

Report of the New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education Annual Conference, Rotorua, New Zealand, 22-23 March 2001

Building on the success of the 2000 conference, the New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education (NZACE) fifth annual conference was held in conjunction with the Association's AGM at the Lake Plaza Hotel in Rotorua, New Zealand's leading geothermal area and prime tourist attraction. The conference theme was *Issues and Innovations in Contemporary Work-Based Learning* and some 35 delegates including overseas representatives attended paper presentations across a range of subject disciplines - science and technology, business studies, teacher education, and industry training organizations. Papers were presented on aspects of best practice such as the use of trial or mock interviews to improve students' chances of gaining placements, the internationalization of cooperative education, the role of placement coordinators, and work-based learning in undergraduate teaching. Plenary speakers included Ms Miram Weisz from RMIT University in Melbourne Australia, who spoke about the use of cooperative education on the provision of transformational learning. Other keynote addresses included a discussion of the employers' views of the advantages of cooperative education, delivered by Mr. Neil Walker from Kiwi Cooperative Dairies, and a detailed discussion of the implementation of a work-based learning program for graduate students at Lincoln University by Kathryn Gibson. Dr Richard Coll from Waikato University presented a workshop of research and publishing to facilitate publication of work presented at the conference. Refereed papers will be produced in the form of conference proceedings and will be available shortly (email: lfinch@waikato.ac.nz). The conference program for 2002 is yet to be confirmed, as is the venue; the details will be available from the NZACE web site (<http://www.nzace.ac.nz>) later this year.

The AGM resulted in a new look council with Mr. Lester Finch, Dean, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at the Eastern Institute of Technology, elected President. The Council meets in May 2001 to consider future aims of NZACE for the year including the proposal to host the 2004 Asia-Pacific WACE conference.

Contributors to the NZACE conference are encouraged to submit research reports to APJCE for publication (email: editor@apjce.org).

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Cooperative Education: The Missing Link?

It is common knowledge that cooperative education is a tripartite collaboration between education institutions, industry and learners (students). The World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) defines it as "combining classroom learning with learning on the job, bringing this on the job learning back to class for further analysis and reflection" (WACE Membership Directory 2000, p. 1). It has the improvement of the relationship between education and work as part of its mission statement. But, in attending meetings and conferences related to cooperative education, who does one find? Academics and, if one is lucky, some of the committed and dedicated industry representatives that play such a vital role in the whole cooperative education process. Where are the learners? Why are they not present? They are, after all, the very reason why the cooperative education model exists. I know that money is one of the reasons (and, I'll admit, a valid one!) why learners are not found at the above types of events. These learners and their education and development as productive employees are, however, what is discussed and argued - and sometimes hotly debated - at such conferences. In my opinion thus they should also be there! Problems are only problems until a solution has been found. I am convinced that we, (educators, industry and learners) as partners in the cooperative education process, can come up with a solution to the dilemma of the 'missing' learners. I would like to issue a challenge to all education institutions practicing cooperative education to "bring a friend" - one (or more) of their learners and one (or more) of their industry partners to the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference in 2002. Can you imagine the valuable interaction and sharing of experiences that would bring about? This would add richness to the whole conference and be a very rewarding experience for all involved. I have issued a similar challenge to the South African Society for Cooperative Education (SASCE) for their National Conference to be held in Cape Town, South Africa from 1 - 3 April 2002 and will invite WACE to take up the gauntlet, as it were, as well, for the 2003 conference in Rotterdam.

I see the following benefits for the learner in this, and it's not meant to be an exhaustive list:

1. A growth opportunity for the learner who may be attending a formal conference for the first time
2. A chance to share his/her experiences, concerns, hopes and aspirations regarding entry into the world of work
3. An opportunity to gain insight into, understanding of and appreciation for the dedication of the educators and industry employers
4. A chance to meet fellow learners - from different study fields, cultures, backgrounds and even different countries.

Should this concept prove feasible, one could even have a 'Student Track' at the conferences, or a breakaway session/plenary where learners could present short papers on issues regarding cooperative education/experiential learning/work based learning that are relevant to them, and thus educators and industry too! You may well ask – what are the suggestions I spoke about? It would be easy to invite learners to conferences, if money were not an issue. The first suggestion is simply to budget that a student attends with a (ideally his/her) cooperative education coordinator. Sponsorship is another avenue to pursue. The company that the learner is based at could be approached to both sponsor the learner and, ideally again (!) send an own delegate to attend the conference. The conference organizers themselves could assist by having special student rates. This may not be achievable for 2002, but is a thought to be kept in mind for future conferences.

Selection of the 'lucky' student is another issue that bears consideration. Some sort of selection criteria should be set up, with an application procedure. Interested learners could be asked to prepare abstracts or papers for review or one could hold a competition.

Cooperative education practitioners – both educators and those from the world of work – often feel that their management does not fully appreciate the power of this education model; does not 100% understand how vitally important their support is, nor the wonderful benefits all that are concerned can draw from the cooperative education experience. Therefore I say, why not bring a member of your management team along, introduce him/her to the rest of the cooperative education enthusiasts and let them experience at first hand the tremendous amount of sharing, gaining of insight and networking that takes place particularly at our cooperative education conferences.

What do you think? Is this a worthwhile goal to strive for?

Learners – the 'missing link' at cooperative education conferences? Hopefully, not for much longer!

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