Professional Placements that Enable Exploration of Diverse Career Options

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Rationale
Students undertaking a course in environmental science have a diverse range of aspirations and career outcomes and as a result, it is not possible to provide workplace experiences that cover the breadth of possibility. In addition, a limit to the resourcing available for work placement has required us to think in more innovative ways. Students are encouraged to develop their own work placements in partnership with the course directors and technology is used to create a more exploratory and reflective learning environment. Workplace learning in environmental science is in contrast to courses with accredited workplace learning, such as teaching education. This lack of accreditation requirement makes professional practice, as a recognised and important part of learning, challenging.

Description
After careful consideration of the needs and limitations for workplace learning in environmental science, a change to our initial concept of simply providing a workplace experience was made to a more integrated and reflective professional practice, encouraging students to independently explore vocational options and realise their career aspirations over the duration of the course. Students are given the opportunity to explore the diversity of career pathways from the first to final years of the degrees in adventure ecotourism, environmental science and the park management degrees.

Implementation
The workplace learning is achieved by implementing complementary (one introductory and one capstone) subjects in the first and final years of study. Learning sessions to introduce the student to career planning and virtual role plays support these subjects. Between this period, e-portfolios and reflection are used to stimulate a student's deeper learning about possible career opportunities and the skills required to achieve these aspirations.

Course Title: Bachelor of Applied Sciences in adventure ecotourism, environmental science and in park management
Course Level: Undergraduate; Years 1 and 3
Course Delivery: on-campus, distance

What Worked Best
The following innovations are important:
- An introductory component on career planning.
- A virtual role play to simulate practice in the final year.
- Dedicated work by the course coordinator in creating and sustaining a range of partnership types with a diversity of agencies.

Issues to Consider
Because students set up their own work placement experiences and complete these at variable times, it can be difficult to track students between years.

Good Practice Framework
The Good Practice Framework utilises the CSU P&PBE Standards, accepted by Academic Senate 2010 as good practice, and the EFPI Guidelines for Good Practice in PBE as reference points for good practice. This exemplar aligns well the specific standards and guidelines as outlined below:
CSU P&PBE Standards

32 Provide WIL strategies (e.g. simulations, e-learning, visits by industry partners and clients) to bring the practice world into the classroom. (E-learning is of particular value to distance students.)

45 Resources create an up-to-date practice-relevant setting that enables students to experience their practice world including:
- real clients
- practice workloads
- real interactions with practice communities, clients and local communities.

Guidelines for Good Practice in PBE

5 Experience of practice roles/decision making/workplace reality - To engage responsibly in professional practice graduates need the capacities to make sound, ethical and justifiable decisions and to deal effectively with the realities of the workplace. Experiential learning (both in actual workplaces and in simulated environments), role play and case studies foster these abilities. PBE can also bring the real world into the classroom, blended and distance learning environments. Experiential learning allows learners to see the significance of ideas and actions in context and to cope with real world complexities and client needs. Reflection on the experiences should be used to reinforce and deepen learning and expand capabilities in decision making. The actual experience of practice will develop skills in appropriate communication, interactions and teamwork and the capacity to work flexibly in complex and changing workplaces.

6 Situating learning in the context of the profession/occupational community of practice - The core goal of practice-based education is for learners to be equipped to enter the workplace and be prepared to practise professionally. The alignment of all learning activities and learning strategies in the context of practice and professionalism will foster work readiness. Situated learning strategies include workplace learning and ensuring that learning across the curriculum is situated or grounded (e.g. made relevant, applied, enriched with examples) in the context of the students' professional or disciplinary context.

Keywords
Geography, Ecotourism, Environmental Science, Work Place learning

Additional Readings
