

Brock University – Co-operative Education Reflective Learning Course

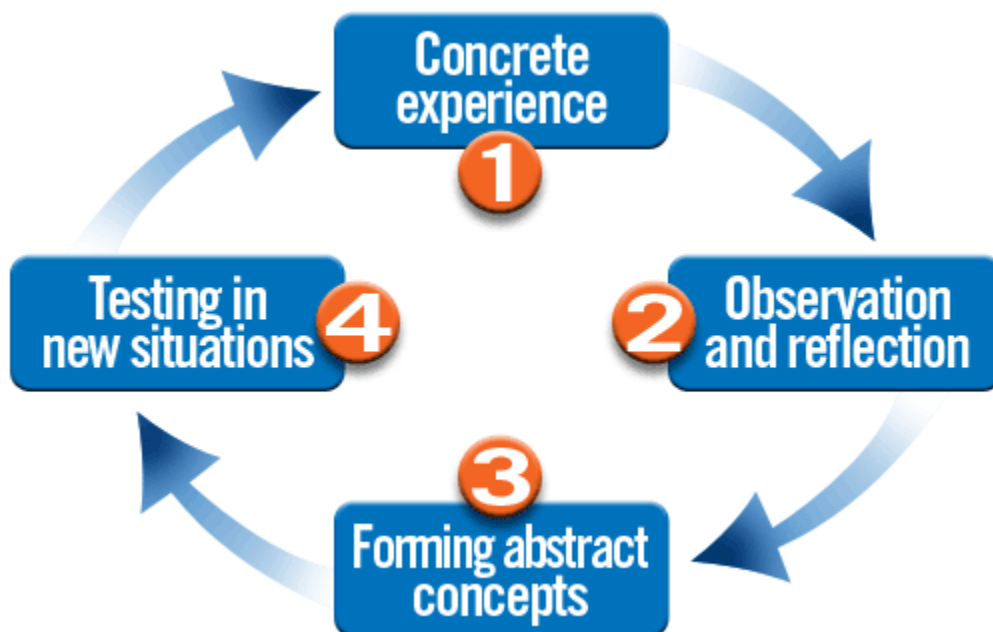
Co-operative Education is based on the philosophy that people learn best through active engagement in meaningful activities. A Co-operative work term supports this theory by providing the student with an opportunity to apply academic theory in real-world work settings consistent with his/her academic discipline.

Academic Value of Work Based Learning

There is a 2 prong outcome of co-operative education: 1. to enhance the classroom learning with work place learning, and, 2. to apply classroom learning to the work place. The ability to integrate theory learned in the classroom with practical experience is called experiential learning. Think of the work place as an extension of the classroom with the supervisor/colleagues becoming the teachers. Reflection and analysis of this experience replace written reports and assignments.

The Four Stages of Reflective Learning

Reflecting on your experiences, whether they are at work or in the classroom is the best way to enhance the learning of any experience. As the key part of the experiential learning cycle, reflection strengthens learning and allows you to recognize your areas of growth and areas that need improvement. Through this recognition, students come to understand and appreciate the benefits and consequences of their actions. "Students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their own experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking." (Kraft & Sakofs, 1988). The theoretical learning model below was developed by David Kolb, 1984.



This model can be simplified to:

1. **Experiencing** – These are activities from which a student may learn (readings, analysis, calculations, fieldwork, lab work, problem solving, observations, simulations/games).
2. **Reflecting** – the student thinks about the experience (what was seen, felt, thought about) and integrates the new experience with past experiences. (Keeping a journal or log through the work term will help with this process.)
3. **Generalizing** – the student develops questions and theories and attaches meaning to the experience.
4. **Applying** – the student tests out new ideas, attitudes and behaviours and the cycle continues.

Assignment: (To be completed within the first 5 weeks of co-op employment and submitted via email to co-op@brocku.ca). Please use the attached template. It will be used as the basis for discussion during the work-site visit.

Setting Goals and Objectives

Reflective learning occurs after the fact, i.e., one ponders the benefits of the activity once it has been completed. However, much like a roadmap, if you have a plan for a final destination, it will be easier to get there. Setting goals and objectives will initiate and support your learning and increase the chances for positive outcomes. While the words "goals" and "objectives" are used interchangeably, goals are generally defined as being broad in nature, while objectives are the clearly defined steps needed to achieve your goals.

Your goals should be written in terms of the 'learning outcome' of your objectives. For example:

Learning Goal: To improve oral communications through giving presentations.

Objective: As part of my work term, I will seek out at least one opportunity to develop and deliver an effective and well organized presentation to my co-workers and supervisor.

Develop your Goals the S M A R T Way

Specific: Outline in detail what you wish to accomplish. What, why, how?
Measurable: The goal must be quantifiable; a standard is needed for comparison.
Action-Oriented: Describe activities needed to accomplish the goal.
Realistic: The goal must be attainable, practical and do-able.
Timebound: A time frame is needed; make the commitment.

One way to develop goals is to think about the transferable skills that employers are looking for and then develop goals and objectives around them. (Following is a small sample of the many possibilities).

Transferable Skills:	Example of goal:	Objective:
Communication	Improve technical writing skills	Write a technical report by end of the work term that analyzes a process or makes recommendations to improve operations.
Creativity	Assist with developing a marketing plan for a new product launch	Prepare an catchy ad that will promote the product to the target market age group
Customer Service	Improve sales techniques	Shadow an experienced colleague and then practice methods until confident
Leadership	Demonstrate ability to lead	Volunteer to organize a fund raising or social event for my work team
Problem Solving	Enhance ability to work through problems without assistance	Learn to break down a problem into smaller parts by analyzing a process or operational procedure, generating alternatives and recommending a solution
Project Management	Learn project management software	Schedule time in each day to become familiar with the program

Another way to think about goals you might set is to identify skills needed on the job. (Remember that these represent only a sample of possible goals).

Skills:	Example of goal:
People:	Improve ability to work with teams and network within organization
Data:	Gain experience conducting research and surveys
Things:	Work in manufacturing to gain hands-on experience
Ideas:	Contribute to process improvement by bringing recommendations to team meetings
Personal Growth:	Manage finances effectively to pay tuition
Initiative:	Don't wait for work to come to me, be proactive in finding it
Time Management:	Use the calendar and tasks features in Outlook to record and track activities to effectively meet deadlines

You can choose to develop goals around professional experience, personal attributes or technical expertise. You don't have to wait until you are at work to set your goals but you should integrate them with your actual work assignments and discuss them with your supervisor as well as give him/her updates on your progress.

For further information or for assistance, please contact the Co-op Office at 905-688-5550, ext. 4325 or by email at co-op@brocku.ca.

Good luck on your work term.