

Academic learning for sport management students: learning through engaged practice

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Sport management students seek employment in an overtly competitive market place. Competition is heightened because of the perceived desirability of sport as a workplace. Students require degree level qualifications and industry experience together with a host of generic and specific skills in order to be workplace ready. For this reason, student work placement is seen to be a necessary component of Sport management degree programs. This paper identifies placement outcomes and perceived value from the student perspective. Sport management students engaged in personal reflective practice throughout their work placement. Reflections were analyzed, demonstrating support for teaching through practice. Further, it provides a framework for curriculum development and best practice methodology. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2007, 8(1), 53-65).

Keywords: sport management; work placement; engaged practice; placement outcomes; professionalism; Australia.

SPORT STUDY AND COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

The Value of Work Placement

The study of sport at the tertiary level has rapidly increased (Ferkins, 2002). Historically, the focus of sport degree programs was one of physical education and the applied sciences (Kerr, 2003). However, degree programs of this nature do not adequately provide students with the knowledge and skill to meet the dynamic needs of the current sport environment (Kerr, 2003; Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). Increasingly, "educational institutions are offering sport management degree programs as a growing need continues to exist for qualified sport professionals in the area of sport management, sport marketing, venue and facilities management together with sport governance and planning and development related activities" (Kerr, 2003, p. 2).

This growing need is reinforced by job vacancies and growth in the Australian sport employment sector (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). McMurtrie (2006) indicates that in terms of growth in job vacancies and outlook, the sport sector remains positive with a 23 percent growth rate between the 2003/2004 calendar year. Further, the data demonstrates that "jobs in sport are at their highest level in eight years, the third consecutive year above the previous high set during the Sydney Olympic and Paralympic games recruitment drive of 1999/2000" (McMurtrie, 2006, p. 1). In spite of this outlook, the proliferation of leisure, sport and recreation degree courses will add to the competitiveness of the sport job marketplace.

This competitiveness is also attributed to the industry that supports graduates from the above mentioned courses. Comparatively speaking, the sport and leisure industry is in an

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early stage of evolution (Hindson, 1999, cited in Ferkins, 2002) with the global professionalism of sport driving its continued expansion. Professionalism has seen a movement away from the tendency to employ retired players as sport managers and administrators. Tertiary qualified managers with strong business acumen are increasingly more attractive to sport employers. The Sportspeople Workplace Survey (2003) affirms this proposition with almost 64 percent of sport professionals possessing a bachelor's degree or higher qualification (McMurtrie, 2003). Sport is no longer just sport. Sport is business (External Advisory Committee, 2006).

Workplace learning/internship is critical to the professional preparation of graduates seeking employment in the sport industry (Bell, Crebert, C-J Patrick, Bates & Cragolini, 2003; Stratta, 2004; Sutton, 1989). Further, sport qualifications at the tertiary level have been developed primarily for vocational purposes, "the integration of work based learning is therefore considered a natural focus" (Cunnen & Sidwell, 1994, cited in Ferkins, 2002, p.29). Providing graduates with a more holistic set of experiences will benefit them throughout their career (Smith & Westerbeek, 2004). Despite the acknowledged importance of work placement within the sport curriculum, there has been limited research conducted in this context (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005). Of these studies few have focused exclusively on the student experiences and outcomes associated with engaged practice (Stratta, 2004). As a consequence, "Curriculum design for cooperative education has relied on research and the growing body of knowledge in cooperative education in settings other than sport" (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005, p. 42). Although providing an important knowledge base there are unique elements about sport that need to be identified and catered to in an educational sense.

Sport and sport related management is unique because of its diversity as a discipline. As a hybrid field of study, sport management combines and requires skill in the areas of management, marketing, accounting, communication, human resources, finance, logistics the social sciences as well as leisure, recreation and physical education (Love, 1993; Sutton 1989). Thus, sport organizations are grounded in the traditions of generic management, but unique aspects specific to sport organization need also be considered; the strong personal identification held by the sport consumer, sport organizations simultaneous competition and cooperation, and the growing professionalism of sport (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005).

Work Placement: Perceived Value

The role of work placement in student development is not a new concept; however, the value of work ready graduates is increasingly evident in a changing employment economy. In the delayed, downsized, innovative organization there is likely to be less time for the training and development needs of new recruits. Employers will want people who can quickly adapt to the workplace culture and hit the ground running (Harvey, 2000). As a consequence, employers identify work placement as a valuable component of undergraduate education, supporting the assertion that a strong disciplinary knowledge does not, of itself, guarantee a new graduate a job (Bell et al., 2003). This is particularly true of employment in the sport industry. It has been asserted that 60 percent of jobs in the sport industry are filled without external advertisement (McMurtrie, 2006). Employment success is driven by additional factors including the establishment of network and industry reputation. Work placement provides an invaluable opportunity for students to develop and polish this ability.

In addition, engaged practice offers an opportunity to reduce the gap between skills gained from qualification and the skills perceived as necessary for the workplace (Eames, 2003). “Disciplinary related knowledge and skills are highly sought by employers, as on-the-job training is an expensive process” (Kerr & Proud 2005, p. 96). The reduction of the skills gap is particularly relevant to students who enroll in tertiary programs immediately post secondary education (Bates, 2005). Work placement provides students with an answer to the question most commonly asked by recruiters ‘what experience have you had?’ Placement students will have less difficulty answering this proposition, “they will have worked in a professional environment and would have performed as a professional in their chosen career field” (Sharma & Sivagnanam, 1997, p. 81). Moreover, researchers have identified far reaching benefits from the industry/client perspective. Outcomes relate to the input of fresh ideas from the student, more specifically energy and enthusiasm were reported. A further benefit related to access to volunteers who were partially trained in the work required of them. Volunteers of this caliber facilitate the completion of projects that may not have otherwise been completed (Ferkins, 2002). Placement students “can also provide inexpensive assistance, which frees full time employees from routine tasks” (Williams, 2004, p. 1). There is also an opportunity for the industry to build valuable relationships with colleagues and universities and give back to the community in a broader sense.

The present work seeks to articulate (from the student perspective) the learning outcomes associated with professional practice in the sport management context. To date, researchers have focused on recommendations from practitioners and the curriculum concerns of educators. Rather than relying solely on sport management professionals to determine the parameters of a rewarding placement this study explores student perceptions. Thus, the student is central as the educational outcomes and the process of learning in work placement is often difficult to ascertain (Eames, 2003; Stratta, 2004).

The Placement Experience: Areas of Concern

Despite its reported benefits, the role of work placement is a contentious issue in tertiary education settings. This unease extends to sport management degree programs where the decision to award institutional credit is often questioned by academic officers (Younge & Baker, 2004). For this reason, maintaining academic rigor is seen to be of particular significance. Placement journals and self evaluation are identified as pertinent ways to maintain this rigor while ensuring learning outcomes are reported and achieved. In turn, legitimizing placements as a practical learning experience worthy of academic credit (Kelley, 2004).

In addition, there can be a tendency to focus and report on the potential rather than the actual benefits of student placement. Placements in service based industries including sport, tourism and hospitality have discussed issues relating to the failure of placements to maximize student’s benefits: “This situation is abetted by the tendency for employers to over emphasize what can the student do, rather than how they can most effectively utilize the student to mutual benefit” (Leslie and Richardson, 2000, p. 91). For this reason, the quality of the student’s learning experience should be the joint responsibility of the academic coordinator, the administrator of the sport management program and the agency supervisor (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005; Kelley, 2004). Student interest and commitment is also seen to be fundamentally important.

METHODOLOGY

Second and third year Bachelor of Business (Sport Management) students at the University of Western Sydney are required to complete professional practice units as part of their undergraduate degree program. Second year students are required to complete 80 hours of work placement (with a sport or sport related organization), while third year students are required to complete 120 hours. Professional practice includes specific periods of class attendance and specified minimum hours of work experience. The present work draws from the experiences of a cohort of 45 undergraduate students completing their 80 hour second year placement in 2005.

Students are required to select organizations of career and personal interest. They are supported by academic staff in the process of negotiating their work placement. Student driven placement is tied to the development of job-seeking, communication and negotiation skills. As part of the process of encouraging deeper learning through ownership, students complete a learning contract. The learning contract is negotiated between the supervising industry practitioner, the student and the academic supervisor. Generally, learning contracts include: a statement of the responsibilities of the parties involved; the goals and tasks to be pursued; the time period involved; the means and procedures to be used; outcomes to be achieved. Specifically it should:

1. Specify the goals and expectations of both student and supervisor, relating these to specific tasks, with mutual accountability for the tasks agreed to be carried out
2. Reflect the learning styles of the student and take into account the supervisor's learning and teaching styles
3. Anchor the student's learning goals to both ways of achieving these and the student's starting point in relation to each of these goals, and
4. Remain a flexible document open to change, with reasons for the changes being clear to all concerned.

The outcomes of this learning contract are assessed through a 'reflective field diary' and 'self evaluation'. Thematic analysis of 'student reflective journals' and 'self evaluation' has been used to qualitatively investigate and report student experience, knowledge and skill development.

Student Reflective Field Diary

Reflective field diaries provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, skills and abilities. Students were required to record the tasks they completed then commit to writing a critical reflection on how they completed tasks, what difficulties they experienced and what knowledge they have attained. The field diary and reflective practice was seen as central to student learning as "it is through reflection and conceptualization that students are able to translate their work experiences into learning outcomes and engage in deep level learning" (Weisz 2002, p. 4). Student reflective journals and self evaluation resulted in a relatively rich source of data as students are best placed to describe, reflect and analyze their experiences.

Student Self Evaluation

Students were asked to comment and provide a:

1. Summary of major tasks and projects
2. The extent to which their learning objectives were achieved
3. Influence of and on personal values, beliefs and ideals
4. Discovery of their learning and working style
5. Critical reflection on the relationship between theory and practice
6. Knowledge and skills developed from work placement, and
7. Further knowledge and skills to be developed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Attributes derived from the placement experience were diverse. Students illustrated both similarities and differences through their placement experience. However, the thematic analysis of student reports gave rise to a number of recurring themes and outcomes. In essence, these related to seven key placement outcomes (identified from the student perspective), industry knowledge, observation and practice, strengths and weakness, communication skills, application of theory, development of personal values, attitudes and beliefs. Networking and employment post placement were also documented.

TABLE 1

Overview of work placements conducted by University of Western Sydney students

Type of industry organization	Placement example
Sport club	Coaching & development Feasibility study Development officer Sport administration
National sporting body	Sport entries Sport development
Regional sporting body	Project/event management
State sport organization	Event management
Government (State)	Project management
Government (Local)	Project management
Public leisure/fitness facility	Facility management/operations
Private leisure/fitness facility	Operations/project management Facility management
Venue management	Marketing Event management & logistics
Sport event management	Event management & logistics
Sport media	Sport media & statistics
Sporting goods	Sales & marketing Sales Sponsorship & sales
Training & education	Project management School sport development and administration

Student Outcome One: Development of Industry Knowledge

Students reported 'industry knowledge' and 'exposure' as important components of their workplace. Michael indicates:

My learning experience with [organization X] development team was an excellent introduction into the sport environment.

For other students, the placement was more than an introduction. For those students there was a growth in knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the unique elements associated with being a practitioner in the Australian sport industry. Danielle reflects on the growth of her knowledge base:

My major learning outcome was to learn more about the Rugby League industry and to learn about what is needed to run events. I believe I learned a lot from [organization X] because [my agency supervisor] taught me about the importance of sound business strategy. I feel my knowledge has increased immensely of the Rugby League Industry.

Tanya identifies the knowledge gained as a result of her placement experience. She makes specific reference to event management as an interest and an area for employment post degree:

The areas of knowledge that were developed from my placement experience were knowledge of the event management process. This included a wide spectrum of event management areas including venue selection, selection, budgeting, and recruitment of volunteers, logistics, negotiation and event day operations.

Placement experience also identifies areas of 'knowledge gap' from the student perspective. Maree discusses:

I found [at the start of placement] I had little knowledge about particular areas of the industry such as governing bodies, how particular sports are managed and what types of resources are available.

By contrast Lachlan reported placement as a way to peruse the development of his own sport management related business. As a consequence of placement Lachlan worked alongside a small business owner:

Since I started university it has been a goal of mine to open my own personal training business/studio, but I wasn't sure on how to go about it. Placement gave me a great insight into the industry and helped me understand the process of starting your own business.

Student Outcome Two: Observation and Practice

Students frequently reported the value of observation and practice. They viewed work placement as an opportunity to observe the practices of agency staff. It also provided students with an opportunity to attempt new tasks in a supportive and professional environment. Kelly identified placement as a time:

To participate in as much productive work so that I could gain first hand experiences and learn from my mistakes.

For the vast majority of students there was a preference to 'physically complete tasks' during the placement hours, as distinct from watching and observing. Kate asserts the value of both observing and participating:

During my time at placement, I felt that a combination of observing and practice was most useful for my learning. During the first 10 hours of placement my tasks were to observe how [my agency supervisor] liaised with event managers and clients. However, I felt I learnt more when I actually went out and talked to the participants of the golf day.

The value of observation proceeded by practice is further asserted by Maree:

I was given the responsibility of certain tasks which required little supervision. This provided me with the opportunity to demonstrate my initiative and motivation when completing tasks. At the beginning of the placement I worked alongside the training officer and course coordinator to understand.

In contrast, Mark benefited from 'hands on experience' proceeded by feedback and evaluation from the agency supervisor:

I found that throughout the placement that I have a working style that leads me to prefer tasks where I am given a task to complete where outcomes are clearly defined. I like to work systematically and input some of my own thoughts and ideas into the tasks completion and then receive feedback.

Michael reflects on the challenge associated with completing a task on his own:

This [the task] was by myself with no assistance from the development team. It was challenging being thrown in the deep end, having to coordinate and run the session on my own. Although a challenge the student reflects on the experience in a positive way; It [work placement] was a good experience. I learned a lot on how to best keep the kids under control and my skills in the coaching and development area benefited greatly from the experience.

Amanda discusses the value of her involvement in an event management context:

My main objective for the entire period of work placement was to become more involved with the organization and handle some tasks on my own. By helping out in a more in-depth capacity, I was able to develop a greater feel for event management of sporting matches. After working [with the placement organization] I discovered my style of learning and working. I like to take hands on approach and experience as much as I can.

Anthony concluded that placement was successful but reported a want to be more actively involved in the completion of tasks:

I think my placement was a success in that I learned a lot about a broad range of things. In my next placement I would be possible looking to find a placement where I was able to participate a lot more and observe a lot less.

Student Outcome Three: Strengths and Weakness

Placement was a valuable forum for students to reflect on their professional strengths and weaknesses. By establishing a platform, placement provided a measure for the development

of competencies and identification of areas for future development. John discusses the challenge and personal weakness associated with completing a task without directive:

A weakness I found on game night is having no ability to self direct myself, I felt as though I was not confident to complete anything without being directed by another staff member.

Interestingly, several students identified information technology as an area for improvement. Largely, this related to the introduction or use of industry specific database and front of house systems:

A weakness at first was the use of the [organization's] database as it was a new system. Over the time of using the particular system knowledge and understanding was gained although there are a few aspects, which with further exploration and training will bring my skill level in this data base to strength (Jenny).

In relation to information technology, I discovered I need improve in computer software programs. Such programs include picture manager, Microsoft Excel and Microsoft power point. Although I do have basic knowledge in these programs, it would benefit me to have advanced knowledge and skills in using this software (Peter).

My typing skills and my general computer literacy skills [require improvement], as this is a major component of a days work in an office (Kelly).

Student identified strengths were diverse, ranging from time management through to analytical skills and communication techniques:

I discovered early on in my placement that time management is a crucial factor of success in event management. I believe I have good time management in that I can anticipate and meet deadlines. This was shown through game day operations (Amanda).

From feedback I received, I believe that one of my occupational strengths is an ability to quickly analyze a situation, assess what needs to be done and take appropriate action (Mark).

During my placement I feel my strength was liaising with clients, as [my agency supervisor] received good feedback from our clients. I also believe my presentation skills are a strength. My presentations were entertaining and successful (Kate)

Student Outcome Four: Development of Communication Skills

Development of communication skills was frequently cited as a student identified outcome. Kerr (2003) supports the importance of communication skills to sport management graduates. Communication was the first of five competency items identified by sport practitioners. For many students, placement offered an opportunity to try out communication styles in unique and different environments. Alex discusses the uncomfortable feeling of having to contact clients:

An area I wasn't comfortable with at the start of my placement was my communication skills, but I do feel as though my level of communication increased throughout my placement. On a daily basis I needed to contact clients either by the telephone or while on site. [My supervisor] told me by the half way point of my placement that I had opened up a lot with the work and seemed more relaxed.

Placement also gave students an opportunity to reflect on areas for communication development. Tanya discusses communication in a meeting context:

As a result of my placement I believe I need to increase my confidence in the way in which I communicate with people I am meeting for the first time or don't know well. Also, having more confidence to raise my views in meeting environments.

John reflects on the opportunity to communicate/lead and direct staff:

On game nights I got to see exactly what needed to be done from start to finish in regards to staff, planning and the smooth running of the event. I personally was involved in briefing game night staff which improved my communication skills, ensuring technical staff were in place and assigning task to ensure everything was completed.

In contrast, Catherine identified the unique challenges associated with communicating/directing children and young adults:

Early on I found it a bit daunting communicating with kids; this improved over the course of the placement but still at times struggled to communicate in the most effective means to the kids. I believe this will improve with experience.

Student Outcome Five: Course Work Relevance to Work Placement

The approach represented here is one where the placement helps the students to learn by providing an opportunity for them to see theory in the light of a practical situation that is manipulated or orchestrated by the employer. For students, there was evident value in this process. For Amanda there was an opportunity to place theory in context:

Aspects of course work that related to my work placement experience included all marketing and event management work. For example in event management I was learning the steps involved in staging an event, in work placement I got the hands on experience of this.

As did Maree:

I was able to relate previous knowledge from my sport management studies to this type of management setting. Through my studies of organizational behavior I was able to relate my understanding of goal setting in the workplace.

Lachlan discusses the value of several university subjects to the completion of a workplace task:

This was a very satisfying task that tested my marketing creativity and developed my interpersonal communication skills. Being involved in this activity portrayed the importance of an effective marketing mix, involving the product, price, place and promotion. The main subjects that helped me with this task were sport management and sport marketing

Sport marketing was further identified as relevant to Patrick's placement:

In regards to my degree I found the most relevant in relation to working at the stadium was sport marketing.

Mark discusses skills attained at university rather than information and knowledge application:

I found that communication skills which had been developed in subjects such as Sport Management 1 and 2 were helpful in letting me function within the organization. I was able to express what I was there for and what I hoped to achieve, convey my position and oppositions about work related issues, and offer constructive suggestions or feedback when I did not necessarily agree with a course of action in a manner which did not put me off side with other staff members.

Student Outcome Six: Development of Personal Values, Attitudes and Beliefs

Interestingly, placement provided students with an opportunity to reflect on their personal values, attitudes and beliefs. For some students there was a reassessment of value whilst for others an affirmation of their belief systems. Students reported both conflict, and convergence in these areas. For Simon, there was an ability to reflect on the organization's values/thoughts pertaining to customer service delivery:

This experience allowed me to reassess my own values and beliefs in relation to customer service and in particular dealing with customer complaints. The in-house customer service workshop offered great insight into issues concerning correct customer service procedures.

For Patrick there was an opportunity to explore the way in which his personal values sat in context to that of the sport organization:

I developed an awareness in regards to my own personal values and experiences. As well as an understanding of how these affect the ability to respond in a working environment to which I was previously inexperienced. I learnt about my own personal style of learning and working.

Amanda discusses personal beliefs and attitudes. Further, she identified the impact these impose on her conduct in organizational settings:

As a person I value punctuality, loyalty and equity. These values or beliefs influence my work enormously. I arrived at work early almost everyday to prepare myself for the day and expected other staff to do the same. I believe you need to work hard to be rewarded and this resulted in me finding tasks to do and trying to achieve my best overall. I did not wait for instruction when I saw a task needed doing.

Linda reflects on the significance of morals and values:

Throughout the work placement I learnt that morals, values and ideals are a massive part of being a sport agent. The way you conduct your business leads you to what sort of clientele you will attract. I learnt that having strong values and morals will represent you more favorably in the future even though at the present it may not.

Student Outcome Seven: Networking and Employment Post Placement

Networking is identified as necessary for employment and advancement in the sport industry. Further, at the heart of this scheme is the intention to build mutually beneficial partnerships between industry and the university. Thus, referral and networking are beneficial for the involved agency. Sport interns bring a degree of certainty to the search for

quality students and prospective employees of the future “their work ethic, overall professionalism, and technical skills can be easily assessed throughout the internship” (Williams, 2004, p. 1). Maree discussed networking outcomes:

Through the use of my interpersonal and communication skills I was able to increase my ability in networking. This was achieved by creating relationships with other organizations within the industry.

Mark cites the development of friendships and professional association:

I was able to gain an understanding of how all the different parts of the organization operate independently of each other, but at the same time co operate with all staff working together to achieve common goals. I felt I was able to integrate smoothly into the organization, getting along well with co-workers, developing friendships and a general professional rapport.

Eliza also discusses:

Through my use of my interpersonal and communication skills I was able to increase my ability in networking. This was achieved by creating relationships with other organizations within the industry such as neighboring academies and corporate sponsors.

Michael identified placement as an opportunity to get a foot in the ‘sport employment door’. Adding further weight to McMurtrie’s (2006) assertion that 60 percent of roles are filled internally (within the sport organization) without advertisement. Michael alludes to the opportunity for additional work/advancement having established a reputation within the organization:

It was a good opportunity and I see it as getting a foot in the door, especially this year being employed as a part time member of the development team. The position continues on for the rest of the year and I have been notified that further employment is out there within [the organization].

A number of students reported opportunities for paid employment post placement. From a student perspective, one of the primary purposes of work experience pertains to job placement or opportunities for career advancement (Kelley, 2004). This outcome supports Bate’s (2005) assertion that work placement students have greater ease gaining graduate employment compared to those who do not, and that they are significantly more likely to find discipline related employment (Bates, 2005; Sharma & Sivagnanam, 1997).

My next goal is to complete my coaching and training certificate. My placement supervisor has spoken to me about a paid position once I have completed my work placement (Alex).

I have been fortunate enough to have a part time position [post placement] with the company as a recreation leader and hope to further develop my knowledge and experience with them in the future and possibly moving up the ranks (Greg).

The placement has really opened my eyes into what I wish to achieve in the future. My next goal is to complete my certificate in fitness and start working in the industry. [My placement supervisor] has offered me a position once I have completed my certificate (Lachlan).

CONCLUSION

Modern economies are increasingly driven by skill (Ravenscroft & Gilchrist, 2005). Graduates are expected to hit the ground running with organizations increasingly unable or unwilling to dedicate resources to the professional development of employees. This inability or unwillingness is evident within sport organizations. As a hybrid field of study, graduates require more than an undergraduate degree to gain employment and progress within organizational hierarchies. For this reason, universities are well placed to produce students who are innovative, flexible and accustomed to modern employment settings. Work placement at the undergraduate level provides an opportunity for students to experience the practical application of the knowledge acquired in traditional education settings. Further, it provides an opportunity for deeper level learning. Students reflect and critically evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, students can experiment and try new ways of doing in a professional, supportive environment.

Recommendations for future research relate to the development of a global picture/best practice methodology for engaged practice. Ultimately, the aim is to assure quality engaged practice through placements which facilitate academic learning, allowing appropriate transparent and defensible assessment practices. Quality and assessed professional practice has the potential to deliver deeper learning through student focused active learning, using a flexible blended approach.

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative education (APJCE) arose from a desire to produce an international forum for discussion of cooperative education issues for practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region and is intended to provide a mechanism for the dissemination of research, best practice and innovation in work-integrated learning. The journal maintains close links to the biennial Asia-Pacific regional conferences conducted by the World Association for Cooperative Education. In recognition of international trends in information technology, APJCE is produced solely in electronic form. Published papers are available as PDF files from the website, and manuscript submission, reviewing and publication is electronically based.

Cooperative education in the journal is taken to be work-based learning in which the time spent in the workplace forms an integrated part of an academic program of study. Essentially, cooperative education is a partnership between education and work, in which enhancement of student learning is a key outcome. More specifically, cooperative education can be described as a strategy of applied learning which is a structured program, developed and supervised either by an educational institution in collaboration with an employer or industry grouping, or by an employer or industry grouping in collaboration with an educational institution. An essential feature is that relevant, productive work is conducted as an integral part of a student's regular program, and the final assessment contains a work-based component. Cooperative education programs are commonly highly structured and possess formal (academic and employer) supervision and assessment. The work is productive, in that the student undertakes meaningful work that has economic value or definable benefit to the employer. The work should have clear linkages with, or add to, the knowledge and skill base of the academic program.

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