (Coker, 2009, p. 36).

Certain industries are infamous for taking advantage of unpaid interns, including the arts, entertainment, banking, and finance (Collegiate Employment Research Institution, 2010; Curiale, 2010; Gregory, 1998). One television station intern said, “This is a one-year internship, and you learn everything in less than one month. Then for the other eleven months, you are doing a job you should be paid for” (as cited in Gregory, 1998, p. 242). Similarly, at MTV unpaid interns are involved in office work, as well as video editing assignments. According to a former MTV intern, students also have more attractive responsibilities, such as recruiting audience members for live performances and sitting in on important meetings (as cited in Oldman & Hamadeh, 2000). However, MTV has required its unpaid interns to complete academic credit for the experience (Oldman & Hamedeh). This requisite addresses one aspect of the FLSA six-point test: “The internship experience is for the benefit of the intern” (USDOL, 2010, para. 4). However, Wage and Hour Fact Sheet (USDOL, 2010) on internship compensation indicates that for-profit, private-sector employers need to meet all six criteria to justify not paying interns. In both examples, it appears the interns should be compensated because they are contributing to the everyday operations of the business, therefore clearly not meeting criteria number four.

Following complaints, some internship FLSA violations have been investigated. A Pittsburgh Wage and Hour Division study found that 80% of employers were violating the FLSA through student internships (as cited in Gregory, 1998). Additionally, in 1995 the U.S. Department of Labor investigated A. Brown-Olmstead Associates, a high profile public relations firm in Atlanta, for exploiting 54 student interns. The firm reached a settlement, admitting “it billed clients for unpaid intern work, agreeing to pay . . . \$31,520 in back pay to former interns . . . Two . . . interns were still in school when they were working for the firm, while the other 52 had college degrees, with some having previous professional experience in public relations” (as cited in Gregory, 1998, p. 245). These examples demonstrate that employers have been held accountable for violating FLSA regulations in regard to student internships.

In an attempt to avoid questions whether interns should be paid or not, even when students are willing to work for free, some employers have created intern contracts. These documents, when signed, indicate interns agree to receive stipends or credit instead of minimum wage (Gregory, 1998). Rather than paying student interns, some media organizations make a small tax-deductible contribution to the institution, which is then given to students as a stipend when they start their internship (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000). This last tactic is especially problematic. The process encourages the hiring organization to not pay interns by letting them make donations to the university. Not only is the employer receiving free labor, but they are receiving a tax deduction for their *donation* to the university.

Inadequacies of Employment Protection Laws

The inadequacies of employment protection laws for unpaid interns are apparent through the excerpt written below by law student MaryBeth Lipp. She reflects on her vulnerability when she was sexually harassed during an unpaid internship at a Florida television station while she was a journalism student at Northwestern University:

Preoccupation with sex and sexuality permeated the newsroom. I was just another intern from Northwestern, a nameless face that would disappear in a matter of months. While few people remarked on my work or knew any details about my future aspirations, many commented on my “flat chest” and made constant references to Monica Lewinsky, even calling me by her name. . . . The comments pale in comparison to the numerous times employees stared at my body, brushed against my breast, and “accidentally” bumped into my body. The news director and his assistant massaged my shoulders when giving me instructions, always standing so close I could smell their breath, cologne, deodorant. As time went on, I lost confidence in my work and even began to dread going to the station, but the intensity of the situation silenced my complaints. (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000, p. 98)

[S]tudent interns who are unpaid have little employment protections, if any at all. Unpaid interns fall between the discrimination protections for students and those for employees.

One might assume that if a student, such as Lipp, is providing services as an unpaid intern for an organization that he or she would be covered by employment protection laws. However, student interns who are unpaid have little employment protections, if any at all. *Unpaid interns* fall between the discrimination protections for students and those for employees. The legislation of the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938) defines an employee as “any individual employed by an employer,” (section 3[e]) while other federal laws provide similar definitions, including the National Labor Management Relations Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, Civil Rights Act, and others (Rubinstein, 2006). The definition of an employee-employer relationship is somewhat elusive. Regardless, discrimination claims made by unpaid interns have been denied by courts

due to the simple fact that unpaid interns are not deemed employees. Even so, Rubinstein (2006) says, “numerous courts, including the Supreme Court, have recognized that these definitions are circular and useless” (p. 159). In most cases, courts have defined employees by those who receive compensation (Yamada, 2002). These factors leave unpaid interns with little to no employment protections.

In the workplace Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects employees from discrimination based on race, color, region, sex, and national origin. Rulings in court cases *O'Connor v. Davis* and *Smith v. Berks Community Television* suggest the Title VII protections do not apply to unpaid interns. In *O'Connor* (1998), the student completed a required internship at the Rockland Psychiatric Center and was paid through the college’s work-study program. During her experience she was repeatedly sexually harassed by a doctor. The student attempted to claim a Title VII violation. However, the courts rejected her claim because she was not considered to be an actual *employee*. Similarly, in *Smith*, a television station volunteer’s (also considered an unpaid intern) Title VII claim was rejected by the court because volunteers “receive no financial remuneration . . . and contribute assistance on a purely voluntary basis,” implying they were not classified as employees as defined in the Civil Rights Act (as cited in LaRocca, 2006, p.135). Meanwhile, Title IX of the Civil Rights Act (1964) protects students from harassment in an education setting. However, Title IX does not extend discrimination protection to the internship site because these experiences typically take place off campus; therefore, universities have little control over these activities (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000). If the university has prior knowledge about an unhealthy work environment before an internship starts, institutional liability may exist. This will be addressed later in the article.

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967 provides employment discrimination based on age or anyone 40 or older. In *Shoenbaum v. The Orange County Center for Performing Arts*, a volunteer claimed he was denied a position due to his age; however, the court stated that ADEA did not offer protections for volunteers (as cited

in LaRocca, 2006). While *Shoenbaum* did not involve an unpaid intern, volunteers operate in similar capacities as interns, providing a service to an organization. At the time Yamada (2002) published his legal article on employment rights of unpaid interns, there were two age discrimination complaints made by two intern candidates against *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine under review by the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. One of the applicants, Joanna Jackson, 41, received a letter blatantly rejecting her due to her age: "I am afraid that there has been a misunderstanding . . . When we say the internship is open to college students and recent graduates we take for granted that we will attract people in their twenties" (Prinz as cited in Yamada, 2002, p. 221). Because the internships are unpaid, it is likely that these claims will be denied because federal or state employment protection laws have been interpreted to apply specifically to *employees*. Additionally, the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act of 1990 provides employment protections for those with disabilities. Similar to the other employment protection laws, unpaid interns must meet the definition of *employee* to have their claims considered (Yamada, 2002). Consequently, it is likely that students completing unpaid internships would not be protected from age or disability discrimination while in the workplace.

University Liability Issues

Universities may be liable for injuries or other harm incurred during off-campus activities, such as internships taken for academic credit. In most of these experiences, institutions may not have any *control* over what happens to the student at the off-site location (Kaplin & Lee, 2009). In *Gross v. Family Services Agency and Nova Southeastern University*, a doctoral program student completing her required practicum at an off-site location was assaulted in the Agency's parking lot (as cited in Kaplin & Lee, 2009). The university had prior knowledge that other assaults happened in the parking lot. However, the student was not aware of the assaults and filed a negligence suit, which was settled by the Agency. This case suggests universities may have a duty to protect students who participate in required internships under foreseeable situations. University staff might be able to prevent this liability by (a) informing students completing unpaid interns about the risks they may encounter by not being paid, (b) monitoring work progress and responding to student intern concerns, (c) informing students when they have prior knowledge of an unsafe situation, and/or (d) discontinuing partnerships with employers who have repeated complaints about the poor treatment or exploitation of interns.

Possible Consequences for International Students

There may be legal implications for international students who participate in unpaid internship programs, even though no legal precedence exists. It is a common assumption among many employers, students, and career services professionals that unpaid internships present no additional risk for international students. International students may risk violating their visa status and be deported if their internship employer is

investigated for violating the FLSA (Rhoads & Konrad, 2010). International students may not be implicating their immigration status if the unpaid internship meets the Department of Labor rules for volunteer work (Rhoads & Konrad, 2010). The U.S. Department of Labor (n.d.) defines volunteer work as:

Individuals who volunteer or donate their services, usually on a part-time basis, for public service, religious or humanitarian objectives, not as employees and without contemplation of pay, are not considered employees of the religious, charitable or similar non-profit organizations that receive their service. (para. 1)

If the experience does not fit into the U.S. Department of Labor rules for volunteer work, then it is likely considered employment. International students could take the internship if they have the appropriate work authorization, such as Optional Practical Training or Curricular Training, dependent on visa status (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2010).

Recommendations for Career Professionals

When it comes to unpaid internships, career services professionals need to keep the well-being of students in mind at all times. Because few employment protection laws actually cover unpaid interns, students are especially vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination in the workplace. For this reason, it is especially important that career professionals be advocates for unpaid interns when unforeseen situations arise.

Career services offices should consider incorporating both preventative measures and a planned response process into department procedures relating to internships. First, preventative measures should include educating students about their employment rights or risks (with unpaid experiences) before starting an internship, as well as what to do and whom to contact if issues arise (Gregory, 1998). This education could be presented through information on the career center web site, one-on-one appointments with students when they are going through the internship application process, and/or as a part of internship program preparation seminar offered before students start applying for internships. Career advisors should also work closely with their institution's international student services office to ensure international students are authorized to work and not risking their visa status. Internally, preventative action can be woven into a university's internship program operations and policies. An institution may choose to implement a university-wide policy where academic internship credits require students to receive financial compensation for their work. Externally, career centers should encourage employers to pay interns, helping students avoid environments where they are not covered by employment protection laws.

According a National Association of Colleges and Employers (2010) survey, many university career services professionals feel that all internships should be paid. The survey's open comments section suggested that "unpaid internships were essentially

vehicles for corporations to exploit student labor” (p. 4). Career staff should also monitor for potential problematic work environments by reviewing internship position descriptions (submitted by employers) that will be posted on the career center’s job and internship board. For example, an unpaid internship with a vague description may merit a follow up call to the employer to learn more about the position responsibilities. Career staff may then decide to post the position with an updated description, or not post the internship at all because it is unpaid. Internship programs should also include an internship agreement, signed by the student, university, and employer. The agreement should outline the terms of the internship, including non-discrimination policies (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000; Miller, Anderson, & Ayres, 2002). Once students are working at their internship site, career advisors should be reviewing internship progress reports, monitoring for any signs of an unhealthy work environment, such as discrimination or harassment (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000). Career centers are encouraged to incorporate weekly or bi-weekly seminars (in person or virtual) during the internship experience. During these seminars students not only reflect on their learning, but also discuss challenges they might be experiencing, including issues related to employment protection laws (Grant Bowman & Lipp, 2000). Career Services professionals could offer suggestions on how to address these challenges. More complex student situations, or those that merit confidentiality, could be handled through a one-on-one appointment between the student and Career Services professional. Employers who continually exploit students should not be permitted to post, promote or recruit interns at the university (Gregory, 1998). By ending relationships with problematic employers, career centers are also reducing institutional liability.

General university internship program policies and education on unpaid internship issues should be communicated with all staff and faculty who work with student interns. This strategy should help reduce inconsistency in how the internship program is communicated with students and employers. It helps to avoid situations similar to the sexual harassment issues the Northwestern University student faced as referenced earlier in this article. University leadership claimed there was no written contract with internship sites. However, the university internship handbook specified that all internship hosts must sign an agreement, which included the university’s harassment policy and anti-discrimination laws (Grant Bowman and Lipp, 2000). When all university stakeholders are aware of institutional internship policies, a more consistent message is communicated with both students and employers. Consistency may simplify how smoothly university personnel can assist students if unexpected issues occur during their internship experiences.

When unforeseen situations occur with unpaid interns, it is important for career centers to have a response process in place. Grant Bowman and Lipp (2000) suggest the following approach:

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1. Although university career advisors cannot investigate off-site issues, such as discrimination or harassment claims, they should promptly contact someone at the internship host site to ask for an investigation;
 2. Career staff should stay in contact with the intern, providing support throughout the investigation;
 3. If the intern's experience does not improve and the accused harasser retaliates, career staff should speak with the internship site contact again;
 4. If the situation does not improve and continues to worsen, career staff should work with the intern site to try to move the intern to a different department or change the intern's work schedule to avoid the harasser;
 5. If the issue still continues, career staff should assist the student in finding a new internship site that will give him or her a similar educational experience. If this stage is reached, the university should consider ending its relationship with this internship provider.

No matter the situation, it is important that the responding career services staff acts in a timely manner, keeps the appropriate university personnel informed, and serves as an advocate for the student.

No matter the situation, it is important that the responding career services staff acts in a timely manner, keeps the appropriate university personnel informed (such as career services director, related faculty, or legal counsel) and serves as an advocate for the student.

Conclusion

More and more employers are expecting college graduates to have gained professional work experience through internships. Desperate to increase their real world skills before they graduate, some students seem willing to work for free. Although internships — paid or unpaid — will help open doors to employment opportunities, unpaid experiences present a number of legal concerns that are often overlooked. Unpaid internship experiences are more likely to present situations where students are exploited for free labor. Because students need the work experience and opportunities to expand their networks, they are more likely to *put up with* harassment, discrimination or other demeaning behavior. This combination alone is enough to help understand why this pattern of exploiting unpaid interns continues, as well as why unpaid intern experiences have not been given adequate legal attention. It is in the best interest of any student to complete an internship for pay. The U.S. Department of Labor provides some guidance to determine when for-profit organizations should pay interns (2010). By receiving compensation for their work, interns are then deemed employees and are typically covered by most federal and state employment protection laws. If students receive no pay, they have no employment protections.

In most situations internships are often a college student's first experience in a professional work environment. They may be just beginning to learn about workplace etiquette and are likely not aware of employee protection laws, let alone may know when an employer's behavior is inappropriate, unethical, or violates the law. For these reasons, it is of utmost importance that career services professionals be aware of the legal issues that surround unpaid internships. Career advisors need to help students understand the risks they may encounter during an unpaid internship and what they should do if unforeseen issues arise on the job. If students completing unpaid internships become the victims of harassment or discrimination, it is equally important that career advisors take appropriate action and serve as an advocate for the student while the complaint is being handled.

[I]nternships are often a college student's first experience in a professional work environment. They may be just beginning to learn about workplace etiquette and are likely not aware of employee protection laws, let alone may know when an employer's behavior is inappropriate, unethical, or violates the law.

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An Urban Experience: Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers in an Inner City Charter School

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While population demographics are shifting dramatically in many areas of the U.S., most elementary teachers remain white, middle class females (Feistritzer, 2011). Because attempts to recruit a more ethnically diverse teaching force have been largely unsuccessful — at least in most areas of the Midwest — teacher education programs must provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to have diverse field experiences if they are to enter the teaching field successfully in urban, high-poverty, diverse schools. These are the schools most likely to employ recently graduated teachers, but a pre-service period that fails to train its pre-service teachers to understand and succeed with diverse populations will produce teachers more likely to fail or flee to more affluent districts at the first opportunity (NPTAS, 2005). Major university accrediting bodies recognize this need for diversity of experience and now require teacher education programs to supply proof of the diversity of field experiences (NCATE, 2011). Believing that experience working with diverse students might result in changes in the attitudes of white middle class female education majors, the authors chose to examine attitudinal shifts in pre-service teachers who completed field experiences in an inner-city charter school.

Review of Literature

The role of field experiences in preparing teachers has grown in importance in recent years, as research supports the value of *clinical practice* (Wiggins, Follo, & Eberly, 2007). Placing pre-service teachers in schools similar to the ones they attended as K-12 students seldom leads to significant insights about their abilities to teach in culturally diverse settings. Many of these pre-service teachers, however, report that they feel well prepared to step into culturally diverse classrooms without having had minimal experience in diverse K-12 environments. Fry and McKinney (1997) suggested that their reasons may be *cluelessness* rather than preparation. These researchers found that the placement of pre-service teachers in culturally diverse field settings had positive effects on attitudes and practices of those teachers.

Similarly, other researchers (Bleicher, 2011; Proctor, Rentz, & Jackson, 2001) found that pre-service teachers who had field placements in schools with greater diversity and high poverty rates were far more realistic in their attitudes toward teaching in such schools than those pre-service teachers who did not have similar experiences. Moreover, having multiple field placements in such schools seems to mitigate the fears and concerns of pre-service teachers worried about behavior and/or personal safety. Barnes (2006) cited five gains for pre-service teachers placed in diverse settings, including better understanding of the effects of teacher attitudes toward diversity and learning culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Culp, Chepyator-Thomson, and Hsu (2009) used journaling activities with pre-service teachers in field placements, asking them to reflect on their behavioral observations and on their own experiences. The researchers essentially confirmed the findings of the earlier works, with the added note that pre-service teachers from diverse backgrounds tend to interact more fully and more easily in the physical education class than in academic areas. Stairs (2010) found that pre-service teachers benefitted greatly from immersive field experiences in urban schools. In her study, pre-service teachers did not develop to the transformative stage of urban teaching, but they did begin to view pre-service teachers as a resource for curriculum and instruction.

Setting

In this study, elementary teacher education majors at a midwestern comprehensive university (where 94% of the education pre-service teachers were white) participated in over 50 hours of literacy field experience over the course of three semesters at a culturally diverse urban charter school. The 60 pre-service teachers from middle-class families lacked cultural diversity; most had attended predominately white K-12 schools themselves; all but one were white. Pre-service teachers had little or no previous experience in a culturally diverse elementary school setting. The two purposes of this research project were to (1) immerse pre-service teachers in a culturally diverse setting, and (2) encourage them to reflect and report on literacy practices observed at the field site.

The urban charter school, O'Bannon Academy (pseudonym) is located in a depressed area within the city limits of a mid-sized metropolitan area. In the 2010-2011 school year, 95% of K-5 students at the school were identified as Black or Multiracial. Further, 10% were reported as special education students, and 75% qualified for free and reduced lunch. On the state assessment, however, 51% of the third through fifth graders passed the state assessment in both Math and English. Although O'Bannon students' performance on the state-wide test may not appear stellar, the scores far outshine those of students in other urban public schools with similar student ethnicity and socioeconomic status in the same district. For these students, the passing rate was at the 30th percentile.

The school used the Marva Collins' philosophy of education. Her philosophy centered on individual attention tempered with strict discipline and a focus on reading skills (Collins & Tamarkin, 1990). The strategies inspired by Collins and used at the O'Bannon Academy

included a high concentration on phonics teaching, inspirational signs on classroom walls, *life work* that was completed at home, a classroom management system for discipline, and a weekly study of great people in Black history. A creed was recited daily and begins with the statement: *I am a beautiful and unique individual. I have a brain to think with and to use on a daily basis; therefore, I can do something, if not everything.* The creed is nine stanzas long and was taught and recited daily, beginning in kindergarten.

The students were called *Bright Ones* by the principal and staff, and each class was given a name that represented a positive identity like Philosophers and Einsteins that was posted on the classroom door. Students wore uniforms and were expected to succeed at or above grade level. The school had longer school hours and an extended school calendar, compared to the public schools around it. Teachers stressed both academics and character development. The school's mission was to provide a nurturing learning environment that allowed children to develop uniquely into well-rounded individuals who could reach their fullest potential. O'Bannon Academy served children through a curriculum that its teachers believed was conducive to all learning styles. The school strived to provide a high-quality educational experience, similar to that of private schools, to children who would otherwise not be able to afford such an experience. The school was tuition-free and had limited class size. Admission was determined by random lottery drawing. During the 2010-2011 school year, 243 students from kindergarten to fifth grade were enrolled.

Method

Sixty pre-service teachers (sophomore to senior status) volunteered to take part in the study over three semesters. Fifty-nine pre-service teachers were White and one pre-service teacher was Black. Forty-nine were female. These pre-service teachers were simultaneously enrolled in a block of four 300-level courses: Literacy Methods I, Children's Literature, Diversity and Equity in Education, and Introduction to Exceptional Needs. After the seventh week of class, participants began their field experience, observing in a K-5 literacy class twice a week for 2 hours each visit.

Each pre-service teacher was assigned a specific grade level for the duration of the field experience. During the last three weeks of the semester, pre-service teachers spent 2 hours a day, 5 days a week at the field site. After 2 weeks in the field experience, they were asked to reflect (in writing) on three prompts:

1. Describe the literacy instruction strategies the teacher uses in the classroom.
2. What strategies would you use in your classroom?
3. Were all students clearly engaged? If not, why do you think they were not engaged?

At the end of their field experience, pre-service teachers were given a 15-item questionnaire (see Appendix A) and were also asked to respond to the following:

1. Describe expectations in the classroom for all students.
2. How are students motivated to read in the classroom?
3. Describe the types of literature/children's books in the classroom.

All pre-service teachers completed the reflections; 47 (78.33%) completed the survey.

In the Literacy 1 Methods class and the Children's Literature class, which ran simultaneously, pre-service teachers were taught scientifically based reading instruction using the five pillars of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Anderson, 2009). The textbook was used to engage pre-service teachers in the reading and writing process. Pre-service teachers were exposed to all genres of literature, including culturally diverse literature. The culminating artifact for the classes was a literature focus unit, using picture books for the primary grades and novels for the upper grades. Pre-service teachers used their assigned grade in their field experience at O'Bannon Academy to create their unit. They set goals, chose academic standards, planned the reading and writing process, and wrote lesson plans for one week. Participants placed in the primary classes were able to teach their unit to their respective classes. Participants in the upper grades were able to assist teachers in the reading process and work one-on-one with students who were struggling on the state test in reading.

Participants gained valuable experience engaging students and teaching literacy skills. Some became engaged to the extent that they attended ball games and other school events outside of their scheduled field experience. Teachers at O'Bannon Academy evaluated the pre-service teachers at the end of each semester. All but one received positive feedback.

Statistical Analysis

Primary data analysis of the 15-item questionnaire included frequency and descriptive statistics of pre-service teachers' responses. Additional analysis included conducting principal component factor analysis on the 15-item questionnaire of literacy practices observed at O'Bannon Charter School. In accordance with the recommendations of Merrifield (1974) and Caroll & Schweiker (1951), a cut-off of .40 was used to determine factor loading. The 15-item survey revealed a three-factor solution (eigenvalues greater than one) as shown in Appendix A.

The three common factors identified were teaching strategies, classroom climate, and cultural diversity (see Appendix B).

Five items loaded onto Factor 1: Teaching Strategies. Of the pre-service teachers, 68% strongly agreed that the teachers in the classroom had high expectations for all students, and 66% agreed students were actively engaged in the classroom most of the time. More

than half strongly agreed that teachers treated the students equally and fairly (53%) and that teachers at the O'Bannon Academy used direct, explicit instruction for literacy skills and strategies (51%). A smaller but significant percentage (40%) agreed that teachers used meaningful and authentic literacy instruction.

Three items loaded onto Factor 2: Classroom Climate. Among the pre-service teachers, 72% percent strongly agreed or agreed that students had a positive attitude toward reading, and 76% strongly agreed or agreed that classroom procedures and discipline were fair and just. Smaller percentages of the pre-service teachers agreed the classroom climate promoted positive interaction between students(40%) and that teaching strategies observed were differentiated for all learners (38%).

Three items loaded onto Factor 3: Cultural Diversity. More than half (59%) of the pre-service teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teachers read aloud culturally diverse literature, while 45% of pre-service teachers felt that students were challenged with a culturally sensitive curriculum, and 51% agreed that O'Bannon Academy teachers valued diversity in the classroom.

Three items were independent of the others: 79% of pre-service teachers strongly agreed or agreed that all students were empowered and motivated to learn; 21% were neutral or disagreed. The students were taught the scientifically based reading components of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension along with teaching reading at students' instructional level with leveled readers. Two-thirds (66%) of pre-service teachers felt teachers at O'Bannon Academy were using these methods, while one-third (34%) were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. A majority of pre-service teachers (59%) noted that students read independently on a daily basis; 41% were neutral or disagreed that students read independently daily. Since the pre-service teachers were only at O'Bannon Academy in the morning for 2 hours, this could have been something that some may not have observed during the scheduled 90-minute literacy block.

Student Reflections:

Written responses, both at midterm and at the end of the semester were analyzed for themes. At midterm, pre-service teachers responded to the following prompts:

1. Describe the literacy instruction strategies the teacher used in the classroom.
2. What strategies would you use in your classroom?
3. Were all students clearly engaged? If not, why do you think they were not engaged?

Pre-service teachers reported a variety of literacy instructional strategies, including, but not limited to, the use of basal readers, choral reading, individual read-alouds, and listening to tape recorded literature. While many of them thought they would not use basal readers in their own classrooms, they did plan to use most of the other strategies they observed. Of

“All the students seemed to be clearly engaged. I think this is mainly due to the teacher allowing students to read books that appeal to them. She teaches books that appeal to their lives and history.”

particular note was that most pre-service teachers reported high levels of student engagement: “All the students seemed to be clearly engaged. I think this is mainly due to the teacher allowing students to read books that appeal to them. She teaches books that appeal to their lives and history.”

Other pre-service teachers reported teachers using humor, enthusiasm, and music as motivational tools. A few pre-service teachers thought that some students were not so well engaged, mostly due to boredom with unchallenging work or to frustration with work that was too difficult for them.

An analysis of the student midterm responses yielded three major themes:

1. Pre-service teachers observed a variety of instructional methods in place at all grade levels. They reported the following strategies: choral reading, echo reading, one-on-one instruction, listening to tapes or CDs of literature under study, independent reading, literacy stations, and workbook/worksheet completion.
2. Most pre-service teachers thought they would not use basal readers but preferred leveled readers and projects rather than workbooks/worksheets.
3. Many pre-service teachers reported observing both frustration and boredom in the classroom during literacy instruction. They observed that some high ability students were not challenged and some low performing students were *lost* by materials that were too difficult.

At the end of the semester, pre-service teachers were asked to respond to the following prompts:

1. Describe expectations in the classroom for all students.
2. How are students motivated to read in the classroom?
3. Describe the types of literature/children’s books in the classroom.

“All students in the classroom were expected to succeed. . . . I thought the classroom environment was very inspiring and contagious in a very positive way.”

In responding to these prompts, pre-service teachers reported that expectations were high for all students, with 100% effort expected for their work. This finding correlated with Factor 1: Teaching Strategies. In the survey, 68% of pre-service teachers strongly agreed that teachers at O’Bannon Academy had high expectations for all students. Teachers expected that students would come to school prepared and ready to learn, and that they would behave and respect each other and their teacher. One pre-service teacher explained: “The students are taught to always think of their actions and the consequences that could follow negative behavior and actions. The students were taught to respect one another and to do their best.” Another observed: “All students in the classroom were expected to succeed. . . . I thought the classroom environment was very inspiring and contagious in a very positive way.” A third pre-service

teacher wrote: “Each student was treated as a unique individual. They were expected to achieve . . . to the best of their abilities.”

Pre-service teachers noted a variety of instructional techniques seemed to be key to student engagement. One student reflection stated: “Our teacher was constantly changing instruction. She used wall cards, manipulatives, stations, one-on-one instruction . . . books on tape. . . .” Another noted: “The teacher reads books that capture their attention. She rewards readers by allowing them to read out loud throughout the day.” A third pre-service teacher recorded: “The students were always receiving positive feedback and encouragement from the teacher. She always connected the literature to their lives and came up with an innovative way for them to interact and create.” Although incentives were sometimes provided for good behavior during reading, another pre-service teacher observed: “I know that the kids in my classroom really enjoyed reading. I noticed how engaged they were in the stories we read. From what I saw, the majority of the class dove right into their new books when they first received them.”

Teachers motivated students to read in the classroom by connecting literature to their own lives, reading aloud, encouraging reading during free time, and utilizing the Accelerated Reading program. In the survey, 72% of pre-services teachers strongly agreed or agreed that students had a positive attitude toward reading. They reported that teachers used a wide variety of types of literature, including basal readers, big books, paperbacks (fiction and non-fiction), culturally diverse literature, and a variety of genres. Some pre-service teachers voiced disappointment at the continued use of basal readers but also noted the use of supplementary reading materials, such as “several baskets of books to choose from when they needed to silent read.” Since pre-service teachers were taught to differentiate their reading instruction based on where the child was using the components of scientifically based reading research, some class discussion centered around the continued use of the basal reader especially in the intermediate grades. Although not planned, pre-service teachers saw how using the basal reader with all students in the class was not an effective practice of teaching literacy.

[A]s pre-service teachers develop an understanding of a culture different than their own, research studies show that they can be effective in the classroom. It is not culture, race, or gender that dictate effective reading programs.

According to Callins (2006), “The challenge for today’s teachers is to include those elements of curricula that will optimize learning for students while maintaining cultural identity” (p. 62). These elements are high expectations, rich curricula, approaches that are culturally responsive and student regulated active learning. This is a challenge for all teachers but especially white female teachers in diverse cultural settings. However, as pre-service teachers develop an understanding of a culture different than their own, research studies show that they can be effective in the

classroom. It is not culture, race, or gender that dictate effective reading programs. According to Duffy, Knipper, and Willis and Harris (as cited in Callins, 2006), “Teaching ability, over and above reading programs, is the major contributor to students’ literacy success.”

Discussion and Conclusions

Given the ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic homogeneity of the pre-service teachers, a major goal of the field experience at O'Bannon academy was to increase their comfort levels and cultural competency in a diverse urban setting. The need for diverse field placement settings is crucial as our nation becomes more global and beginning teaching jobs become more available in urban settings with high diversity. Comments from the pre-service teachers would seem to indicate that these goals were met. One pre-service teacher remarked, "I grew very attached." Another stated, "I was a little nervous about going to [O'Bannon Academy], but I ended up loving it." A third pre-service teacher commented about the experience: "It taught me a lot, and it was a great experience. It has made me look at things from different perspectives. I could now see myself teaching at a school similar to [O'Bannon]." The majority of pre-service teachers throughout the field experience stated this sentiment in class. When asked, most students said they not only felt competent to

The need for diverse field placement settings is crucial as our nation becomes more global and beginning teaching jobs become more available in urban settings with high diversity.

teach in a diverse setting but would also seek out employment options in urban, high-poverty schools. Clearly, the homogeneity of today's pre-service teachers can be mitigated, at least in part, by carefully chosen field experiences in culturally diverse settings.

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Appendix A

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

For each question below, circle the number to the right that best describes your opinions.

Question: When you think about your field experience what are your thoughts on the following:	Scale of Importance				
	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
All students were actively engaged in the learning process most of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers had high expectations for all students.	1	2	3	4	5
All students were treated equally and fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
Classroom procedures and discipline were fair and just.	1	2	3	4	5
Students were challenged with a culturally sensitive curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
Students had a positive attitude toward reading.	1	2	3	4	5
Guided reading practices and other research-based instructional practices were used in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
All students were empowered and motivated to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
Students were given meaningful, authentic literacy instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
Students read independently daily.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching strategies were differentiated for all learners.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers used direct instruction to teach literacy skills.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers valued diversity in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
The classroom climate promoted positive interactions between students.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers read aloud culturally diverse literature.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

PRINCIPAL COMPONENT FACTOR ANALYSIS

	Teaching Strategies	Classroom Climate	Culturally Diversity
Students were challenged with a culturally sensitive curriculum.	-.087	.281	.559
Teachers valued diversity in the classroom.	.138	.101	.768
Teachers read aloud culturally diverse literature.	.316	.062	.905
All students were actively engaged in the learning process most of the time.	.590	.187	-.041
All students were treated equally and fairly.	.552	.107	.132
Classroom procedures and discipline were fair and just.	.174	.749	.254
Students had a positive attitude toward reading.	.248	.497	.047
Guided reading and other research based instructional practices were used.	.819	.311	.099
All students were empowered and motivated to learn.	.743	.157	.065
Students were given meaningful, authentic literacy instruction.	.788	.262	.319
Students read independently daily.	.151	.198	.143
Teaching strategies were differentiated for all learners.	.338	.838	.100
Teachers used direct Instruction to teach literacy skills.	.553	.167	.007
The classroom climate promoted positive interactions between students.	.388	.574	.215

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