

**AC 2010-305: COOPERATIVE EDUCATION, INTERNSHIPS, AND  
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING SHOULD BEGIN IN PRE-SCHOOL**

**Craig Gunn, Michigan State University**

# Cooperative Education, Internships, and Experiential Learning Should Begin in Pre-School

## Abstract

Cooperative Education, Internships, and Experiential Learning have been part of the vocabulary of educators for over 100 years. The birth of Cooperative Education as an important part of the education of engineers was the brainchild of Herman Schneider. His foresight in realizing that in order to fully understand what engineering was about required an immersion in the real technical world came at a time when more and more individuals were able to experience an educational system that had been relatively limited to upper class society. Suddenly there was a push to open up the doors of academia to individuals who might actually work in professions and require help in paying for that education by working professionally before they graduated. Family money, unavailable, gave way to technical jobs that could support the student's educational costs. This gave way to a new but fully realized concept that contact between what man thought and studied with how he acted in the real world was beneficial and critical for learning to take place. What you studied and how you used that learning was critical for education.

Cooperative Education, Internships, and Experiential Learning, as important as they are, have been confined to students in college and more recently to students in high school in varying degrees. Institutions across the country have offered the various work-related areas to their students as suggested endeavors or as required activities. There has not been a national consensus to require students, especially in engineering, to gain work-related experience before they graduate. The premise of this paper is that professionals in the Cooperative Education, Internships, and Experiential Learning areas; academic administrators; government leaders; faculty; students; and parents should concentrate on a new area of focus. This focus should not be whether students need to combine the learning they gain in the classroom with the education that they gain on the job but on the other hand when that collaboration takes place. High school and college experience is like the old proverbial phrase that says that it is ridiculous to "lock the barn door after the horse has bolted." At the end of their formal educational careers we tell students that it is important to get work experience. Perhaps that is why we do not have 100% participation. Many have bolted by then to menial jobs close to home or nothing jobs just to pay for a few college expenses. This is why **When** is so important.

This paper argues that we should focus our attention on dealing directly with K-12 educators and parents, especially those with children in the very early years of education, and start to formulate a concentrated plan that deals with the education of the young in all things related to the work that they will do in their later lives. The synthesis of academic learning and the work done outside the classroom and its immense value needs to be exploited.

## Introduction

Cooperative Education, Internships, and Experiential Learning conveyed in different terms should be begun at the earliest age possible, probably in pre-school. What once were called

chores should be presented to these young impressionable children as the beginnings of their career aspirations. In early Greece, boys learned to be fighters at an early age. Alexander the Great was slugging it out with his friends, not as fun time but as preparation for his career as soldier and king. Everything he did focused on where he would be later in life. Education at the knee of Aristotle led directly to learning the methods of leading one's people, directing a battle, and cultivating cultures other than one's own. Young girls were actively involved with the running of their families' households. They learned early what was required of them in their mature years. As our society has changed to embrace the equality of men and women and all races, the focus has simply broadened to envelop all these people with the same idea: learning at an early age is vital and learning about work-related issues should begin much earlier than it does today.

### **The Premise**

We at the upper levels of education are concerned with students understanding the importance of an education and the work that will be driven by that education. One of the benefits of work is that there is reward both in what one learns and what one earns. When we start to educate children on the importance of work it is critical that these children also learn the importance of what they receive from that work in the form of payment. According to experts, "It is really never too **early to start teaching your children** about money. And the sooner you begin teaching your children about money the better chance they will grow up to have a well-rounded and responsible appreciation of the uses and value of money."<sup>1</sup> Money is easily associated with work and children begin the understanding process of knowing that their work has value and is rewarded with both knowledge and payment. Parents who instill in their children the knowledge that work involves both a learning process and an earning process will make their children rounded individuals in the working world.

"In the very beginning when children are very young money **education** can begin simply by teaching them to identify various coins. You can then reinforce what money is used for by taking your children shopping even at an early age and pointing out what is going on." Many parents already present these fundamentals to their young children. It does not require a great deal of effort, but it does lay a foundation for learning about the working world."<sup>1</sup>

At a slightly older age, children can be encourage to travel with parents to grocery stores, where parents can lead them through the process of comparing prices and looking for the best values. The element of work as a worthwhile activity that allows people to attain goods helps children to understand the importance of doing the job where pay is involved. By creating an integration of work, value, and reward for one's efforts, the child begins the process that leads ultimately to a career path. The pay aspect can be fulfilled through actually acquiring jobs or receiving allowances for monetary reward. The important issue is to make sure that allowances are received for work that is performed. Simply giving children money for nothing provides a negative consequence to working and its rewards.

Co-op, internship, and experiential learning professionals need to work closely with elementary teachers to encourage the practice of educating children and their parents into making a clear association between work as important part of learning and pay as an integral part of one's

working career. Obviously many parents have practiced this by deciding that their children can learn a great deal about money and work ethic by encouraging their children to seek out ways to earn money by helping with chores around the house. These chores should be reworded into cooperative education, internships, or experiential learning where the children start to hear about and equate their work with career activities. They learn to work in teams to get those household jobs done. They collect all their toys and school supplies in class with their classmates to prepare the classroom for the next day. The terminology of the working world can easily be used with children as they learn how to function in the real world.

Educators provide additional suggestions for money education in late teenage years: “allowing children to do the family grocery shopping, and involving them in planning a budget for an upcoming trip, and helping them complete their tax returns if they're employed. For older teens it can also be a helpful learning experience to help them secure a small installment loan. This will teach them to learn to budget for regular financial obligations as well as build their credit.”<sup>1</sup> Here again it is not just the earning of money, it is the learning about how to function in the real world and making sure that children realize that work is not simply putting in time but finding how much learning can be done on the job.

Parents and early educators become a critical element in training the future work force. With the children in mind, it is necessary to carefully set up a means for them to learn from their own experiences.

1. The first thing you have to teach them is to have a plan of the things which they need to do. They should set a step by step guide on how what they need to do. They should have set goals or have pre-plans for out of town trips and the like. They should see how important this is rather than not having a plans and end up leaving all the things you need to bring at home.
2. A child should be taught that there is a right place for a certain task. You have to set a comfortable place where they can study and a different place to play. In his table, you need to show them how to fix thing accordingly. They should know how to stack papers and keep their coloring materials neatly. Through time, this may change, and you need to allow them to adjust with the way they work. They will find it more helpful if they plan the things by themselves.
3. With these comes responsibility. There are certain responsibilities which children should learn at a young age. You can assign them certain household chores which they can do by themselves. Usually, buying them a pet will help them in learning responsibilities. They will learn how to feed them, bathe them and take care of them. Set a schedule for them like this is the time when you should feed your pet or bathe them. They will learn the consequences of missing responsibilities so they will learn the value of being responsible.
4. Children can really be awful in making decisions. All of them only look for fun and we can't blame them. Children love to enjoy life so they need to learn when it is okay to

have fun or when is it not okay. They need to know the importance of doing what is right rather than doing what they like.

5. Train your children in answering who, what, when and where questions. They need to know the basics of things work. It is also important to always ask these questions so that the children will be rightly informed about the things that they do.

6. Teaching your children to be organized is something which you should consider. They need to know the right way of doing things. This is in preparation for the future when they are faced with more complex decisions to make. They will see how being organized will be advantageous for them. <sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note the above suggestions and how they fit well as foundations for future work ethics. All work well with career activities.

All of the above activities are very useful in preparing young children for their future careers, but there is also a need to make sure that learning is part of the child's understanding of why one works. Incorporating the following with the above concerns over equating chores, work, and assignments with learning on the job provides educators and parents with tools necessary to prepare young children for future careers in the working world.

The four categories of learning outlined below are especially relevant to the education of young children with a work ethic involved:

- Knowledge. In early childhood, knowledge consists of facts, concepts, ideas, vocabulary, and stories. A child acquires knowledge from someone's answers to his questions, explanations, descriptions and accounts of events as well as through observation.
- Skills. Skills are small units of action which occur in a relatively short period of time and are easily observed or inferred. Physical, social, verbal, counting and drawing skills are among a few of the almost endless number of skills learned in the early years. Skills can be learned from direct instruction and improved with practice and drill.
- Dispositions. Dispositions can be thought of as habits of mind or tendencies to respond to certain situations in certain ways. Curiosity, friendliness or unfriendliness, bossiness, and creativity are dispositions or sets of dispositions rather than skills or pieces of knowledge. There is a significant difference between having writing skills and having the disposition to be a writer.

Dispositions are not learned through instruction or drill. The dispositions that children need to acquire or to strengthen--curiosity, creativity, cooperation, friendliness--are learned primarily from being around people who exhibit them. It is unfortunate that some dispositions, such as being curious or puzzled, are rarely displayed by adults in front of children.

A child who is to learn a particular disposition must have the opportunity to behave in a manner that is in keeping with the disposition. If that occurs, then the child's behavior can

be responded to, and thus strengthened. Teachers can reinforce certain dispositions by setting learning goals rather than performance goals. A teacher who says, "Let's see how much we can find out about something," rather than, "I want to see how well you can do," encourages children to focus on what they are learning rather than on their performance.

- Feelings. These are subjective emotional states, many of which are innate. Among those that are learned are feelings of competence, belonging, and security. Feelings about school, teachers, learning and other children are also learned in the early years.<sup>3</sup>

Looking carefully at the four bullets above we can see how a work ethic involving cooperative education, internships, and experiential learning can fit well into each segment. The knowledge a child gains from doing a particular job and discovering how things work and do not work is beneficial at a young age. They question how to accomplish a particular task and in the process learn the importance of questioning and the need for answering questions in the real world. Through their work experience they are trained in the skills needed to accomplish tasks. The simple process of how to reach a level that is too high to reach without a ladder gives a child a lifetime of being able to remove and place things far above his or her head. With dispositions, a child learns from seeing how others function in the workplace. They learn how being curious and having initiative will stand them in a better place in those jobs that they do. As they accomplish tasks, improve their abilities, and find that work is valuable, they sense the value of belonging and competence in what they do. All these items can be and should be initiated at the earliest of ages in ever increasing doses to prepare the child for a world of work that involves much more than a Friday paycheck.

## Conclusions

Thinking about work does not begin as one graduates from high school or college. The formation of knowledge, skills, disposition, and feelings about how to function as a competent and compatible worker in the real world begins shortly after birth. We start to learn how to function as part of that working world long before we apply for that first paycheck. It is therefore necessary to begin a process where educators, parents, and students can be given the chance to participate in the means to prepare for what comes naturally to most of us – work. Cooperative education, internships, and experiential learning are proving to be important tools in preparing older students to adjust from the more relaxed world of childhood to the real world of work, but that really is only a beginning, a beginning that should be pushed back 12 to 14 years when the child is in a much better position to really learn the qualities of work as they are growing with their new experiences with the outside world. All of the things that make cooperative education, internships, and experiential learning so valuable to students in the latter part of their formal education should not be lost to the earlier generation. By incorporating the foundations of cooperative education, internships, and experiential learning into the early lives of children, we can see a stronger work force than we have ever seen before.

## References

1. <http://www.yousaytoo.com/littleprince/start-teaching-your-children-at-an-early-age/22211>
2. [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_5039832\\_teach-become-organized-early-age.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_5039832_teach-become-organized-early-age.html)
3. <http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/learning.html>