

Connecting School-Based Learning and Work-Based Learning:
Perceptions of Students, Their Teachers and Their
Workplace Supervisors

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Vocational educators are reexamining methods of preparing students for the transition from school to the workplace as employers from business and industry are looking to schools for help in meeting their human resource needs. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (1994) has stimulated a number of approaches to link school-based learning and work-based learning to help students transition to the workplace. Research has been conducted in school settings and work settings but little is known about how the two link together. Thus, little is known about the ways that situated learning contributes to the linkages between school-based and work-based learning.

To address this concern, the overall purpose of this study was to determine how work-based and school-based experiences of students enrolled in cooperative education are linked. More specifically, details of students' school-based experiences that they, their teachers, and their workplace supervisors perceive as linked to the workplace were sought. Additionally, details of students' work-based experiences that they, their teachers, and their workplace supervisors perceive as linked to school-based experiences and activities were examined.

Participants were ten students enrolled in cooperative education, their cooperative business or marketing education teachers, and their workplace supervisors from ten school sites in southwest Virginia. Individual interviews were used to collect data for the study. The interview data was used to ascertain perceptions of instances in the students' work experiences that reflect how school-based learning gives context to their work-based learning and how work-based learning gives context to their school-based performance. Emphasis was on detailing situated learning experiences, where school-based learning and work-based experiences were interlinked.

The interview protocols were designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What school-based experiences do students, teachers, and workplace supervisors perceive have provided learning in the context needed for the work-based experiences of students enrolled in cooperative education?
2. What work-based experiences do students, teachers, and workplace supervisors perceive as providing context to school-based learning experiences of students enrolled in cooperative education?
3. What additional school-based learning experiences can students, teachers, and workplace supervisors identify that would help students who are enrolled in cooperative education relate their school learning to the workplace?

The findings of the study indicated that the foundational skills and the competencies identified in the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) report as necessary for workers were, also, identified by interviewees as school-based experiences that provided learning for the students in the context needed for work-

based experiences. Further, they were identified as work-based learning activities that linked work with school.

Based on the findings in this study a number of implications for school-based and work-based instruction were developed that focus on the importance of providing students experiences and activities in the context needed for the workplace. Implications for further research are also provided.