

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT:

a chat with
judene pretti

INTERVIEWED BY: Cheryl Cates, PhD, University of Cincinnati

Q: *Tell us about yourself; how did you get interested in experiential learning research?*

A: I was an undergraduate co-op student at the University of Waterloo in Canada where I completed five work terms, two in the insurance industry, two in public schools and one at the university. The co-op program provided me with such an amazing opportunity to be part of a number of different workplaces and to be exposed to the many ways in which the knowledge and skills I was developing through my mathematics degree could be applied. Through my career at the university, I have been connected to co-op as a supervisor and also as the Director of WatPD, the professional development program we deliver for our co-op students. As a naturally curious person, I always had questions of “HOW” and “WHY” in my mind with respect to co-op but not until I became the Director of the Waterloo Centre for Advancement of Co-operative Education (WatCACE) did I really have the opportunity to pursue answers to co-op research questions as part of my role.

Q: *For the experiential learning practitioner, what key theoretical foundations should he/she understand?*

A: The majority of research in co-op has been rooted in educational theories which is natural and appropriate. There are certainly key theoretical foundations to understand such as Kolb’s experiential learning cycle and Lave & Wenger’s legitimate peripheral participation. However, I think it’s also important for us to recognize and draw on the

multi-faceted nature of co-operative education and to look for relevant theories from other disciplines. For example, in my doctoral research in Management Sciences, I’m drawing on organizational theories to understand the experience of the students in the workplace.

Q: *How might one go about becoming involved in co-op research?*

A: Start small. Think about a question that relates to your work that you would like to answer. Reach out to established work-integrated learning researchers. They can listen to your ideas and provide feedback or guidance on how to get started. They may also be able to point you to existing relevant research or to researchers they know who are interested in similar topics. There are sometimes research workshops offered as part of conferences (e.g. CEIA, CAFCE, WACE) that you can attend to flesh out your research questions and planned methodology. Also, as the Regional Vice-Chair for the Americas of the International Research Community for WACE, I would encourage those interested in work-integrated learning research to contact me and join the WACE-IRC to learn about what’s happening in the field and to connect with other researchers.

Q: *Tell us about your current research.*

A: The Waterloo co-op program is very large, more than 18,000 four-month paid work terms are supported each year. However, it is not just the quantity of opportunities that matter, it is also the quality. With the

support of government research grants, we undertook a number of research projects that explored the notion of quality, from the perspective of students and employers. Building on that work, we are now examining how organizations view universities and use their work-integrated learning programs as talent pipelines.

Q: Tell us about your efforts to organize experiential learning research.

A: I feel very passionately about co-operative education and feel very strongly that research has played and will continue to play an important role in the advancement and sustainability of the co-operative education model. Fortunately, these sentiments are shared by the University of Waterloo, as demonstrated by the existence of WatCACE. The three objectives of WatCACE are to 1) conduct and facilitate research, 2) to provide thought leadership on co-op and other forms of work-integrated learning within and outside the university, and 3) to disseminate findings. Within the university I have expanded the group of WatCACE Associates, who are faculty or staff members whose research areas align or connect with work-integrated learning research. The group is quite multi-disciplinary ranging from Educational Psychology to Management Science. The Associates, who often have grad students working on WIL research projects, meet a couple of times per term to hear presentations on the progress of various WIL research projects. Outside the university, I am the chair of the

research committee for the Canadian Association for Co-operative Education (CAFCE) and the Regional Vice-Chair, Americas for the WACE International Research Community. These roles enable me to better understand the needs of the WIL community and understand the ways that research can continue to advance our understanding and practice.

Q: Do you have examples of recent studies that you would recommend for Experience Magazine readers to review?

A: Rather than identifying a specific study, I would like to highlight resources that may be of interest to the Experience Magazine readers. First, with the support of international WIL researchers, I had the opportunity to lead the creation of a Work-Integrated Learning research portal (www.wilresearch.uwaterloo.ca) which currently stores and/or links to articles from the Co-operative Education and Internships journal as well as the Asia Pacific Journal for Co-operative Education and the African Journal for Work-Based Learning. We will be continuing to add links to other WIL research in the coming months and look forward to being able to provide trends analysis on the research in the field. Second, WatCACE produces monthly newsletters, titled "Co-op Research Matters" where we profile recent WIL publications and include a practitioner's perspective on the relevance of the article for his or her work. To sign up for the newsletter, go to the WatCACE website (<http://www.uwaterloo.ca/watcace>), or follow us on LinkedIn or Twitter (@UW_WatCACE).