

PRINCIPLES FOR STRUCTURING COOPERATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

FRANCES RICKS, PH.D.

University of Victoria

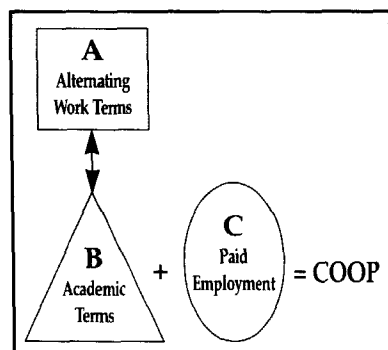
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Introduction

During the symposium many references were made to the evolution of cooperative education with an emphasis on how to structure cooperative education programs. More pointedly it was observed during the symposium that co-op educators have moved away from understanding and drawing on basic principles and values of work-based learning in their program planning. Over time, co-op educators have turned their attention to designing, debating and arguing the particular program structures of work-based learning. Lengthy discussions have focused on the required number of work terms, the required length of work terms, the required amount of money from companies for work terms, and so on (Ricks, et al, 1993).

A program structure approach to the planning of education programs looks like linking blocks together (see Figure 1). With the continued embellishments of program structure and with the proliferation of these programs, some good ideas about work-based learning and the values reflected in these ideas have been largely ignored . . . perhaps never known to some and forgotten by others. It seems timely to put forward those key principles of cooperative education that are not only based in our rich history, but with some modification, can speak to the educational needs and challenges of the current educational and social reality facing us in the twenty-first century.

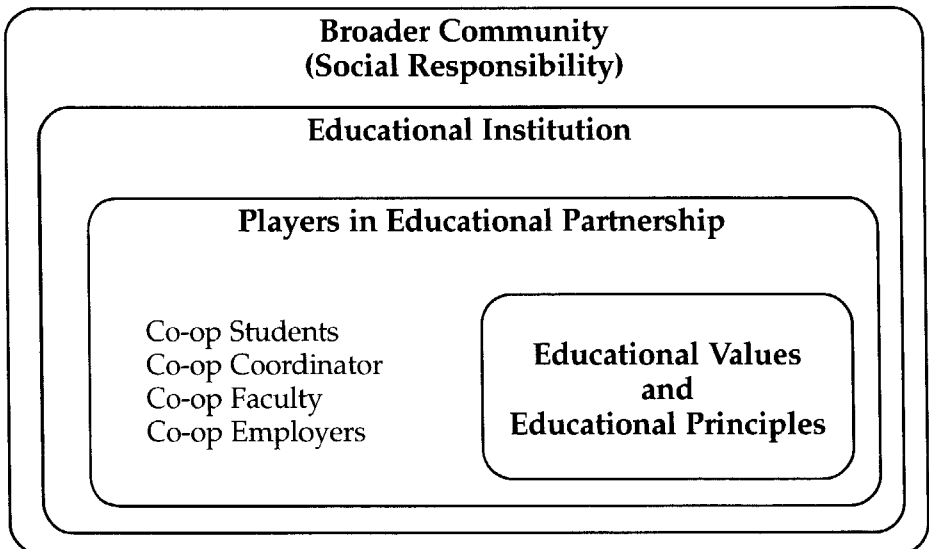
Figure 1: Structural Approach to Cooperative Education Design



Before listing the principles and discussing their application to practice, it is important to point out that key principles represent an attitude or philosophy about education and therefore learning. Inherent in any philosophy are those beliefs and values that direct action. Therefore, it is critical that cooperative education practitioners have principles based on what they believe and value about cooperative education and be able to articulate those principles to others. Only by being clear about the beliefs and values that are foundational to cooperative education programs can practitioners be intentional and deliberate in their planning of cooperative education initiatives.

While principles offer guiding values that give direction to strategic planning, they allow for the application of *different* structures and educational strategies. The critical point being, perhaps cooperative education programs reflect practitioners being too focused on the building of the house and not enough on the life experiences of living in the house. If practitioners focused on the principles, they could build a house to suit and get on with developing an effective educational experience involving the students, cooperative education coordinators, work site supervisors, and the college/university teaching faculty. Principle-based thinking would provide co-op-educators a great deal of latitude in their strategic planning of cooperative education programs.

Figure 2: Principles AndValues Based Approach To Cooperative Education Program Design



This latitude allows for variations in programs depending on the local players, institutional style and needs. Visually it looks like this (see Figure 2). The cooperative education practitioner comes from a position that work-based learning represents shared principles and values. Practitioners bring with them different skills depending on their positions: students, faculty, worksite partners and co-op-coordinators. The principles simply point in a direction without dictating how the program has to look or be. In essence, the principles help to guarantee that cooperative education programs will meet the following objectives:

- Cooperative education programs create optimum learning!
- Cooperative education partners work across differences to meet needs!
- Cooperative education programs involve all partners equally!
- Cooperative education programs are regenerative thereby ensuring that the cooperative education partnership benefits all stake holders and informs the educational process!
- Cooperative education programs benefit society and improve its condition!

Keeping the above objectives in mind is important because they define the context in which the principles are manifest or realized. In other words, the objectives give definition to what cooperative education is up to or its larger purpose and reason for being. An amalgamation of the above objectives points to a cooperative education mission:

It is the mission of cooperative education programs to create optimum learning through a partnership involving the learner, the educational institution, and the work site. Cooperative education programs are regenerative and benefit all stake holders, ultimately serving and benefiting the larger society.

Recognizing the overall purpose and context of cooperative education programs, the following principles can be used to guide the development of cooperative education programs.

Key Principles

Recognizing cooperation education as a way of educating, rather than the way of educating, requires a tolerance and understanding of differences; particularly differences in how things look or are organized or are done. The promotion of key principles gives permission for, indeed demands, the development of different programmatic approaches for delivering work-based learning. A pilot project involving the University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia in northern Manitoba is delivering a masters degree in

Child and Youth Care to a cohort of 17 Aboriginal people who work in the same social service agency that provides child and family services to all of northern Manitoba (Ricks, 1994). The students are completing the program over a 2-3 year period and are employed full time while in school. Learning activities and projects are focusing on the real issues of running a social services agency in rural, under-resourced, and under-developed Aboriginal communities in northern Canada. If we look at this from a structural point of view, it would not be considered cooperative education although it has some aspects of cooperative education as defined by the Canadian Federation of Cooperative Educators, e.g., paid work and related classroom experiences. However, as it does reflect the principles of cooperative education, it could be considered a cooperative education program.

The following principles may be instrumental to opening the door to future successes in cooperative education. Sticking to these principles could guide cooperative education practitioners in realizing the goals of cooperative education. These principles are listed below and then discussed in terms of the possibilities in translating them into practice.

1. Cooperative education fosters self-directed learning and is student centered.
2. Cooperative education fosters reflective practice.
3. Cooperative education fosters transformational learning.
4. Cooperative education integrates school and work learning experiences.
5. Cooperative education learning experiences are collaborative: students, faculty, co-op coordinators, and work site partners have different roles while respectfully owning the entire process.
6. Cooperative education learning experiences are grounded in adult learning theories.
7. Cooperative education insures school and work learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful to life and life long work.
8. Cooperative education is enhanced by using advanced technology and alternate models of delivery.
9. Cooperative education is defined through program and curriculum.
10. Cooperative education is accountable and insures that learning claims are demonstrated and documented.

From Principle to Action

Cooperative Education Fosters Self-Directed Learning and Is Student Centered. The principle of self-directed learning is the heart of adult-education

(Knox, 1974; Knowles, 1975; McKeachie, 1985; Mezirow, 1991). The most basic translation of this principle is to treat the learner as an adult and to decrease progressively the learner's dependency on the educator. This requires helping the learner learn how to use learning resources and to engage in reciprocal learning relationships. This requires putting the learner in the middle of the learning experience that they direct and is based on their needs and wants.

There are many ways this could be played out in cooperative education. Probably the first step is to recognize that a "one size fits all program" is not going to work for most of the people most of the time, never mind, all of the people all of the time. Any program based on self-directed learning requires an educational experience tailored to some extent to the self. For example, different cooperative education students will need different work arrangements. A program might well expect a student to find their own work arrangements and negotiate with the university or college the particulars of the work contract. Length of work site contracts may vary to accommodate young mothers or different employment settings. At the very least, there could be work site contracts that allow for the development of different learning objectives for different learners.

In the academic setting, this principle may direct similar strategies to those mentioned for the work site. Instead of the professor deciding what will be learned and how it will be learned because of how it is taught, assignments may be individually negotiated within certain constraints. Work site issues may become the focus of academic discussions in classes thereby posing the opportunity to examine relevant theories for practice problems. Academic work could well become a research project initiated by the student and inspired by their work site challenges. Directed study courses, again initiated by the learner, may offer the learner the opportunity to explore and study a topic that embellishes a current curriculum.

Probably the most challenging aspect of this principle is that in the short run self-directed learning is more difficult for everyone! Students who have not learned how to learn, professors who like teaching from aging and yellowed notes, coordinators who know best about what is good for the student, and employers who want things done in certain ways only, will require some careful reeducation. To get these players comfortable with learning to learn, to engage them in the process of reciprocal learning, and to achieve the long term benefits of reciprocal learning is the challenge. Sometimes doing it yourself is just easier! Wrong! In self-directed learning the learner is guided to learn, not lead or have learning done to them.

Cooperative Education Fosters Reflective Practice. Reflective practice (Meyer, 1986; Pugach & Johnson, 1990; Ricks, 1995; Schon, 1983, 1987) is being able to reflect in posing and solving problems. The reflection involves being more critical in understanding the self and how oneself intrudes on the definition of the problem and potential solutions because of one's beliefs and values. Only by having this awareness and being able to act on this awareness can learners engage in reflective practice. To be engaged in reflective practice requires being able to participate in critical discourse with others and in doing so can assess the validity of assertions made or implied during the communication. Rational discourse is valued and to achieve this the program must encourage a communicative learning. The key to reflective practice is self-awareness (Ricks, 1993, 1995).

In essence, this principle is postulating the need for a combination of thinking skills and self-awareness skills. The following suggestions may prove useful in actualizing this principle.

1. Work site mentor programs aimed at achieving communicative learning skills at the work site.
2. Special seminars in colleges/universities at the front end of courses that model and demonstrate critical discourse skills applied to particular disciplines in different settings, as a way to engage faculty.
3. Self-awareness workshops for faculty, coordinators, employers, and students on beliefs and values about reflective practice and self-directed learning.

Any activity that presses the learners to examine how they think, how they address problems, their assumptions, and where they listen from, is the essence of this principle. This principle is the antithesis of most "filler up" educational strategies where the student is expected to take in or find out about quantities of information fed to them. The principle is based on the idea that all information is mediated by the student and never stands on its own.

Cooperative Education Fosters Transformational Learning. Transformational learning involves the digging down to the roots of our assumptions and pre-conceptions and, as a result, changes the way we make meaning from and about the experience (Clark, 1993; Cranton, 1992; Daloz, 1986; Farquharson, 1992; Karpiak, 1991; Mezirow, 1991). The process of transformational learning aimed at addressing problems may be viewed in new ways and therefore addressed in new ways. Transformational learning requires reflection on the content and the process resulting in the recreation of what is known in the moment. Each learning moment is a little explosion of personal truth that unearths new meaning and gives new direction.

This principle does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bath water. There are times when students need to learn particular information because that information provides the foundation for thinking about other things. However, for students to understand this and learn what must be learned, could be a transformational learning experience!

The opportunity for transformational learning in cooperative education is inherent in juxtapositioning the academic and work sites with each other. For example, if students were asked to analyze the assumptions in their course work against the assumptions inherent in their work site, what would happen? Students would be asked to determine in their own minds the connection between the two! What if faculty members supervised students in the work site for a day or two? What if the work site supervisor taught the college class? What if the cooperative coordinator taught a course on assumptions in work-based learning and learning how to learn? The cooperative education coordinator might recommend topics for a curriculum to the college/university teaching faculty to keep them up on changes in the work settings. Collaborative seminars between work site supervisors, teaching faculty, students, and cooperative education coordinators may help to transform an old curriculum into more innovative and a more current curriculum. Just reviewing the curriculum could be a first step.

Perhaps it would be transformative simply to generate a curriculum for cooperative education. Few faculty have thought through their curriculum in terms of work sites and few work sites have learning objectives, never mind curriculum per se. Work sites might benefit from being introduced to learning organization thinking that is emerging in the organizational literature (Marsick & Watkins, 1993; Senge, 1990; Weiner, 1990; Zauzi, 1987).

Cooperative Education Integrates School and Work Learning Experiences. The integration of school and work learning experiences is the pulling together of the separate learning experiences into a unified and whole learning experience. Too often students talk about the real learning that they associate with work sites and the stuff they have to learn to get the degree. When students talk like this about their educational experience, educational programs have failed them! Anything a student sees or learns in the work site should be relatable to the classroom material and experience and vice versa.

How can this be achieved? More careful work site placements that better reflect where the students are in their learning and what they can offer employers. Work site visits by faculty so faculty can incorporate learning opportunities in the classroom that draw on particular work site challenges and opportunities. Employers may want to visit the campus and actual classes to get a better idea of what kind of cooperative educa-

tion students are available. Videos of campus programs may be an efficient way of helping employers understand their choices regarding students. Cooperative Education coordinators may need to acquaint themselves with the faculty in terms of their expertise and their classrooms to better advise the employers what is available from students as to knowledge and skills. Coordinators may want to visit faculty classrooms to see how they might be useful in promoting the integration between classes and work sites.

Cooperative Education Learning Experiences Are Collaborative. This principle means that while the different players (students, coordinators, faculty, and supervisors) have their different roles they respectfully own the entire process and work jointly to achieve the goals of the program. The ultimate evidence of owning the entire process is, if I am a cooperative education coordinator and I see a faculty member who is having difficulty in teaching the cooperative education students or who is unavailable for employers, then I have a problem. Usually the tendency would be to think, "Boy, does h/she have a problem!" and walk away. However, using this principle requires that all stakeholders take what they see as "our problem," knowing that if it continues, the student and the program loses, and ipso facto, everyone loses.

To incorporate this principle into the educational experience, new marketing strategies may be in order. Instead of marketing outside the college/university, marketing inside the college/university may be more beneficial. It might be advisable, indeed necessary, to renegotiate the relationships that exist between key players. Discussing how to arrange working relationships that are collaborative may be necessary. For example, in most colleges/universities, the teaching faculty and employers are not involved directly in the cooperative education process. The student is often the link to the three parts of the triangle and is ever running from one to the other. There may be a need for cooperative education personnel to take a leadership role in the college/university rather than just work on the side of the campus assigning students to work sites.

Because many institutions of secondary and post secondary education have an ethos of competition and are out to capture resources from their colleagues, the larger context of the program may require devolution in order to have educational experiences that are created through a collaborative process negotiated among students, faculty, cooperative education coordinators, work site supervisors, and administrators. The educational experience embodied in this principle requires new learning, stretching, realizing, creating, and imagining . . . not winning. The entire educational philosophy

of the educational institution may need to be addressed and rethought to achieve an ethos of collaboration and win/win.

Cooperative Education Learning Experiences are Grounded in Adult Learning/Theories. This principle requires some knowledge about adult learners. It is known that adult learners learn best from experience; while adult learners may sometimes be slower in learning, they retain their learning longer; adult learners have different learning styles; adult learners have lives outside school that can augment their learning and can distract from their learning; no two adult learners are alike and bring into the classroom class differences, racial differences, ethnic differences, and gender differences, to mention a few (Butler, 1987; Knowles, 1975; Knox, 1974a, 1974b, 1986, Schroeder, 1993); more than anything, the adult learners today will not be the same as the adult learners of tomorrow, e.g., the generation of learners who have grown up in a computer world.

Although these differences about adults in our classrooms are acknowledged, educational programs are structured in a way that assumes that students are more alike than different. Probably the only thing they have in common is wanting to learn and even that is debatable. In spite of these differences, classrooms are set up so that everyone reads the same material, gets the same assignment, and engages in the same discussions in class . . . although perhaps different discussions outside class.

Given the range of learners, educating the stakeholders on educational strategies and techniques might be useful. Many educators are unaware of the technology of education that has mushroomed over the past 10-15 years (Cooper, 1990; Diamond, 1989; Johnson, 1990). Co-op coordinators might coordinate seminars on techniques useful in the classroom and the work site and create a conversation between faculty and supervisors on teaching strategies. This principle is closely related to another principle that may be spoken to at this point.

Cooperative Education is enhanced by using advanced technology and alternate models of delivery. Computer technology, satellite links, rapid transit that transports us anywhere in the world in hours, E-mail, and other technology opens endless opportunities to teach anywhere, at anytime, and in many ways (Noam, 1995; Parsley, 1991; Urion, 1990; Tierney, 1992). Yet, most college/university teaching is in the classroom with the teacher lecturing.

Once a student is placed out of town, E-mail and other technologies may be a suitable method of supervision. Around the world placements are becoming a reality. However, most college/universities are not sure just what is happening over there for their student. Again, the use of distance technology may offer a solution. Communicating through modems,

phone conferences, and even connecting a student via satellite to a classroom on campus is possible.

In essence, because of advanced communication technology, cooperative education programs do not need to be campus bound. The educational program can occur within the work site and to a group of adult learners who work for the same or same kind of company. Maybe communities can get together a group of 5-10 who want the same or similar degree, yet must remain in their community because of family and employment commitments. Co-op on wheels, co-op on electricity, or co-op on air . . . the opportunities and the packages are endless.

To move in the direction of alternate technologies raises the question and/or stresses the point, that co-op educators are in the EDUCATION business. Because of this fact, changing the phrase co-op placement to co-op work site educational experience might be worthwhile. The term placement suggests that once they are placed, it is all over . . . even for the student. Additionally, renaming co-op coordinators to co-op education specialists clearly suggests a different set of functions beyond job placement. Co-op teaching faculty may serve to remind faculty that they do something different from regular teaching faculty. "Naming" matters and communicates to ourselves and others what we are up to. Are we up to placements or education?

Cooperative Education Insures School and Work Learning Experiences That Are Relevant and Meaningful to Life and Life Long Work. This principle is imbedded in two important aspects of life and life-long work: (1) living and working involve generic processes of planning for change (change is a constant in our world), and (2) learners will work all their lives at something. To engage in living and working which requires engaging in a process of planned change, there are basic/generic skills that are critical for adult functioning whatever a student's field or discipline: thinking skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, and negotiation skills. It just so happens that these are critical skills for learning to learn (see self-directed learning) and some of the strategies used in self directed learning may be applied in cooperative education.

In addition, however, rather than teaching students how to get the job, perhaps seminars and workshops could focus on how to crack the "getting a job process." Class discussions on how to create a job rather than get a job may be more suitable as we move into the mid 90's! This may involve other workshops on self-awareness as students may be unaware what is stopping them from getting or creating the work they want. For example, is it their insecurity that shows up in their negotiations and not getting the job is simply not a func-

tion of the economic situation? Students and faculty could have interesting and lively debates about the nature of work and how work contributes to effective living. Discussions on workaholics, unemployment, changing opportunities for women, the closing off opportunities for men, may help students gain insights about the world in which they are to be employed in light of who they are. Work site supervisors could bring to class survival strategies for balancing work and family life. Work site supervisors could establish mentor programs that allow for a more personal connection in the work environment.

Cooperative Education is Defined Through Program and Curriculum. Currently Cooperative Education is defined through program structure rather than curriculum. What this means is that if a program meets the criteria, then it is a cooperative education program, e.g., certain number of work terms, certain number of academic terms, terms have a specified length of time, students are paid for the work term, and so on. What has been undefined is the actual curriculum of cooperative education programs, both for the academic and work terms. Curriculum development involves defining the content or substance of the course, stipulating the course structure (how it is going to be organized), the course learning objectives (what you want the learners to know or be able to do by the end of the course), teaching strategies (what the teacher, work site supervisor, student or coordinator will actually be doing to help the student in achieving the objectives), and ensures that the course is congruent with the program (Cooper, 1990; Diamond, 1989; Lovell-Troy & Eickmann, 1992; Miller & Seller, 1990).

A great deal can and needs to be done regarding curriculum development in cooperative education. In many colleges/universities curriculum does not exist for the regular programs because faculty simply do not know what curriculum is, never mind how to develop it.

A starting point would be for cooperative education personnel to learn about curriculum development and develop it for the more apparent co-op aspects of the program, e.g., work sites. Further, there would then be a need to help work site supervisors in the implementation of a curriculum or they may need to implement it themselves.

Cooperative Education is Accountable and Insures that Learning Claims are Demonstrated and Documented. Accountability is being able to justify, explain, or cause something to happen. Applied to cooperative education, being accountable would mean being able to ensure that learning objectives are met for all students and that this is captured in some form of documentation.

The possibilities are endless:

1. Interview students or do focus groups to determine if learning

- objectives have been met.
2. Conduct a more formal program evaluation that monitors success of stated objectives of the program.
 3. Conduct follow-up studies of graduates to see if they are more successful than non-co-op students.
 4. Conduct an evaluation that examines the programs utilization and application of the declared principles of the program.
 5. Compare co-op programs with more conventional programs to see if one works better than the other on stated criteria.
 6. Research aspects of cooperative education that would help us understand what and how something works, e.g., different kinds of work terms, mentor programs, or other structural aspects of the program.
 7. Analyze student progress through the program to identify stresses or hindrances to student achievement.
 8. Study whether certain kinds of teachers are more effective in cooperative education programs.

These are only some of the possibilities for research or program evaluation studies. This principle prompts us to know what cooperative education is, how it works, and the effects of cooperative education on learning and capacity building in the larger social context of organizations and communities.

Summary

These principles are only guidelines to prompt thinking and creativity around cooperative education programming. Clearly the message embedded in these principles is that cooperative education is about education and learning. Therefore, whether the practitioner is in the academic or work setting, students need to be engaged in a learning process with partners who need to understand and care about their learning and the application of that learning. Another inherent message of these principles is that cooperative education is up to something bigger than itself. Cooperative education is inherently committed to improving the bigger picture, e.g., the economy, peoples' working lives, and life long learners living more effectively. If these principles are applied, cooperative education will continue to regenerate itself and in another 50 years may have yet another set of objectives and perhaps different principles. If cooperative education is going to be an effective educational program, it must live in the paradox of being something, while becoming something else. Co-op educators can help with both!

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