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Drysdale, Maureen, Ward, Lisa J., Johansson, Kristina, Zaitseva, Elena and Sheri, Dressler

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ACEN Abstract – 15 minute Presentation

Comparing the Attributes of Students in Cooperative Education or Work-Integrated Learning Programs in Four Countries

Abstract

New technologies, the internalization of markets, and higher numbers of university graduates have led to greater competition for employment and greater needs for higher-order employment skills, practical experience, and a strong sense of competence. An increasing number of students are turning to work-integrated programs of learning (WIL) –where they can gain the necessary skills to enhance their future employment and career prospects.

The aim of this international project was to examine the relationship between work-integrated learning and the psychological variables believed to play a role for success in the transition to the labour market.

Students from four countries (Canada, Sweden, England, and the USA) completed the same online questionnaire measuring self-concept, self-efficacy, hope (goal-setting, goal achievement), procrastination, motivation, study skills, and work ethic. Results indicated there were many attitudes and behaviours shared by WIL and non-WIL students in the four countries – however there were also significant differences that shed light on WIL outcomes and/or the type of students who select WIL, regardless of where they reside. WIL students appear to have a stronger math self-concept and problem-solving self-concept. Non WIL students appear to have more confidence to attain academic and career goals, but it decreases by the end of their studies. On the other hand, confidence increases substantially for WIL students. Gender effects and achievement differences between the two groups will also be discussed. In summary, *Students in WIL programs –regardless of where they reside - appear more similar than different.*

Background

New technologies, the internalization of markets, and higher numbers of university graduates have led to greater competition for employment and greater needs for higher-order employment skills, practical experience, and a strong sense of competence. An increasing number of students are turning to work-integrated programs of learning (WIL) –where they can gain the necessary skills to enhance their future employment and career prospects.

The aim of this international project was to examine the relationship between work-integrated learning and the psychological variables believed to play a role for success in the transition to the labour market. More specifically, self-concept, self-efficacy, hope, procrastination, tacit knowledge, and study skills/work ethic were examined in a pre/post-test design with WIL as the independent variable. This comparison was made in disciplines where both co-op/WIL and non co-op/non- WIL existed. In addition, international comparative analysis was made to determine the learning outcomes on a global scale.

Method

WIL and non WIL undergraduate students from four countries completed the same online survey consisting of the: *Trait Hope Scale* (THS) (Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Sigmon, et al., 1991); *Procrastination Assessment Scale – Students* (PASS) (Solomon, & Rothblum, 1984); *Self-Description Questionnaire* (SDQ) (Marsh, 1992); *College Academic Self-Efficacy Scale* (CASES)

(Owen & Froman, 1988); and *the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire* (MSLQ) (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1993).

Results

There were many attitudes and behaviours shared by WIL and non-WIL students in the four countries – however there were also significant differences that shed light on WIL outcomes and/or the type of students who select WIL, regardless of where they reside.

1. WIL students have a stronger math self-concept and problem-solving self-concept.
2. Non WIL students appear to have more confidence to attain academic and career goals, but it decreases by the end of their studies. On the other hand, confidence increases substantially for WIL students.
3. Several gender effects were found – however only test anxiety was directly related to WIL. Females overall are more anxious than males but it is the WIL females who are the most anxious.
4. Non WIL students perceive themselves as better critical thinkers in their courses than WIL students.
5. WIL students are more concerned with high grades and gaining the approval of others.
6. A main effect of institution was reported for HOPE, PASS, SDQ-Verbal, Problem-Solving, & General Esteem, Intrinsic Goal Orientation, Cognitive Processes, Peer Learning, & Help-Seeking – however the differences were not a function of WIL.

Conclusion

Students in WIL programs – regardless of where they reside - appear more similar than different. Implications and future directions for this research will be discussed.

Key References

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