

Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Cooperative Education in  
a Southern Ontario City in Canada

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## Abstract

Despite 2 Ontario Ministry of Education policy documents which mandate that regular program effectiveness surveys be completed in secondary school co-op programs, research was either not occurring or data were not being made available. A lack of co-op research also existed at the postsecondary level. The primary reason for this study was to determine the perspectives of current secondary school co-op employers in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) and to identify any program strengths as well as any areas in which improvement can be made. A secondary aim of the study was to discover the reasons that some employers decline to participate in the co-op program, and why other employers decide to discontinue their co-op partnerships. An online survey was utilized with 2 Likert scales and open-ended questions to solicit responses from the 100 participants. The findings from this study strongly supported previous secondary and postsecondary co-op research. Overall, the HWDSB co-op program was found to be very strong, and employer satisfaction very high. There were, however, areas in which improvement could be made. Although most employers felt supported by institutions and felt that expectations were clearly communicated and were reasonable, there was evidence that many employers perceived a lack of institutional support which included factors such as communication, student placement and fit, and institutional responsiveness. In addition, some employers felt that students were underprepared for the workplace and lacked basic employability skills such as dependability and responsibility.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROBLEM**

This study was conducted to determine the perspectives of both current and prospective employers of the secondary school Co-operative Education (Co-op) program in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB). Despite two Ontario Ministry of Education (OMOE) policy documents that mandated regular program effectiveness surveys be completed in secondary schools, research is either not occurring or is occurring in isolation, with no standardization or mechanism by which the data can be shared. As a result, there have been no data published on employer perspectives regarding secondary school co-op in Ontario. The expectation is that knowledge from this study will inform teaching practice and will form the basis for discussion towards developing a standardized instrument to allow data to be more easily compared and shared between the various boards of education in Ontario.

### **Background**

Ontario is Canada's largest and most diverse province, serving about two million children in its four different publicly funded school systems (OMOE, 2010). The public system supports 95% of all Ontario students (OMOE, 2010, p. 1).

Over the past 8 years, Ontario has experienced a rapid expansion of co-op programs. This expansion has also been accompanied by a legitimization of the programs. Both of these have resulted from a targeted effort by the provincial government to improve student success. In 2003 – 04, the graduation rate was a dismal 68% (OMOE, 2008). The then newly elected government was committed to improving these statistics and announced a graduation target of 85% by the year 2010 – 11 (OMOE, 2010, p. 4). There are four major government policies that have



affected the rapid expansion of co-op programs in Ontario. These policies are:

1. the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy,
2. changes to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements,
3. Bill 52, The Education Amendment Act, Learning to Age 18, and
4. the creation of Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) programs.

Initially, the “Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy” (SS/L18) was launched in 2003 with a goal to “[provide] all students with more choice of innovative, engaging and quality learning opportunities that match their strengths and aspirations and prepare them for the destination of their choice” (OMOE, 2010, p. 10). To support this initiative, the province “made major investments in personnel . . . and resources” (OMOE, 2010, p. 5). Phase two of this strategy was introduced in the fall of 2004 and consisted of many pilot projects, several of which featured co-op as a focal point to improving student retention (OMOE, 2010).

In 2005, three major initiatives came together to greatly expand co-op programs across Ontario. The first was the completion of a major external study of early school leavers by Doctor Bruce Ferguson of The Hospital for Sick Children. The study concluded that there were many contributing factors which lead to students choosing to drop out and also indicated that “risk status fluctuates over time” (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 59). Generally speaking, students who dropped out felt schools lacked a sense of community, culture, and caring (Ferguson et al., 2005). As a result of this research, The Ministry gave a clear message that stated that the needs of individual students must become a priority. The less traditional approach of co-op (less academic learning, more hands-on learning) fit nicely with this Ministry directive and paved the way for the

expansion of co-op programs in Ontario secondary schools.

The second initiative in program expansion was the creation of the Learning to Age 18 Act, which effectively raised the legal age at which a student could drop out of school from age 16 to age 18 (OMOE, 2010). This had the effect of forcing a significant number of disengaged students to remain in secondary school an additional 2 years. These students, disenfranchised with the traditional education system, often chose, or were guided towards, the more unconventional programs involving co-op.

It was clear that a major key to student retention was student engagement. With this in mind, the Ministry of Education announced the official expansion of co-op programming during the third phase of SS/L18 in December 2005. Kathleen Wynne, then Minister of Education, stated, "We know that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in education" (OMOE, 2006b). This expansion was based on some of the success experienced in the co-op pilot programs in phase two of SS/L18. It was designed specifically to target students who were disengaged with the traditional classroom-based approach and were therefore at risk of dropping out.

While co-op programming was expanding, the OMOE announced a change in the requirements for graduation and began to allow co-operative education credits to be counted as two of the 18 required courses towards a student's Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OMOE, 2006a). Previously, co-op credits were counted towards only the elective credit graduation requirements. This change in policy helped to legitimize co-op in the eyes of many administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Further legitimization of the co-op program occurred in 2007 when the OMOE announced the creation of SHSM programs and released the Implementation Guide. The

SHSM programs were designed to provide highly specialized training in a specific employment sector and would confer a special designation on student diplomas upon graduation (OMOE, 2007). The intention of the SHSM program was to better prepare students for specific employment sectors so that they would receive an advantage when applying to their postsecondary destination of choice (OMOE, 2011). Each SHSM is a bundle of 8 – 10 credits and requires a minimum of two credits of co-op in the associated employment sector as well as a partnership with a community employer (OMOE, 2009).

Initially SHSM programs were accompanied by OMOE startup funding and support, along with a strong provincial push for boards of education to form employer partnerships and create new SHSM opportunities for students (OMOE, 2009). As partnerships were developed, these opportunities were actively marketed to students and their parents. Every SHSM program was mandated to have a pathway for every student regardless of the student's academic level. This again had the effect of expanding the number of students participating in the co-op program but, interestingly also attempted to appeal to students in the university-bound, academic courses. These students traditionally do not elect to participate in co-op for two reasons. Initially, university-bound students are applying to programs that typically have many more required (or strongly suggested) courses when compared to other postsecondary destinations. Co-op is most commonly packaged in a two-credit bundle to allow for the student to attend the workplace half of the day during each school day. This is done both to provide the student with an immersive, more meaningful experience in the workplace as well as to allow the student time for transportation to the workplace. The difficulty arises when trying to schedule a student's courses. It is sometimes very difficult to fit two bundled

courses of co-op into an academic timetable. A second reason that academic students often do not participate in co-op is they typically thrive in a traditional, academic school setting, feel more comfortable and connected to school, and are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities. Comparatively, unlike the student who struggles in school and is looking for a different approach to education, academic students often do not seek out opportunities for co-op.

To summarize, targeted legislation and the creation of OMOE policies resulted in both the legitimization of the co-op program and a rapid increase in the number of students taking co-op courses. This necessitated a proportionally rapid increase in the number of co-op teachers required to support these students.

Unlike other courses taught in secondary school, co-op requires a partnership with a community organization. Maintaining strong relationships within the community is therefore essential to ensuring that co-op opportunities continue to exist for students, particularly under conditions of program expansion. Understanding the perspectives and needs of employers is paramount to maintaining strength in these community connections.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the legitimization of the co-op program in the eyes of many, there are a few co-op teachers who, either in meetings or in private conversation, have suggested that the rapid expansion of co-op has diminished the quality of the program and led to a decline in employer participation. It is impossible to know if this opinion is valid, as no data exist. To what extent (if any) has program effectiveness been diminished? This is one of the questions that this study is expected to answer.

In spite of a rapid expansion of the co-op program in Ontario, research remains localized and minimal. In 1999, the OMOE released “Choices into Action,” an Ontario policy document for guidance and career education which calls for a program-effectiveness survey to be “conducted every three years” for the purposes of program improvement (OMOE, 1999, p. 6). Although there was a CD-ROM produced in 2002 with “effectiveness survey support materials,” no means of central collection, analysis, or comparison of data was established. All aspects of survey development, execution, and follow-up are therefore left to the discretion of each individual board of education. As a result, there is no consistency with respect to survey instruments and no means of data comparison across boards of education.

To complicate things further, the Co-operative Education policy document was created in 2000. It mandates that a program effectiveness survey be completed every “four years,” but while it suggests that “employers . . . should be given an opportunity to evaluate the [program],” it does not require their involvement (OMOE, 2000, p. 32).

The end result is that despite two OMOE policy documents requiring that program effectiveness surveys be completed regularly, research on co-op programs is implemented sporadically and with no standardized instrument. Surveys typically involve only small sample sizes, are randomly conducted, and require no employer involvement.

This explains the result of a request to the Ontario Co-operative Education Association (OCEA). The official request to their board asked for members to forward, “any information at all regarding any research on Co-op employer satisfaction at any level, in any country, province, etc” (OCEA president, personal communication, March

25, 2011). The OCEA board, consisting of some of the most knowledgeable co-op coordinators and educators across the province, cited only one survey, and the data from the study were not available for this literature review.

### **Purpose**

The lack of research on co-operative education in Ontario, and in particular on the perspectives of co-op employers, indicates the need for this research project. The main purpose of this research is to determine the perspectives of current co-op employers in the HWDSB and to identify any program strengths as well as any areas in which improvement can be made. The study also aims to discover the reasons that some employers decline to participate in the co-op program, and to understand why some organizations who partnered in co-operative education in the past have chosen to discontinue their partnership. An understanding of employer perspectives can lead to informed practice, greater employer and student satisfaction with the co-op program, and an improved and healthier experience for all stakeholders. Results of this research may also serve as the baseline for comparison against results of future employer surveys. It is also one of the most ambitious employer surveys (based on both sample size and scope) undertaken by any Ontario board of education in many years.

Specific goals are to:

1. determine the overall trends with respect to strengths and areas of improvement in the Co-op program,
2. attempt to identify most important areas of concerns for possible follow-up research,
3. determine if any sector-specific trends are evident,

4. identify current beliefs and attitudes of employers in organizations that choose not to participate in the co-op program,
5. note any overall trends in nonparticipating organizations for possible follow-up research,
6. inform teaching practice,
7. begin discussion and lay the groundwork for possible future research on secondary school co-op in Ontario, and
8. serve as a definitive baseline for comparison to future data.

### **Research Questions**

There are five questions which this research attempted to answer.

1. What is the state of employer satisfaction with the HWDSB co-op program?
2. Why do some employers decline to participate in co-op programs?
3. Why are some employers discontinuing their participation in the co-op program?
4. To what extent has program effectiveness been diminished in the eyes of employers?
5. What are the implications for future practice for teachers with respect to both employer interaction and student preparation?

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The main reason for conducting this study was the severe lack of data with respect to secondary school co-op employer perspectives. As a result, most of the data reviewed in this literature are based on studies involving postsecondary co-op programs, but even postsecondary research is scarce and much of it is a decade or more old.

### Preface

While there are certainly many similarities in co-op at all levels of education, there are also distinctive differences. The most significant difference is the level of education and training which the student has attained. While secondary school co-op students are often working to master basic employability skills such as punctuality, social skills, teamwork, computer software, and general work ethic, postsecondary students have mastered these basics and are able to work at a much higher capacity in all respects; hence the financial remuneration seen in postsecondary level co-op programs. It is fair to assume that postsecondary employers have a higher set of expectations than employers of secondary school co-op students, but despite this difference, data from postsecondary studies can still prove to be very relevant.

There are many similarities in the perspectives of co-op employers across many countries. Braunstein and Stull noted “[that two Canadian studies] echo research findings in the United States” (2001, p. 8), while Young concluded that employers in “six countries surveyed have many similarities in . . . what they see as the greatest benefits of cooperative education” (as cited by Braunstein & Stull, 2001, p. 8). Many findings from the “landmark studies of the 1970’s and 1980’s” were similarly reflected in research on employers completed decades later by Braunstein and Stull (p. 15). It is therefore



reasonable to conclude that studies on employer perspectives reviewed here, despite being more than a decade old, still provide valid insight into current employer perceptions of co-op benefits and concerns.

This literature review includes research from Canada, the USA, and New Zealand as well as some worldwide data on vocational education from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). There are also references to two secondary level employer program effectiveness surveys previously completed by the HWDSB in 2003 and 2008. An attempt to locate other Ontario secondary school employer survey data was initiated through OCEA, the provincial secondary co-op body in Ontario. Only one other board of education was noted to have collected employer data. Unfortunately the results were not released and could not be included in this review.

### **The Research Review**

There are 25 years of overwhelming evidence, from both Canada and the United States, that clearly demonstrate that employers benefit from their partnership with co-op programs. According to Hurd and Henry in their comprehensive review of co-op research in Canada and the USA, “the benefits to employers of participation in cooperative education are well-documented” (1997, p. 55). An employer survey conducted in 2001 “identified many benefits to [employers] participating in co-operative education including hiring motivated new employees, screening students for permanent employment and providing positive interactions with the [educational institution]” (Braunstein & Stull, 2001, p. 7). New Zealand researchers found a similar level of overall employer satisfaction and listed both the management of costs and short-term

employment management as key areas of importance to employers (Chapman, Coll, & Meech, 1999). As might be expected, many of the reasons that employers highlighted as areas of satisfaction were linked to financial benefits through increased production or cost savings. There were also “spin-off benefits” such as morale improvement and community involvement (Chapman et al., 1999).

Co-op is a three-way partnership between an employer, the student, and the educational institution. This partnership is the key to the functioning of co-op (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Chapman et al., 1999; Hurd & Henry, 1997), which relies on the relationships between institutions and employers (Bonds, 1990; Freeland, Marini, & Weighart, 1998). Understanding employer needs is essential to ensuring a strong partnership, but “employer needs and the state of society are dynamic components of a dynamic process” (Hurd & Henry, 1997, p. 61). It is therefore essential that the needs of employers be constantly sampled and fully understood. Co-op practitioners must understand the needs of employers before they can meet those needs (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Chapman et al., 1999). Yet “employer research is least well represented” (Hurd & Henry, 1997, p. 55).

### **A Lack of Co-op Employer Data**

In the past 2 decades, many researchers have noted the void with respect to co-op data and have concluded that this is an important area for further study (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Chapman et al., 1999; Hurd & Henry, 1997; Hutchinson, personal communication, 2011; OECD, 2010; Steeds & EBEST, 2008). The OECD completed a 3 year review of vocational education and training (VET) throughout 17 countries around the world and stated:

VET has been oddly neglected and marginalised in policy discussions, often overshadowed by the increasing emphasis on general academic education and the role of schools in preparing students for university education. It has also often been seen as low status by students and the general public. As a result, comparative policy analysis is undeveloped, and there are very limited data available, especially data that can be reliably compared across countries. (2010, p. 1)

Dr. Nancy Hutchinson, a member of the Queens University Co-operative Education and Workplace Learning Group, has specialized in research on postsecondary co-op in Ontario and has observed two major reasons for a lack of co-op research in Canada. Initially, “there is a definite hierarchy of academics over hands-on learning” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). Research from the OECD would corroborate this. While Canadian data were not even included in the worldwide VET review, Canada ranked in the top five of the 34 OECD ranked countries worldwide in English, Science, and Math (OECD, 2009). The second observation made by Hutchinson is “while employers are happy to talk about a current student, they are reluctant to engage in research from a global perspective” (personal communication, October 27, 2011). This would suggest that employers either do not perceive discussion-based qualitative data as being research or they value the qualitative, more personal connection to research as opposed to quantitative methods of gathering data. This helps to explain the low response rates reported by some researchers with respect to employer surveys (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Experiential Learning Consultant, personal communication, 2003).

Hutchinson’s observations also serve to highlight one of the reasons that many

types of research are valid. Utilizing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method approaches ensures that both the depth and breadth of the topic are fully analyzed, but there are significant costs and barriers to both the collection of data and the design of each type of study (Chapman et al., 1999). Fully understanding current employer perspectives is the first step to being able to meet their needs. A student can then be matched to those needs to ensure that all three partners have a rich, meaningful, and profitable experience. This approach ensures a strong and lasting co-op relationship between employers, institutions, and students.

The problem of having so little research on the perspective of co-op employers is further compounded by the fact that available data are so diverse in nature. The OECD study noted that data were very difficult to compare across countries (2010). Researchers must “begin to standardize the data gathering process so that data can be gathered and compared across studies” (Hurd & Henry, 1997, p. 61). This would allow the collection of baseline information to which future data could be compared to allow trends to be established and tracked over time. These trends in employer perspectives can then be correlated to changes in co-op programs in order to track and monitor the relative success of various initiatives. Standardization also allows the comparison of data across various studies, geographical areas, political boundaries, and socioeconomic regions. An understanding of the perspectives of employers can lead to the development of effective practices for employer interaction, recruitment, and retention. Sharing this knowledge could provide a strong provincial foundation to strengthen programs provincially and to ensure program viability for future students.

### **Areas of Employer Dissatisfaction**

While employers in many countries have generally had a positive view of co-op programs (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Chapman et al., 1999; Hurd & Henry, 1997; Hutchinson, personal communication, 2011; Steeds & E-BEST, 2008), the two areas of recurring concern suggested by researchers are the lack of support from co-op institutions and inadequate student preparation.

Of these two, student preparation features more predominantly (Chapman et al., 1999; Freeland et al., 1998; Hurd & Henry, 1997). Employers called for students to have improved employability (Hurd & Henry, 1997) and communication skills (Chapman et al., 1999). They also valued a multidisciplinary team-based learning approach and expressed a desire to have input into the curriculum (Freeland et al., 1998).

Interestingly, most of the employer feedback around student preparation would require long-term investments. Every co-op program has a preplacement phase which attempts to prepare students for the workplace. While communication, teamwork, and employability skills are certainly covered during the preplacement phase, it is impossible to instill them with any level of depth in such a short time period. Accomplishing this would require a much more holistic and global approach to education by institutions.

The OECD (2010) concluded that “workplaces provide a strong learning environment, developing hard skills on modern equipment, and soft skills through real world experience of teamwork, communication and negotiation” (p. 7). It is clear that these skills are valued globally by employers, some of whom feel that students are not quite as prepared as they should be. If indeed the purpose of education is to prepare students for the workplace (a hotly debated view of education), this suggests that

institutions may need to reexamine their collective approach to curriculum, perhaps involving employers in the process of curriculum development (again, a view hotly contested by some educators).

The second theme of concern noted by some co-op employers was the perceived lack of support from some co-op institutions. Although this was almost universally noted across many postsecondary studies, there is some variance in what type of supports employers felt were necessary. Hurd and Henry (1997) concluded that program service and flexibility were key areas in which to focus. A lack of workplace visits by co-op coordinators was found to be an area of employer distress in two studies (Braunstein & Stull, 2001; Chapman et al., 1999). Closely related to this were both the perceived inaccessibility of co-op coordinators by employers and the lack of clarity in the role of the workplace supervisor (Chapman et al., 1999). These issues all illustrate the paramount importance of communication to the role of the co-op coordinator/teacher which ensures that the expectations of employers and students are clearly defined. Coordinators need to be available to visit regularly and to respond to queries from students and their supervisors. Ensuring a reasonable and balanced co-op coordinator workload is one way to help maximize accessibility to employers (Chapman et al., 1999).

Although research reviewed thus far is decades old and has focused on postsecondary co-op programs, there is remarkable consistency between the conclusions across all of the co-op programs. But do postsecondary co-op employer perspectives reflect those of secondary school employers?

### **HWDSB Program Effectiveness Surveys**

The first HWDSB co-op “program effectiveness survey was executed in 2004 as

part of the *Choices into Action . . . initiative*” (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008, p. 1). It involved surveying employers, students, and parents to get their perspective on many aspects of the co-op program. Unfortunately the results of the study were unavailable for this review, but overall trends from the data were made available through discussion with the HWDSB Experiential Learning Consultant. In general, although the co-op program was viewed positively by all three stakeholders, the response rate from employers in particular was exceptionally low, and the data were considered poor (Experiential Learning Consultant, personal communication, November 21, 2011). As with any first initiative, many lessons were learned and were applied to a second survey which was completed in 2008.

The 2008 program effectiveness survey was a joint effort of a single co-op teacher and the Evidence-Based Education and Services Team (E-BEST), the research service for the HWDSB. Although it provided much richer data than the survey from 2003, it was conducted at only one of the 18 HWDSB secondary schools and involved only 23 participants. It did however, have an excellent employer response rate of 85% (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008).

Overall, the results of the Steeds survey were extremely similar to those of postsecondary employers with respect to the overall program and student satisfaction and with the concerns noted by employers.

Secondary school employers were quite satisfied with both the co-op program and their experiences with the students. Character traits of co-op students were noted by employers as being “mostly or definitely [positive]” while experiences with the co-op program were almost always “definitely [positive]” (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008, p. 24).

These favourable statistical responses were also strengthened by employer comments in open-ended sections of the survey. Employer statements such as “it has been a wonderful experience working with all of the students” and “it has been a pleasure working with the kids and your staff” further serve to highlight the positive experiences that employers had with both the students and the program (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008, p. 25).

The general two themes of student preparation and institutional support were noted by both secondary and postsecondary co-op employers. While the concerns of postsecondary employers were more global and required institutional change on a mass scale, those of secondary employers were much more fundamental in nature. They suggested that teachers need to “try and stress to students how important it is to show up on time and [to attend regularly]” (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008, p. 25).

With respect to institutional support, suggestions from secondary school employers were very similar to those of postsecondary employers. They included “mandatory sit down meetings with the co-op teacher & advisor” and the necessity for the teacher to provide “more specific information . . . [regarding] hours required, projects & assignments” (Steeds & E-BEST, 2008, p. 25). This again echoes the importance of communication and employer support to the role of the co-op teacher.

### **Chapter Summary**

Data across all geographical boundaries and over both secondary and postsecondary levels of education strongly suggest that co-op is perceived positively by employers but that institutional support and student preparation are areas of concern. Additionally, postsecondary studies also highlight the importance of the relationship between co-op employers and educational institutions.



This review of literature highlighted three main reasons to support the need for this study. The most obvious reason is that despite a huge expansion of co-op programs in Ontario, there have been almost no data available regarding employer perspectives. Second, no research has specifically targeted employers who have quit their co-op partnerships. Braunstein and Stull concluded that “Co-op practitioners must diligently monitor employers’ satisfaction and dissatisfaction” (2001, p. 17). In past studies, dissatisfaction has been surmised by interviewing current employers of co-op. This study, in addition to targeting current employer perspectives, also surveyed employers who either refused to participate in co-op or who had quit their participation.

The third reason supporting the need for this study was alluded to by Chapman, Coll, and Meech, who found that programs stagnate without a purpose-driven approach (Chapman et al., 1999). This research can provide the knowledge and focus that drives a co-op program forward and sustains it over the long term.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the procedures followed to determine HWDSB employer perspectives on the co-op program. A description follows which details the process of participant selection, instrument design, study design, the collection and analysis of data and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

Permission was granted to include the name of the school board (HWDSB) and the names of persons mentioned in this thesis (Appendix B).

### **Research Design**

Since the object of the study was to examine current attitudes, beliefs, and opinions about the co-op program from the largest possible sample size in a short time frame, a cross-sectional survey design was utilized. In order to minimize the potential for participant manipulation in this quantitative approach, the survey was only available to employers for approximately four weeks from Monday, March 19 through Friday, April 13, 2012.

This descriptive study survey methodology was appropriate given that the purpose of the study was to explore employer perspectives on the HWDSB Co-op Program. The study plan was to inform teaching practice by sharing study conclusions with all HWDSB co-op teachers and the Experiential Learning Consultant. The overall intentions of the study were both to strengthen the relationship between teachers and employers as well as to strengthen the HWDSB Co-op Program as a whole.

### **Survey Package**

The Survey Package and a copy of the survey are presented in Appendix A. The Survey Package contained the standard information that was distributed by teachers to all

study participants. It consisted of a two-page Letter of Invitation along with a shortened version of the letter called the Quick Cover Summary Sheet.

The Quick Cover Summary Sheet was an attempt to improve the response rate of participants in two ways. As referenced by Dr. Hutchinson in the literature review, employers often don't wish to engage in research. The summary sheet simplified the dense information and wording required in the letter of invitation in an attempt to ensure that employers found the information short, accessible, and nonthreatening. The intent was also to capture the attention of participants in order to entice them into reading the more detailed Letter of Invitation. The Quick Cover Summary Sheet also served as a quick reference to co-op teachers. While performing their regularly scheduled co-op visits, teachers were able to glance at the summary sheet which reminded them of key words to use with employers. They could then introduce the concepts of the research to their employers in a more personalized, nonthreatening manner, thus maximizing the chances of employers becoming participants.

### **Participant Selection**

The participants of this study were current or potential co-op employers within the HWDSB. The employer participants were divided into three groups. The groups have been identified as Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 and will be referred to often throughout the remainder of this text. Group 1 was made up of employers who were currently participating in the HWDSB Co-op Program. Group 2 consisted of former employer partners in the HWDSB Co-op Program who had decided to discontinue their involvement with co-op. Group 3 was made up of potential employers who had never participated in co-op.

### **Employer Recruitment of Group 1**

Initially, this group potentially included the entire population of 1,600 HWDSB co-op employers for the 2011 – 2012 secondary school year (Experiential Learning Consultant, personal communication, April 11, 2012).

Originally, the survey was timed to go live in January, which would have allowed teachers to visit both semester 1 and semester 2 employers during their regularly scheduled visits. There were, however two significant delays (both to be discussed further in the limitations section of this chapter) which led to the survey going live in mid-March. As a result, the recruitment of Group 1 was limited to the 705 second semester co-op employers.

To target Group 1 employers, all of the 60 semester 2 co-op teachers were invited (not required as it was outside of regular teacher duties) to participate and were asked to distribute survey packages to each of their current employers. Not every teacher elected to participate, and not every participating teacher visited every employer.

### **Employer Recruitment of Groups 2 and 3**

Group 2 was made up of employers who used to participate in co-op but who have chosen not to participate in co-op again in the future. Group 3 was employers who had never before participated in co-op. Understanding their reasons for declining to participate in the co-op program was of paramount importance to this study, therefore these employers were selectively targeted to receive a survey package. Both of these groups were targeted for participation in the study in one of three ways: teacher referral, telephone survey of employers in Lime Ridge Mall, and from HWDSB data which tracked co-op employer participation for the years 2002 – 2011.

Initially, an email was sent from the HWDSB Experiential Learning Consultant to every co-op teacher in the board (Appendix B). The email requested that teachers “[forward the names of] any employers who do not do co-op at all, or have done so in the past, but are choosing not to” (personal communication, Experiential Learning Consultant, March 23, 2011). This request was repeated by the consultant during a face-to-face system-wide co-op meeting on October 18, 2011. Sporadic email responses were collected from 14 teachers who forwarded a total of 20 organizations. One organization declined to accept a survey package therefore 19 of these employers were distributed survey packages.

The second method for recruitment began by utilizing the results of a student survey of employers in Lime Ridge Mall. During the months of November and December 2011, an HWDSB co-op student compiled a list of 136 employers in the mall, noting their response to the question, “Do you currently accept co-op students in your business?” Respondents who indicated that they did not participate in the program were targeted to receive a survey package, and all 92 of these employers accepted the package.

The final method of recruitment for Groups 2 and 3 involved examining HWDSB employer participation data which had been tracked for 8 years. To be selected for participation in the survey, employers needed to have demonstrated a long-term commitment to co-op (defined as having participated in the co-op program three or more consecutive years), which then was followed by two or more years of nonparticipation in co-op through to the 2010 – 11 school year. One-hundred fifty-two employers fit the criteria, however of these, 32 businesses were no longer operational, 25 declined to participate in the survey, and 5 did not have internet access. The remaining 90

organizations received the email version of the survey package.

Utilizing these three recruitment methods yielded a total of 201 organizations, all of which received their survey package from the principal investigator either through email ( $n = 93$ ), or through face-to-face interaction ( $n = 108$ ).

Participants self-selected the group to which they belonged based on their answers to two survey questions (Q5 and Q15). Answering *yes* to question 5 (indicating employers had previously had HWDSB co-op students) and *no* to question 15 (indicating that employers will not accept co-op students in the future) placed participants into Group 2. Selecting *no* to question 5 indicated the participant had never participated in co-op and therefore met the criteria for Group 3. If an employer answered *yes* to both questions, they met the criteria for Group 1.

### **The Survey Instrument**

On January 10, 2011, the principal investigator met with the Experiential Learning Consultant to discuss the possibility of using a preexisting survey that had been utilized in a single HWDSB secondary school. The survey, referred to in the literature review, was jointly created by Steeds and E-BEST. The survey was judged to be a good starting point which could nicely address the purpose of the current study and would also have the advantage of being able to compare results from the current study to the conclusions of the Steeds and E-BEST survey conducted in 2008. Permission was obtained from Sandra Steeds during a co-op meeting on March 10, 2011, at which time she also indicated that the survey could be modified in any way as required to meet the needs of the current study.

The first stage of survey design was to check for clarity and to ensure that the

length was manageable for employers. Initially, only minor changes were made to the Steeds and E-BEST survey: Some questions were deleted while others were modified to ensure clarity. Originally this version of the survey was to be utilized only for participants in Group 1. A second survey was developed for Groups 2 and 3 that utilized some of the questions from the Group 1 survey but also added a checklist for employers to report reasons for their nonparticipation in co-op.

Both the long and shortened versions of these questionnaires were then presented to the OCEA (the provincial association for secondary school co-op education in Ontario) board members for their input. Contact with the OCEA board was initiated March 23, 2011, and feedback provided August 8, 2011. Field testing was initiated after consideration of the feedback.

During this time frame, an E-BEST Services Request Form was submitted on May 31, 2011. This form initiated the request for the HWDSB to provide a secure server, web address, and support to host and retrieve data for the online survey. Email response (Appendix B) from E-BEST (June 15, 2011) indicated strong interest in the research and suggested proceeding with the ethics submission.

### **Field Testing**

Field testers were chosen based on three criteria. Initially, to ensure data purity, testers could not be involved with the HWDSB Co-op Program. Second, familiarity with either a secondary or postsecondary co-op program was essential. Finally, an attempt was made to recruit a cross-section of testers from diverse fields of business and education. This was an attempt to create the strongest survey possible by attaining divergent feedback from knowledgeable sources that encompassed many varied

perspectives on co-op.

Field testers included board members from OCEA, one postsecondary Co-op Coordinator, two secondary school Co-op Coordinators, one elementary school teacher, one partner from a global accounting firm, one manager from a pharmaceutical company, and one manager of a very large restaurant.

Field testers were contacted between August 30 and September 5, 2011. Contact was initiated either by phone or through email. Responses were returned between September 12 and September 28, 2011. Based on the input, changes were made to the individual questions as well as to the design of the survey. At this time discussion was also initiated with E-BEST regarding the possibility of combining both versions of the survey into one branching online survey. This would simplify the survey process for employers and teachers as every participant would receive the same set of instructions and would log into the same website. Based on participant answers, the survey would branch accordingly to gather data specific to each of the three employer groups. E-BEST confirmed that a branching survey design was possible, so the short and long survey versions were combined.

The resulting survey was presented in paper form to the HWDSB Experiential Learning Consultant in a meeting on October 6, 2011. His input was evaluated and some changes were made. The survey was finalized for submission to the Ethics Boards of both Brock University and HWDSB on October 9, 2011 (Appendix C).

In an effort to expedite the ethics process, the principal investigator requested a meeting with the superintendent responsible for ethics approval. It took place on December 19, 2011. Present at the meeting were the principal investigator, board



superintendent (who ultimately would be responsible for the HWDSB ethics clearance for this study), and the Experiential Learning Consultant. A few minor changes were made to reduce redundancy between two questions and to clarify wording. Changes were also made so that participants were not actively encouraged to comment about specific individuals or schools but rather to give their overall perspective on their experiences with the co-op program.

Although the final survey instrument utilized for this study has striking similarities to the 2008 HWDSB survey, there are significant modifications. In the interest of clarity and brevity, many questions were deleted, some were added, and others were modified. Based on field testing, both Likert scales were changed in questions 9 and 10 to ensure a clear distinction between each of the possible scaled responses. The questionnaire was also branched to accommodate answers from all three participant groups.

### **Survey Package Distribution**

Each of the three groups of employer participants was targeted for survey distribution in different ways.

#### **Group 1: Current Co-op Employers**

On March 5, 2012, all co-op teachers in the HWDSB were emailed a copy of the survey package and a paper attachment of the survey which matched the online version. Teachers were given 3 days to provide feedback or to express any concerns. A copy of the email appears in Appendix B. No teachers had any questions or expressed any concerns, but the Experiential Learning Consultant noted some redundant information in the Quick Cover Summary Sheet, which was amended to ensure the letter was concise.

At a board-wide co-op meeting on March 25, 2012, the survey package was formally introduced and the online survey was presented in its live form. Teachers were reminded that their participation in distributing survey packages to employers was completely voluntary, but the Experiential Learning Consultant strongly encouraged all teachers to participate. The noted benefits of teacher participation included gathering better data which could lead to stronger conclusions and a better idea of how to strengthen the HWDSB Co-op Program. The principal investigator also described how Co-op Program Effectiveness Surveys were mandated by the Ministry of Education and described how the knowledge gained from this survey would lead to a smoother process for all future program reviews. It was also noted that teachers could distribute the packages during the course of their regularly mandated midterm employer visits, which meant that there was very little extra effort required on their part.

Survey packages were bundled into groups of 25, and at the conclusion of the meeting teachers were invited to take enough survey packages for their employer contacts. One thousand survey packages were printed, and all were distributed to teachers, either on the day of the meeting or through board internal mail in the days following the meeting.

As previously noted, employer relations are crucial to the skill set of co-op teachers, and it is this relationship which is one of the keys to attaining a high employer response rate. With this in mind, a teacher script to introduce the employer survey package was deemed too artificial. Instead, during the system meeting, the principal investigator asked teachers to take no more than a minute or two with each employer in which to (a) politely impress the importance of the study; (b) point out that it takes less

than 10 minutes; (c) encourage each employer to examine the survey package and to express their views through their participation in the survey.

### **Groups 2 and 3: Former Employer Partners or Non-participating Organizations**

All of the participants in these two groups were systematically targeted by the principal investigator as described in the Employer Recruitment section of this chapter. Each employer identified was contacted in one of two ways. Initially, employers from the first two recruitment lists were visited by the principal investigator, who distributed survey packages and instructions in the same way as was described for Group 1. As time became a factor, however, it was clear that it was not possible to visit every employer on the remaining third recruitment list. These employers were therefore contacted by phone and were asked to provide an email address if they would like to participate in the survey. The electronic survey package was then sent to interested employers.

### **Data Collection**

The majority of the data were collected with the online survey, although within the final few days of the survey, a few employers requested a paper copy of the survey. The survey package given to employers contained two different methods of accessing the online survey. The first method was to directly type the survey link ([www.hwdsb.on.ca/programs/coop](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/programs/coop)) into their web browser. The second option involved employers accessing the main HWDSB webpage, then clicking on the “Programs” link, then clicking on the “Co-op” link. Both methods of access resulted in the employer getting to the same survey start screen.

Once at the start screen, employers were given the option to either “complete the survey online” or “to download this survey in pdf version.” If the pdf version was

chosen, participants were directed to complete the paper survey and to mail it to E-BEST. If this method was chosen by employers, there was no way to provide postage to improve the response rate.

In the final 3 days of the survey, eight employers requested a paper copy of the survey from the principal investigator. Survey packages were distributed along with the surveys and an envelope. Employers were instructed to seal the completed survey in the envelope provided, and the principal investigator returned a day later to retrieve the sealed envelopes. After consultation with E-BEST, it was decided that due to time constraints, the principal investigator should input the data from these surveys. Employers did not request paper versions of the survey from any other teacher. A single survey was mailed to E-BEST but was received after the close of the survey so was not utilized for this study.

All data were housed in a secure HWDSB server until the conclusion of the study, at which time all raw data were provided to the principal investigator in the form of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet.

### **Data Analysis**

Before analysis, several cleaning tasks were performed. Of the 112 surveys submitted, 11 surveys were submitted blank and were therefore deemed unusable. One other submission contained duplicate data from the same participant and was also discarded. After deletion of these records, the resulting 100 surveys were available for analysis.

An examination of the remaining data revealed that two participants had access to a section of the survey that they should not have been able to answer. Although these

participants had indicated that they had previously had co-op students, due to a glitch of some sort, these employers were given an opportunity to report the reasons that they had never accepted a student, which was clearly at odds with the rest of their responses. The inaccurate data were deleted while all other data from these participants were retained.

In two questions, data were sorted into groups to facilitate better demographic conclusions. For Q3, “Approximately how long has your organization been in operation,” many employers gave a range of years or typed numbers using text instead of numerical values. All text was converted to numerical values which were then sorted into three categories: 0 – 5 years; 6 – 20 years; and 21+ years. This was done to easily identify the organization as new, established, or very well established to see if there was a pattern of participation in the co-op program.

With respect to data in Q4, 18 employers listed their job sector as “other” and then added a description of their organization. Based on the employer descriptions, the two new sector headings of “Arts” and “Service” were added. The addition of these categories allowed for all of the 18 employers who had chosen “other” to be sorted into one of 10 categories. The Information Technology and Business sectors received no responses so were left out of sector-specific analyses.

The last cleaning tasks involved Q5a and Q6, as both questions asked employers to report time in years. Participants in some cases chose to type a range of years instead of a single numeric response, while in other cases there was text included in addition to a numerical response (e.g., “12 years”). To facilitate numerical analysis, all text was deleted, and data reported in ranges were replaced by a single numerical equivalent by using the median of the two ranged numbers. In cases where the median was not exactly

in the center of the range (e.g., 4 – 7, there is no number exactly between 4 and 7), the data were alternately rounded up and then rounded down. This method of rounding was utilized to ensure data accuracy and was utilized seven times in data from question 6.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Creswell (2008) lists three factors that “can result in unreliable data, including: when questions on instruments are ambiguous and unclear; when procedures of test administration vary and are not standardized; or when participants are fatigued, are nervous, misinterpret questions, or guess” (p. 169). Internal consistency reliability is the only type of reliability that pertains to this study, as the instrument was administered only once and each participant completed the instrument. Many strategies were employed to ensure reliability.

Initially, efforts were made to ensure that the final version of the instrument was clear and concise and that employers could answer questions quickly and with certainty. The design of the instrument included multiple stages of editing and field testing (as described earlier), and many changes were made to the instrument in an attempt to ensure absolute clarity.

Although the survey package distribution methods may have differed slightly (email versus paper) and teachers were not given a formal script (only guidelines), the information in the survey package was identical and included contact information for the principal investigator on every page and in every email. Employers and teachers were repeatedly encouraged in text, verbally, on the website, and in the survey itself to contact the principal investigator with “any questions or concerns.” No one indicated any kind of confusion about any aspect of the survey at any time.

With respect to the state of participants, there were many factors that ensured that reliability was high. The survey was self-administered, and employers had the choice to participate or decline. Employers had the choice to complete the paper version of the instrument or the online version. Perhaps the most important factor was anonymity. It ensured that there was no pressure on employers to participate in the survey or to alter their opinions and that honesty could be expected. All of these procedures should have eliminated factors such as employer fatigue, nervousness, or the misinterpretation of questions.

As a final measure of reliability, the introduction of the survey (comprising the first two pages) performed four functions. After describing the purpose of the study, it clarified terms (e.g., organization), encouraged employers to contact the principal investigator with “any questions or concerns,” and assured employers that the survey information was confidential. Only after having the opportunity to examine this information was the employer able to consent to participation so that the survey could begin. No employers or teachers expressed any concerns or confusion over the survey, and very few fields of data were missing, which suggests that the instrument was very clear and reliability is very high.

All three types of validity (content, criterion-related and construct validity) will be examined. Creswell defines content validity as “how well . . . the questions represent all of the possibilities of the questions available” (2008, p. 172). As previously indicated, many experts were involved in the design and field testing of the instrument. Additionally, many stages of instrument editing were completed. These procedures ensured a high content validity.

Criterion-related validity does not factor into this study, as there is no attempt to relate instrument scores to a particular outcome. Similarly, construct validity does not apply to this research.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

Throughout the process from initial survey design to the conclusion of the online survey, there have been several assumptions. Each of these is examined, starting from the provincial level and working through to the data assimilation stage.

#### **Provincial Level Assumption**

Feedback was solicited from a provincial co-op body that agreed to examine the survey and provide their insights. As Co-op Program Effectiveness surveys are provincially mandated to take place every 3 – 4 years, and since the instrument is the major component of the survey, it was assumed that the provincial body had a huge stake in helping to create the best instrument possible, an instrument that can be used by many boards of education throughout Ontario. After many months of communication, promises to provide insight, many reminders to the board, and a long period of waiting, feedback from the body was vague and yielded no improvements to the survey instrument.

#### **Board Level Assumption**

The HWDSB as a whole was committed to the study. However, there was a 14 week delay in passing through the HWDSB ethics clearance stage. This was a significantly longer time frame than was initially indicated. A staffing shortage was given as the reason for this delay.



**Teacher Assumptions**

The principal investigator, is a teacher in the HWDSB and, as such, I have no hierarchical influence over teaching colleagues. Since teacher participation in survey distribution was completely voluntary, teacher compliance depended on several factors. Perhaps the strongest factor was that teachers had to believe that the survey would be of value and that the conclusions would help to improve the co-op program. It was assumed that most teachers would be interested and committed to improving the co-op program and would do their best to provide feedback on the survey, to participate in survey package distribution, to distribute packages in a timely manner to all employers, and would actively use their positive relationships with employers to encourage employer participation. In addition, teachers needed to be relied on to accurately report the distribution of survey packages in both paper and electronic form.

Since it is mandatory that co-op teachers must visit all current employers for an evaluative visit before midterm marks are due, and since midterm marks were due April 17, 2012, it was assumed that all teachers would complete mandatory visits in the weeks leading up to April 17. The online survey was timed to take full advantage of this assumption to try to get the largest sample size possible.

**Participant Assumptions**

Since contact information was available on all printed material, the online survey, and the website, it was assumed that participants would follow up on anything that was unclear in the survey. Since no contact was initiated from any teacher or employer, it was assumed that the survey instructions and questions were clear and easily followed. In addition, it was assumed that employers would follow the direction to take into

account their “overall experience” with co-op students and not be biased towards a single co-op experience.

Employers also had to be relied on to differentiate between the origin of their co-op students. In two instances while the survey packages were being delivered, employers insisted on sharing their “horror stories” regarding one of their past co-op students. On both occasions, employers noted that the students involved were from a specific school which they knew was not part of the HWDSB. While both employers assured me that they would not include those experiences while answering the survey, other employers may not be as cognizant regarding student origins or may report all of their experiences with co-op students regardless of the board of origin.

By offering a survey choice in both online and paper formats, and by allowing employers to self-report, it was assumed that a higher response rate would be the result, as employers could easily access the survey and would generate honest and thoughtful responses due to low test anxiety. Given that employers had a vested interest in making co-op a better experience, it was expected that response rates would be relatively high and that surveys would be completed thoroughly and within the time frame specified.

### **Methodological Limitations**

The most significant methodological limitation was the timing of the survey. Due to long delays during both the field testing and ethics approval, the survey, originally scheduled to go live in January, was delayed until mid-March. A January time frame was chosen for three significant reasons. Initially, teachers are visiting both first semester employers (to finalize student marks) as well as employers for semester 2 (to secure incoming student placements). In theory, a January timeline could have led to the

possibility of surveying every participating 2012 HWDSB co-op employer and could have had the effect of doubling both the sample size and the number of respondents.

The second reason for a January survey was to take advantage of the lull often experienced (particularly in retail businesses, but also in other organizations) following the December holiday season. This slow period often leaves employers with more opportunity to interact with teachers for longer periods of time and in a more relaxed atmosphere. It was hoped that these factors would lead to a higher response rate.

Finally, a January rollout was timed to coincide nicely with a HWDSB city-wide co-op meeting that would facilitate the timely preparation and distribution of the survey packages and teacher instruction. Teachers coming off a holiday are generally more relaxed and rested as well, which also could have led to a higher participation rate on their part.

Delaying the survey until late March introduced several factors, all of which were a detriment to this research. Perhaps the biggest of these factors was that semester 1 employers did not fall under a teacher's regular semester 2 co-op duties. The sample size for Group 1 was therefore cut in half.

Another significant issue was the coinciding of the survey to follow March Break. This meant that the survey materials were finalized just before the break and needed to be printed and packaged during March Break for distribution at the system-wide co-op meeting. Furthermore, communication wasn't available, as most board personnel were off throughout the holiday.

Due to the timing of the city-wide co-op meeting and a miscommunication that led to an error in printing, the survey was essentially inaccessible to most teachers for the

first week it was live. System-wide co-op meetings are scheduled only a few times a year, and due to the availability of an appropriate-sized meeting area and consultant availability, this meeting could not be arranged until the afternoon of Wednesday, March 21. Since the survey went live on Monday, March 19, the result was that the first 3 days were lost waiting for the meeting at which teacher training and survey package distribution were to occur.

During the system meeting, teachers overwhelmingly requested that an email version be made available so that they could forward the information to employers electronically. The web link was considered too complicated to type into a browser, and it was felt that employers would respond well electronically. It was decided that an electronic version of the survey package would be made available to all teachers following the meeting, but teachers were also asked to follow up in person with employers to improve the response rates.

After the meeting had concluded, it was discovered that a major miscommunication had occurred and all survey packages had been printed with incorrect information. The web link originally used to host the survey was changed when the survey went live. The result was that all printed survey packages referred employers to the old link which, when used, would return the message, “this survey is now closed. Thank you for your interest.” An email was immediately sent out to all teachers (Appendix B) noting the printing error and asking teachers to delay survey package distribution until further notice. No incorrect survey packages were ever distributed, but 2 more days were lost to this error.

Follow-up email (Appendix B) was sent to all teachers, offering two solutions to

the misprint error. As promised in the system meeting, an electronic version of the survey package was emailed to all teachers to be distributed to employers whose email addresses were known. The first solution to the misprint was to have teachers use the attachments in the email to print out corrected versions of the survey package for distribution to employers in a face-to-face format. The second choice made available to teachers was that they could request adhesive labels which had been printed with the correct web link. The new labels were sized to cover the incorrect information so that old packages could still be utilized with minimal effort and no loss in printing cost.

In summary, despite the survey going live March 19, 2011, it was inaccessible to the vast majority of teachers for the first week (3 days as a result of having to wait to distribute materials until the city-wide meeting and another 2 days to correct the printing error). It is impossible to say what effect, if any, that this delay had on the distribution or response rates of the survey. Most co-op teachers typically complete the mandatory midterm visits to employers in a one week period. As was pointed out, midterm marks were due April 17. It is reasonable to conclude that most employer visits would likely have been completed during the last 2 weeks of the survey, thus minimizing the effect of initial survey inaccessibility.

As previously discussed in the survey distribution section, there were three methods of recruitment for employers who do not engage in co-op. With respect to teacher referral and the Lime Ridge Mall recruitment methods, all employers were given a survey package. After completing the first two lists, it was clear that time was a concern, and the last list was only partially addressed.

Another possible limitation is that the number of new co-op teachers is quite high,

as noted by the Experiential Learning Consultant in the system-wide meeting. This could mean that teachers are less established in co-op protocol and have had less time to establish a strong rapport with employers. The result is that new teachers may have felt too overwhelmed to participate or too uncomfortable to distribute the survey or encourage employers. This may have negatively affected both the survey distribution and the response rate of employers in Group 1.

One final limitation could be the online format of the survey. It was initially assumed that the vast majority of all employers would have access to a computer. A relatively high response rate was expected to be achieved as the online survey delivery method was simple to access and very quick to complete. One of the complaints from some employers during survey package distribution was that they could not access the internet at work. Distribution of a paper copy of the survey may have led to a higher response rate in these instances.

### **Chapter Summary**

Despite well-laid-out timelines, unexpected lengthy delays led to issues in timing of the survey. This introduced significant limitations to the study. Some limitations may have led to a significantly smaller sample size, a decrease in survey distribution, and a lower response rate. The sample size for Group 1 was quite good, but those of Groups 2 and 3 were very low. Reliability was high, but only content validity existed and other forms of validity could not be demonstrated due to the nature of the survey.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

Chapter Four presents data on the demographics of participants and their co-op history followed by data on employer perspective of both the HWDSB co-op students and the co-op program in general. Themes obtained from the open-ended questions of the survey are examined and compared with closed-ended data to establish continuity of theme. Reasons that employers in Groups 2 and 3 declined to participate in co-op are also reported.

### **Terminology Clarification**

The word “sample” refers to the sample of  $N = 100$  participants in the survey. The three subsamples of the sample have been previously introduced as Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 and will be compared to the sample frequently.

### **School Representation and Response Rate**

All 60 HWDSB co-op teachers were asked to volunteer to participate in the recruitment of employers by delivering survey packages. Since teacher participation was voluntary, both response rate and teacher participation were determined through an email inquiry to teachers (Appendix B). The inquiry asked teachers to indicate the school they were from, how many teachers had participated from their school, and how many survey packages were distributed in each of the two formats (email versus envelope). Twenty of 60 co-op teachers (33%) participated in the survey, and 12 of the 16 (75%) HWDSB secondary schools were represented. Responses indicated that the total number of survey packages distributed was 582, with email copies accounting for 36.1% ( $n = 201$ ) and paper copies representing 63.9% ( $n = 381$ ).

The entire population of second semester employers was 1,082 and 100 of these

employers completed the survey for a sample size of 9.2%. Co-op students were placed in 705 individual organizations, and 68 of these (9.6%) were represented in the survey. The Group 1 response rate was 24.1% (92/381). It was not possible to determine individual response rates for Groups 2 and 3 (as these participants self-selected their group based on their answers during the survey), but the response rate for both groups combined was 5.0% (10/201). The response rate for the sample was 17.2%.

### **Study Participants**

In total, there were 100 participants in this study ( $N = 100$ ); Group 1 consisted of  $n = 90$  participants, while Groups 2 and 3 had  $n = 5$  participants each. Sample demographics are summarized in Table 1. Most participants were managers or supervisors (52%), followed by employees (36%), owners (9%), and human resources personnel (2%). A very large number of participants (64%) were associated with very well-established organizations (“21+” years in operation), while 22% were associated with established organizations (“6 – 20 years”), and only 6% were from newly established organizations (“0 – 5 years”).

Participants worked in eight different workplace sectors. The highest three sectors represented were Education (25%), Government–Not For Profit (20%), and Retail (17%). These sectors were followed by Medical (12%), Trade (10%), Hospitality (6%), Service (5%), and the Arts (4%). There were no participants from either the Business or Information Technology sectors, and one participant declined to identify the sector.

### **Participant History with HWDSB Co-op Program**

Only Groups 1 and 2 have a history profile, as employers in Group 3 have never participated in the co-op program. The employer history profile is presented in Table 2.



Table 1

*Demographic Profile of All Employer Participants*

	<i>n</i>	%
Position in the company		
Manager/Supervisor	52	52
Employee	36	36
Owner	9	9
Human Resources personnel	2	2
Missing data	1	1
Total	100	100
Number of years business in operation		
0 – 5	6	6
6 – 20	22	22
21+	64	64
Missing data	8	8
Total	100	100
Sector		
Education	25	25
Government/NFP	20	20
Retail	17	17
Medical	12	12
Trade	10	10
Hospitality	6	6
Service	5	5
Arts	4	4
Business	0	0
Information Technology	0	0
Missing data	1	1
Total	100	100

Table 2

*Combined Employer History with the HWDSB Co-op Program*

	<i>n</i>	%
Total number of co-op students accepted in organization's history		
1 – 5	19	20
6 – 10	15	16
11 – 19	17	18
20+	42	44
Missing data	2	2
Total	95	100
Total number of co-op students hired after co-op		
0	20	21
1 – 2	20	21
3 – 5	16	17
6+	16	17
Not applicable	18	19
Missing data	5	5
Total	95	100

Most employers (44%) had taken a total of more than 20 co-op students over the course of their partnership with the HWDSB. There was a similar distribution of employers between the other three responses: 1 – 5 students (20%), 6 – 10 students (16%), and 11 – 19 students (18%).

A very similar distribution existed in all responses regarding how many co-op students had been hired by organizations; 21% of employers have hired 0 students, 21% have hired 1 – 2 students, 17% have hired 3 – 5 students, 17% have hired 6 or more students, and 19% of employers responded “not applicable” which indicated that their organization cannot hire students (e.g., an elementary school can’t hire a student after co-op).

### **Group 1 Participants**

This group represents the vast majority (90%) of participants. As a result, data were almost identical to those of the sample. Demographic data are summarized in Table 3. Relative breakdown of participants by position in the company was identical to the sample. There were 5% more participants in very well-established organizations (21+ years), an identical 22% associated with established organizations (6 – 20 years), and 2% fewer from newly established organizations (0 – 5 years).

A breakdown by sector again contained almost identical information to the sample. From highest number of participants to lowest, both tables are identical with one exception: The Hospitality and Service sectors swapped positions but were still within 1% of each other.

The Group 1 employer history profile is presented in Table 4. Once again data were virtually identical to the sample with a difference of only 0 – 2% for responses

Table 3

*Demographic Profile of Employer Participants in Group 1*

	<i>n</i>	%
Position in the company		
Manager/Supervisor	47	52
Employee	32	36
Owner	9	10
Recruitment/Resources personnel	2	2
Total	90	100
Number of years business in operation		
0 – 5	4	4
6 – 20	20	22
21+	60	67
Missing data	6	7
Total	90	100
Sector		
Education	24	27
Government/NFP	19	21
Retail	13	14
Medical	11	12
Trade	10	11
Hospitality	4	4
Service	5	6
Arts	4	4
Business	0	0
Information Technology	0	0
Missing data	0	0
Total	90	100

Table 4

*Group 1 Employer History with the HWDSB Co-op Program*

	<i>n</i>	%
Total number of co-op students accepted in organization's history		
1 – 5	17	19
6 – 10	14	16
11 – 19	16	18
20+	41	46
Missing data	2	2
Total	90	100
Total number of co-op students hired after co-op		
0	18	20
1 – 2	19	21
3 – 5	14	16
6+	16	18
Not applicable	18	20
Missing data	5	6
Total	90	100

regarding the total number of co-op students accepted, and a 0 – 1% difference in responses regarding the number of co-op students hired after co-op.

### **Group 2 Participants**

There were only five participants in this group, and their demographic data are summarized in Table 5. Similar to trends demonstrated in the sample and Group 1, there were three participants who were supervisors while two were employees. Similar to the sample, participants tended to be at organizations that had been in operation a long time, as three participants were in the 21+ response and one was in the 11 – 19 response. Only one of the employers was in a newly established organization (0 – 5 years). Employer participants were in the sectors of Hospitality (40%), Retail (40%) and Government–Not for Profit (20%).

The co-op history of Group 2 employers is summarized in Table 6. The number of total students accepted by these organizations is significantly fewer than reported in Group 1. The highest and lowest responses were almost identically opposite between the groups. Group 2 reports 40% of the organizations have accepted 1 – 5 students, while only 20% of participants reported taking 20 or more students. There were also far fewer co-op students hired on average by this group. Double the percentage of participants (40%) reported hiring 0 students after co-op while 0% hired 6 or more students.

### **Group 3 Participants**

Demographic data on this group are summarized in Table 7. Since these participants had never taken part in the co-op program, no historical data could be collected.

Group 3 data were very similar to the sample in terms of the breakdown of both

Table 5

*Demographic Profile of Employer Participants in Group 2*

	<i>n</i>	%
Position in the company		
Manager/Supervisor	3	60
Employee	2	40
Owner	0	0
Recruitment/Resources personnel	0	0
Total	5	100

Number of years business in operation		
0 – 5	1	20
6 – 20	1	20
21+	3	60
Missing data	0	0
Total	5	100

Sector		
Hospitality	2	40
Retail	2	40
Government/NFP	1	20
Medical	0	0
Trade	0	0
Education	0	0
Service	0	0
Arts	0	0
Business	0	0
Information Technology	0	0
Missing data	0	0
Total	5	100

Table 6

*Group 2 Employer History with the HWDSB Co-op Program*

	<i>n</i>	%
Total number of co-op students accepted in organization's history		
1 – 5	2	40
6 – 10	1	20
11 – 19	1	20
20+	1	20
Missing data	0	0
Total	5	100
Total number of co-op students hired after co-op		
0	2	40
1 – 2	1	20
3 – 5	2	40
6+	0	0
Not applicable	0	0
Missing data	0	0
Total	5	100



Table 7

*Demographic Profile of Employer Participants in Group 3*

	<i>n</i>	%
Position in the company		
Manager/Supervisor	2	40
Employee	2	40
Owner	0	0
Human Resources personnel	0	0
Missing data	1	20
Total	5	100

Number of years business in operation		
0 – 5	1	20
6 – 20	1	20
21+	2	40
Missing data	1	20
Total	5	100

Sector		
Retail	2	40
Education	1	20
Medical	1	20
Government/NFP	0	0
Trade	0	0
Hospitality	0	0
Service	0	0
Arts	0	0
Business	0	0
Information Technology	0	0
Missing data	1	20
Total	5	100

the participant's position in the company and the length of time the organization has been in business. Most participants were managers or employees and were usually associated with organizations which were either well or very well established. Two participants were associated with the retail sector, one with education, one with medical, and one respondent did not identify the sector.

### **Data from Groups 2 and 3**

A breakdown of participants in these groups by sector is shown in Table 8. Retail (40%) and Hospitality (20%) are the sectors which contain the highest number of participants.

### **Employer Perceptions of Student Employability Skills**

Data in this section were gathered through the Likert scale on question 9 in the survey which asks participants "about [their] experience with co-op students" inviting employers to rate students "based on . . . overall experience." Participants evaluated 10 Likert items which were considered basic employability skills. Responses of *always* or *very often* were considered positive, a *sometimes* response was considered neutral, while responses of *rarely* or *never* were considered negative. This was done to more clearly (in positive or negative terms) answer the research question regarding the current state of employer satisfaction with respect to the HWDSB co-op program. The term "combined" refers to the sum of Group 1 and Group 2 data. Combined data were utilized to provide an overall picture of employer perspectives, as both of these groups had previously participated in co-op (as opposed to Group 3 who had never participated).

### **Combined Perceptions of Employability Skills**

Combined results are presented in Table 9. Each Likert item had a possible  $n =$

Table 8

*Sector Breakdown of Participants in Groups 2 and 3*

Sector	<i>n</i>	%
Retail	4	40
Hospitality	2	20
Medical	1	10
Government/NFP	1	10
Education	1	10
Trade	0	0
Service	0	0
Arts	0	0
Business	0	0
Information Technology	0	0
Missing data	1	10
Total	10	100

Table 9

*Summary of Combined Perceptions on Student Employability Skills*

		Very					Don't		Total	Median
		Always	often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	know			
Are respectful and courteous	Count	36	48	7	0	0	0	91	Very often	
	%	39.6	52.7	7.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Are responsible and accountable	Count	16	51	21	4	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	17.4	55.4	22.8	4.3	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Are punctual	Count	18	53	19	1	1	0	92	Very often	
	%	19.6	57.6	20.7	1.1	1.1	0.0	100.0		
Are organized	Count	13	50	27	2	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	14.1	54.3	29.3	2.2	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Demonstrate good work ethic	Count	13	53	23	3	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	14.1	57.6	25.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Can work independently	Count	11	44	34	3	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	12.0	47.8	37.0	3.3	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Can work well with others	Count	21	61	9	0	0	1	92	Very often	
	%	22.8	66.3	9.8	0.0	0.0	1.1	100.0		
Show initiative	Count	11	42	32	7	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	12.0	45.7	34.8	7.6	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Work hard to achieve goals	Count	11	50	27	2	1	0	91	Very often	
	%	12.1	54.9	29.7	2.2	1.1	0.0	100.0		
Work safely	Count	39	45	8	0	0	0	92	Very often	
	%	42.4	48.9	8.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0		

95 responses and each item received either 91 or 92 responses, so very few data were missing.

Employers generally demonstrated strongly positive perspectives on students. The median for all items was *very often*, and in all of the data there was only one response of *I don't know*, and two responses of *Never*.

Table 10 demonstrates that employers rated students very positively in three of the Likert items: “are respectful and courteous” (92.3%), “work safely” (91.3%), and “can work well with others” (89.1%). In addition to having highly positive responses, these three Likert items received 0 negative responses, and neutral responses accounted for less than 10%. Even the two items rated the least positive, “show initiative” (57.6%) and “can work independently” (59.8%), were relatively speaking still very positive as they had very low negative scores (7.6% and 3.3% respectively). On average, 74.7% of responses were positive, 22.5% were neutral, and only 2.6% were negative.

### **Group 1 Perception of Employability Skills**

Employability skills data for Group 1 have been summarized in Table 11. Given that Group 1 represents such a large portion of the sample, the data are very similar to the combined perceptions on employability skills and differ only in that each Likert item has a slightly more positive score (1 – 3% higher). There were very few missing data as participants completed 96.7% of the responses. The median, *very often*, is identical to that of the combined data. As is demonstrated in Table 12, the ranking of the qualities by positive responses is identical to the combined data. On average, Group 1 had positive scores that were 1.9% higher, negative scores that were 0.5% lower, and neutral scores that were lower by 1.3%.

Table 10

*Combined Ranking of Student Employability Skills from Most Positive to Least Positive*

Student Likert items	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Don't know %	Total %
Are respectful and courteous	92.3	7.7	0.0	0.0	100.0
Work safely	91.3	8.7	0.0	0.0	100.0
Can work well with others	89.1	9.8	0.0	1.1	100.0
Are punctual	77.2	20.7	2.2	0.0	100.0
Are responsible and accountable	72.8	22.8	4.3	0.0	100.0
Demonstrate good work ethic	71.7	25.0	3.3	0.0	100.0
Are organized	68.5	29.3	2.2	0.0	100.0
Work hard to achieve goals	67.0	29.7	3.3	0.0	100.0
Can work independently	59.8	37.0	3.3	0.0	100.0
Show initiative	57.6	34.8	7.6	0.0	100.0
Average	74.7	22.5	2.6	0.1	100.0

Table 11

*Summary of Group 1 Perceptions on Student Employability Skills*

		Very					Don't		Total	Median
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	know			
Are respectful and courteous	Count	35	48	4	0	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	55.2	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Are responsible and accountable	Count	15	50	20	2	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	57.5	23.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Are punctual	Count	18	51	17	0	1	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	58.6	19.5	0.0	1.1	0.0	100.0		
Are organized	Count	13	48	24	2	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	55.2	27.6	2.3	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Demonstrate good work ethic	Count	12	52	20	3	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	59.8	23.0	3.4	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Can work independently	Count	10	44	30	3	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	50.6	34.5	3.4	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Can work well with others	Count	20	60	6	0	0	1	87	Very often	
	%	0	69.0	6.9	0.0	0.0	1.1	100.0		
Show initiative	Count	11	40	31	5	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	46.0	35.6	5.7	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Work hard to achieve goals	Count	11	48	25	1	1	0	86	Very often	
	%	0	55.8	29.1	1.2	1.2	0.0	100.0		
Work safely	Count	37	43	7	0	0	0	87	Very often	
	%	0	49.4	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0		

Table 12

*Group 1 Ranking of Student Employability Skills From Most Positive to Least Positive*

	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Don't Know %	Total %
Are respectful and courteous	95.4	4.6	0.0	0.0	100.0
Can work well with others	92.0	6.9	0.0	1.1	100.0
Work safely	92.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Are punctual	79.3	19.5	1.1	0.0	100.0
Are responsible and accountable	74.7	23.0	2.3	0.0	100.0
Demonstrate good work ethic	73.6	23.0	3.4	0.0	100.0
Are organized	70.1	27.6	2.3	0.0	100.0
Work hard to achieve goals	68.6	29.1	2.3	0.0	100.0
Can work independently	62.1	34.5	3.4	0.0	100.0
Show initiative	58.6	35.6	5.7	0.0	100.0
Average	76.6	21.2	2.1	0.1	100.0



### **Group 2 Perception of Employability Skills**

Group 2 was very small ( $n = 5$ ) and consisted of employers who had indicated that they will not take co-op students in the immediate future. A summary of the data is contained in Table 13. Of note is the fact that median scores were significantly less positive than those of Group 1. All but one Likert item had medians of *sometimes*. The exception was the item “work safely,” which had a median of *very often*. Group 2 data are summarized in Table 14 which was organized based on negative responses (as opposed to positive responses) to highlight possible areas for improvement, as these data were more negative than those of Group 1. Four Likert items contained negative data: “show initiative” (40%), “are responsible and accountable” (40%), “are punctual” (20%), and “work hard to achieve goals” (20%). Of the remaining six items, five contained neutral responses, which accounted for 60 – 80% of the total, while positive responses ranged from 20 – 40%. The item “work safely” however had a very positive score of 80% with a 0% negative score. Although data from Group 2 were more negative than those of Group 1, they were still relatively positive as, on average, 40.5% of responses were positive, with only 12% negative and 47.5% neutral.

### **Employer Perceptions of the Co-op Program**

To gather employers’ perspectives of the co-op program, data were utilized from the Likert scale survey question 10 which asks participants to “respond to each statement below based on your experiences with HWDSB’s Cooperative Education Program.” Responses were organized in a similar fashion to data from Q9. Responses were considered positive if *strongly agree* or *agree* were indicated, neutral if *undecided* was indicated, and negative if *disagree* or *strongly disagree* were chosen.

Table 13

*Summary of Group 2 Perceptions on Student Employability Skills*

		Very					Total	Median
		Always	often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never		
Are respectful and courteous	Count	1	0	3	0	0	4	Sometimes
	%	25.0	0.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	
Are responsible and accountable	Count	1	1	1	2	0	5	Sometimes
	%	20.0	20.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	100.0	
Are punctual	Count	0	2	2	1	0	5	Sometimes
	%	0.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	100.0	
Are organized	Count	0	2	3	0	0	5	Sometimes
	%	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	
Demonstrate good work ethic	Count	1	1	3	0	0	5	Sometimes
	%	20.0	20.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	
Can work independently	Count	1	0	4	0	0	5	Sometimes
	%	20.0	0.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	
Can work well with others	Count	1	1	3	0	0	5	Sometimes
	%	20.0	20.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	
Show initiative	Count	0	2	1	2	0	5	Sometimes
	%	0.0	40.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	100.0	
Work hard to achieve goals	Count	0	2	2	1	0	5	Sometimes
	%	0.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	100.0	
Work safely	Count	2	2	1	0	0	5	Very often
	%	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	

Table 14

*Group 2 Ranking of Student Employability Skills From Most Negative to Least Negative*

Ten Students Qualities	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Don't know %	Total %
Are responsible and accountable	40.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	100.0
Show initiative	40.0	20.0	40.0	0.0	100.0
Are punctual	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	100.0
Work hard to achieve goals	40.0	40.0	20.0	0.0	100.0
Work safely	80.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Are organized	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Demonstrate good work ethic	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Can work well with others	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Are respectful and courteous	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Can work independently	20.0	80.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Average	40.5	47.5	12.0	0.0	100.0

### **Combined Perceptions of the Co-op Program**

Combined data are summarized in Table 15. Each Likert item had a possible  $n = 95$  responses. With the exception of one item, all items had either 90 – 91 responses, so very few data were missing. The Likert item “I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future” elicited 86 responses. Although this is less than any other item, it is still close to a full set of data (90.5%). The median for all questions was *agree*. Trends of previously examined data continued, as combined data for this question presented strongly positive perspectives on the co-op program as a whole. Table 16 demonstrates that 88.1% of responses are positive, with only 3.3% negative and 8.6% neutral. Employers rated the top four Likert items at over 92.2% positive, with “what was expected of me as an employer was reasonable” being rated a 100% positive response. The least positive item (66.3%) was also the most negatively scored (5.8%); “I have hired co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future.” Although negative responses were quite low (generally less than 5%) a few areas were higher than others: “involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization” (5.5%), “I was advised of the program expectations” (4.4%), and “communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient” (3.3%).

### **Group 1 Perception of Co-op Program**

Data from Group 1 (summarized in Table 17), were very similar to combined data and shared an identical median of *agree*. Table 18 demonstrates that Group 1 on average had a 1.5% higher positive response (89.6%), a 1.3% lower negative response rate (2.2%), and a 0.4% lower average neutral response (8.2%). All Likert items were ranked identically in both sets of data.

Table 15

*Combined Summary of Employer Perceptions of HWDSB Co-op Program*

	Count	Strongly agree			Undecided	Strongly disagree			Total	Median
		Count	Agree	%		Disagree	Count	%		
I was advised of the program expectations	91	32	53	35.2	2	4	0	91	Agree	
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	91	36	55	39.6	0	0	0	91	Agree	
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	91	41	46	45.1	1	2	1	91	Agree	
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	90	28	55	31.1	5	1	1	90	Agree	
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	86	22	35	25.6	24	2	3	86	Agree	
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	91	41	37	45.1	8	3	2	91	Agree	
Participating in the program was good for public relations	90	32	43	35.6	13	2	0	90	Agree	
	100.0		47.8		14.4	2.2	0.0	100.0		

Table 16

*Combined Ranking of Co-op Program Items From Most Positive to Least Positive*

Criteria evaluated	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Total %
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	95.6	1.1	3.3	100.0
I was advised of the program expectations	93.4	2.2	4.4	100.0
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	92.2	5.6	2.2	100.0
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	85.7	8.8	5.5	100.0
Participating in the program was good for public relations	83.4	14.4	2.2	100.0
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	66.3	27.9	5.8	100.0
Average	88.1	8.6	3.3	100.0

Table 17

*Group 1 Summary of Employer Perceptions of HWDSB Co-op Program*

	Count	Strongly agree		Undecided	Disagree		Total	Median
		Strongly agree	Agree		Disagree	Strongly disagree		
I was advised of the program expectations		31	51	1	3	86		Agree
	%	36.0	59.3	1.2	3.5	100.0		
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable		34	52	0	0	86		Agree
	%	39.5	60.5	0.0	0.0	100.0		
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient		41	42	1	1	86		Agree
	%	47.7	48.8	1.2	1.2	100.0		
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester		27	53	4	0	85		Agree
	%	31.8	62.4	4.7	0.0	100.0		
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future		22	32	23	1	81		Agree
	%	27.2	39.5	28.4	1.2	100.0		
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization		41	35	7	2	86		Agree
	%	47.7	40.7	8.1	2.3	100.0		
Participating in the program was good for public relations		32	41	12	0	85		Agree
	%	37.6	48.2	14.1	0.0	100.0		

Table 18  
*Group 1 Ranking of Co-op Program Items from Most Positive to Least Positive*

	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Total %
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	96.5	1.2	2.3	100.0
I was advised of the program expectations	95.3	1.2	3.5	100.0
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	94.1	4.7	1.2	100.0
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	88.4	8.1	3.5	100.0
Participating in the program was good for public relations	85.9	14.1	0.0	100.0
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	66.7	28.4	4.9	100.0
Average	89.6	8.2	2.2	100.0



## **Group 2 Perception of Co-op Program**

There were no missing data for this group which had only  $n = 5$  participants. Data are summarized in Table 19 and reveal some of the most significantly negative data. Although five of the Likert items had the same median as that of Group 1 (*Agree*), two had a median of *undecided*. Items were ranked from most negative to least negative (Table 20), and 22.9% of responses were negative, with 14.3% neutral and 62.9% positive. While positive data outweighed negative data (275%), data in two Likert items were as negative (40%) as they were positive (40%). Both “involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization” and “participating in the program was good for public relations” items were rated with ambivalence. These two items were the lowest scoring positively and the highest scoring negatively and also had a median of *undecided*. One Likert item, “what was expected of me as an employer was reasonable” contained no negative data.

## **Comparison of Program Data to Student Data**

As previously presented, the average positive score on all Likert items for the co-op program was 88.1% while the average for student employability skills was 74.7%. Employers’ responses were 13.4% more positive when rating the co-op program versus rating student employability skills. Employers, however, were also slightly more negative about the co-op program (0.7%) than they were in rating student employability skills.

## **Employer Satisfaction by Sector**

As previously described, data from both questions involving Likert scales were converted to values of positive, neutral, or negative. Used as a measure for general

Table 19

*Group 2 Summary of Employer Perceptions of HWDSB Co-op Program*

	Count	Strongly					Total	Median
		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
I was advised of the program expectations	Count %	2 40.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Agree
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	Count %	2 40.0	3 60.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Agree
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	Count %	0 0.0	4 80.0	0 0.0	1 20.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Agree
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	Count %	1 20.0	2 40.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Agree
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	Count %	0 0.0	3 60.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Agree
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	Count %	0 0.0	2 40.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	1 20.0	5 100.0	Undecided
Participating in the program was good for public relations	Count %	0 0.0	2 40.0	1 20.0	2 40.0	0 0.0	5 100.0	Undecided

Table 20  
*Group 2 Ranking of Co-op Program Items from Most Negative to Least Negative*

	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %	Total %
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	40.0	20.0	40.0	100.0
Participating in the program was good for public relations	40.0	20.0	40.0	100.0
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	80.0	0.0	20.0	100.0
I was advised of the program expectations	60.0	20.0	20.0	100.0
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	60.0	20.0	20.0	100.0
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	60.0	20.0	20.0	100.0
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Average	62.9	14.3	22.9	100.0

employer satisfaction, these values were tallied, converted to percentages, and broken down by specific sector. This was done to facilitate comparison between sectors with respect to perspectives on both student employability and the co-op program as a whole.

### **Satisfaction with Co-op Students by Sector**

As demonstrated in Figure 1, with the exception of the Hospitality sector, satisfaction was generally quite good (over 62% positive) while dissatisfaction was quite low (below 7% negative). The Medical (98%), Education (81%), and Government (79%) sectors all reported very high satisfaction with a very low percentage of negative responses (0 – 2%). While the Arts, Service and Trade sectors were very similar in having moderately high positive values (62 – 73%) and low negative values (0 – 3%), the areas of Hospitality and Retail revealed significantly negative trends. Hospitality was most negative in their perceptions of student abilities (10%) and was also least positive (42%). Retail demonstrated a much higher positive score (69%) but also had a negative value of 7%.

### **Satisfaction with Co-op Program by Sector**

A very similar pattern of co-op program satisfaction was demonstrated (Figure 2), only the positive responses were much higher (16.3% higher) in all categories with the exception of Medical, which was very slightly lower (2.3%). With the exception of Hospitality, which had the lowest level of positive responses (73.8%), all other sectors had positive scores within 10% of each other (85.7 – 95.7%). Dissatisfaction levels were very similar to those demonstrated in Figure 1 as well. Hospitality had the highest negative response (11.9%), with Retail following again with a 6.7% negative response. All other sectors demonstrated low negative responses within a narrow range of 0 – 3.6%.

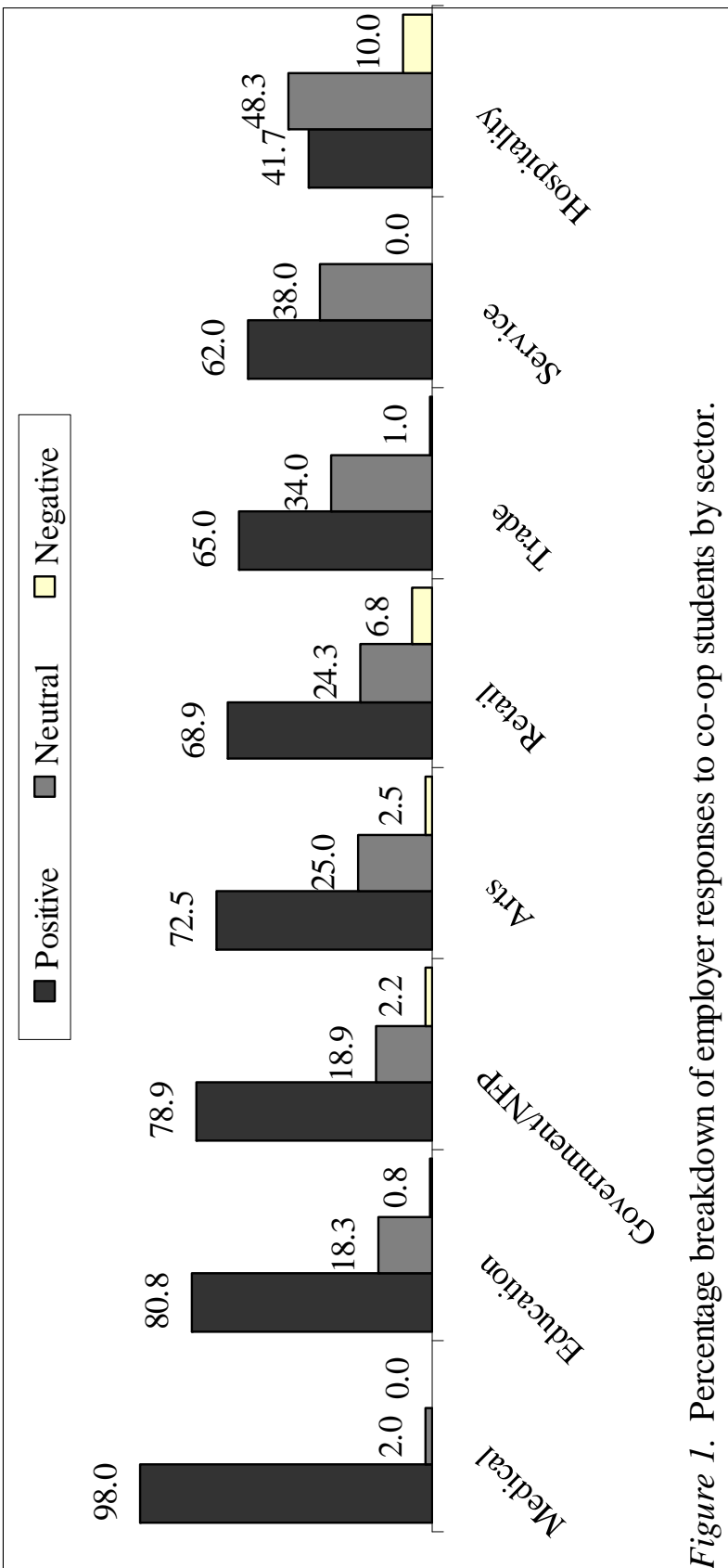


Figure 1. Percentage breakdown of employer responses to co-op students by sector.

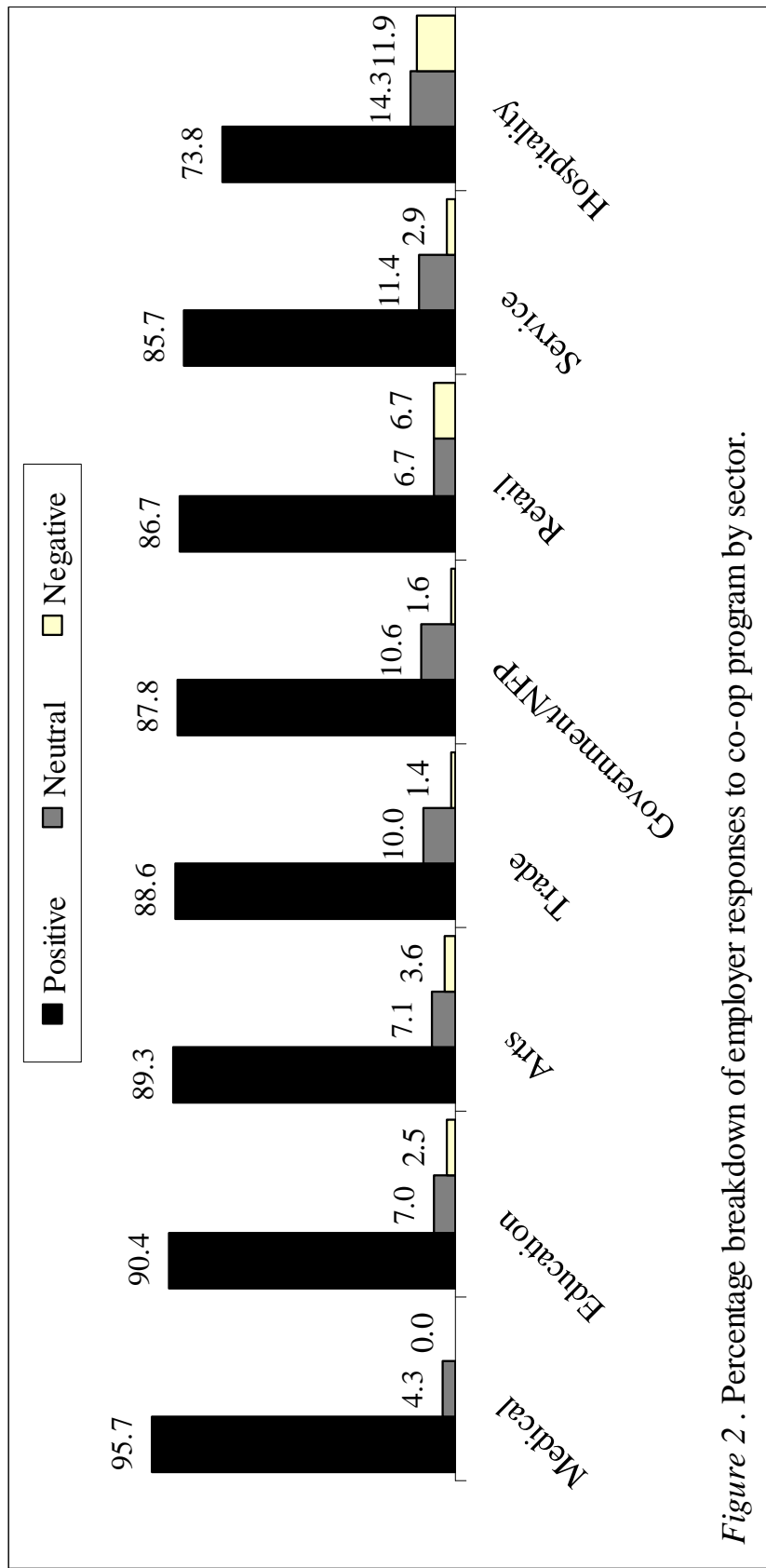


Figure 2 . Percentage breakdown of employer responses to co-op program by sector.

### Open-Ended Employer Responses

Three open-ended survey questions invited employers to share their thoughts first on the “strengths” of the co-op program (Q11), then on the “ways in which . . . it could be improved” (Q12), and finally encouraged participants to comment “about any aspect of the HWDSB Co-op Program” (Q13). Raw data from these questions are presented in Appendix D. Employer comments were often very long and complex and contained positive feedback, feedback of a critical nature (negative), and neutral feedback. For this reason, the data were broken down into “insights,” referred to often. Specific pieces of feedback (insights) were tallied and then organized into themes for analysis.

Groups 1 and 2 (employers who have participated in co-op) responded with a total of 143 comments in the three open-ended questions. There were 60 comments in strengths, 52 in improvements, and 31 under specific comments. Improvement comments, such as “none i am extremely happy with 17 years worth of taking on students,” illustrated that many employers were happy and felt that no improvements needed to occur to the co-op program. Including this comment, there were 13 out of 52 comments in the areas of improvement question that were actually strengths.

Comments such as “I think its the way the students are raised that needs improvement” illustrated a perceived issue that has nothing to do with the co-op program itself. These types of statements were considered neutral as they were not within the power of the co-op program to change. All comments were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral depending on their overall content. Positive comments accounted for 62.8% (91/145) of the responses, while 33.1% (48/145) of the comments were negative and 4.1% (6/145) were neutral. A similar ratio was demonstrated when comments were

broken down into 298 individual insights. This process yielded 64.8% (193) positive insights, while 32.6% (97) were critical of the program and 2.8% (8) were neutral.

### **Themes From Employer Insights**

Positive employer insights were initially sorted generally into major “areas of strength” while critical employer insights were sorted into major “areas to improve.” After this initial sorting, themes were extracted (Appendix E) for comparison to themes established in the literature review. Table 21 demonstrates that about two thirds of the employer insights were positive (64.8%), while approximately one third were critical of the program (32.6%) and 2.7% were neutral.

### **Positive Employer Insights**

Positive employer insights were sorted initially into five categories. In order of total tallies (contained in parentheses), the categories were benefits received by students (68), benefits received by the employer organization (47), strengths of teachers (47), overall program strength (19), and strong student employability skills (12).

There were 19 tallies which generally commented that the program was strong. Seven tallies indicated general happiness with the program, while the other 12 tallies were a response to the question “list ways in which HWDSB’s Co-op Program can be improved.” Employers in this question often either indicated that they were happy with the program or that there were no ways in which the program needed improvement.

It is important to note that although there were initially five themes established from positive insights, “program strength” was considered too general to be explored as a theme so was discarded.



Table 21

*Summary of Insight Content*

Content of insight	<i>n</i>	%
Positive insight	193	64.8
Negative (critical) insight	97	32.6
Neutral insight	8	2.7
Total	298	100.0

### **Four Themes of Program Strength**

The greatest perceived benefit of the co-op program was improved employability (56). In order of tallies, the employability advantage came from four factors: real world experiences (36), receiving insight into their future (18), leadership skills (1), and industry contacts (1). Other miscellaneous benefits noted by co-op employers were motivation (5), achieving success (4), improving self-esteem (2), and community involvement (1).

The second theme of program strength was the benefits employers received through their participation in the co-op program. Factors noted included intrinsic reward (18), the “help” that employers received from co-op students (12), the use of the co-op program as a hiring strategy (10), and utilizing co-op as a staff leadership development strategy (7). Intrinsic factors consisted of such elements as giving back to the community and employers feeling enriched for their participation. Staff development occurred as a result of mentorship of students and from employers learning from the students that they supervised.

The third theme of strength focused on areas in which teaching staff excelled. The most important aspect noted by employers was the support provided by teaching staff (17). Support included direct support of the placement and student (7), partnership with the placement (4), teacher responsiveness and availability (3), teacher involvement (2), and adequate monitoring visits (1). A second aspect of this theme was the importance of the teacher ensuring a good fit between students and the placements (9). This was followed very closely in tallies by teacher communication (8). Four other miscellaneous teacher strengths were noted: organization, caring, having structured

assignments, and the general strength of teachers.

The final theme of strength was the employability that employers noted students possessed. Some insights were general and characterized students as being very capable (4). Other insights specifically indicated areas in which students excelled, such as being well prepared (2), motivated (2), organized (1), hardworking (1), and positive (1).

### **Two Themes of Program Improvement**

Critical employer insights were sorted into themes for program improvement in the same way that positive insights were utilized to determine themes of program strength. The single most significant theme identified is the employers' need for improved supportive factors for the institutions (49). A number of factors contributed to this theme including improved communication (15), ensuring a good fit between students and employers (12), and improved follow-up and visits to the placement (9). Other areas of note included training of employers as mentors (4), improved teacher organization (4), improved honesty regarding student abilities (2), and a call for the standardization of assignments and evaluations (2). Strongly related to the theme of employer support was the subtheme of student preparation (15), in which employers called for better preparation of the students for interviews (11) and desired a better quality of student from teachers (4).

The second major theme of co-op program improvement was improving the students' basic employability skills (25). Dependability (8) was the most important skill identified as needing improvement, followed by responsibility (5), work ethic (4), cell phone etiquette (3), communication (1), commitment (1), social skills (1), and safety (1). Although not big enough to consider a major theme, it is significant to note that

employers suggested building community partnerships and community relations (7).

### **Open-Ended Data on Groups 2 and 3**

These groups indicated they had either never taken a co-op student (Group 3) or did not wish to have a co-op student in the future (Group 2). Of the five participants in Group 3, only one response indicated that the decision was based on the inability of the program to meet the needs of the employer: “Students do not have the specific skills required for our workplace.” Of the remaining participants, one gave no reason, another responded “didn’t know,” while two others indicated, “I am a new teacher” and “our business is yet to open.” Nothing in any of their four responses suggested that they would not take a co-op student in the future.

Group 2 also had five participants. Similar to the trend seen in Group 3, an examination of the reasons given for discontinuing the co-op partnership reveals that three of the employers (60%) gave the response, “there is not enough work to keep a student busy,” a reason which has nothing to do with the co-op program or experiences with students. Additionally, one of the three also noted that they were “busy training a new full time employee and may have a student at a later date.” However, two participants (40%) cited poor program experiences: “There is not enough benefit to our organization” and “general attitude by the students towards the business.”

## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS**

This chapter presents key learning from the data analysis, examines how this knowledge compares to insights of previously reviewed literature, and discusses the implications for future research and teaching practice.

### **Summary of the Study**

This study set out to examine employer perspectives in order to identify the strengths and areas of improvement in the HWDSB Co-op Program as well as to identify the reasons why some employers choose not to participate in the program. The sample size in this study is representative of the population, and the results of the study indicate that the co-op program is very strong. The sample sizes for Groups 2 (will discontinue participation in co-op) and 3 (decline to take a co-op student) are very small. The lack of data makes it impossible to provide any definitive answer as to why some employers decline to participate in the co-op program or why other employers discontinue their co-op partnership. Data from these two groups do strongly support Group 1 data and also support the trends noted in the literature review. Employer perceptions of both the co-op program strengths and areas in need of improvement are universally demonstrated across all three groups and are also present in reviewed secondary and postsecondary research.

### **Employer Perceptions of Students**

Students are generally perceived very positively by their employers who overwhelmingly consider students to be very respectful, very safe, and teamwork oriented. In all other employability skills areas, students score well but have many more neutral responses. The lowest three ranked items were in the students' ability to "work independently," "show initiative," and "work hard to achieve goals". This is not

surprising given that these three items are considered to be higher order skills when compared to other Likert scale items in Q9. For many students, their co-op placement is the first experience entering a workplace and almost everything is a learning experience. For example, it is almost universally noted by employers during the first evaluation period that the student understands and performs all duties well, but students do not take initiative and still look to the co-op supervisor for direction.

Although Group 1 data were very positive, with very few negative responses, the number of neutral responses for some items is high and leads to some concern. An illustration of this occurs in the Likert item students “are punctual.” Generally the item was rated positively. Given the importance of punctuality in the workplace, one expects to see the *always* response level very high, yet it accounts for only 19.6% of the possible responses while 20.7% of responses were “sometimes”. On the Likert scale utilized for this question, the *sometimes* response suggests neutrality, but in this instance it is actually negative as being *sometimes* punctual in the workplace is grounds for termination. From this perspective, the item “responsible and accountable” must also be seen as an area of concern.

### **Employer Perceptions of the Co-op Program**

Employers view the co-op program even more positively than they view student employability skills and feel strongly that expectations placed on them are reasonable, that communication with teachers is very good, and that participation in the program is good for public relations. Other areas score very positively as well, but there are some areas of concern.

One primary concern is the response to the Likert item, “I was advised of the

program expectations.” Some participants indicated that they either were not advised of the requirements or reported that they did not remember. The OMOE requires that co-op employers be thoroughly informed of all of the expectations that are placed on them when accepting a co-op student. This includes a discussion around issues such as safety training, assignments, reporting, insurance, visitation requirements, and evaluation procedures.

Of the employers in Group 3, those who have never participated in co-op, only one reports negative issues being the reason for not taking co-op students. All other employers give no reason to suggest that they will not participate in the future. This highlights the importance of teacher communication, as potential employers such as these are undecided. If employers such as these are approached and are informed of the benefits, goals, responsibilities, and expectations of the co-op program, they may choose to participate.

There was a similar trend in Group 2, as many of the reasons cited for discontinuing their co-op program partnership had nothing to do with negative experiences with students or the program but were the result of either being too busy to mentor a student or not having enough work to keep a student active. These are very good reasons for employers to discontinue the partnership. From an educational perspective, it is not reasonable for a co-op teacher to place a student in an organization in which there are long periods of time when students have nothing to do or where no one is available to mentor the student. Cooperative education is an “education” that occurs in the workplace and as such, needs to have legitimate learning experiences. It is like taking any other secondary school credit, but the learning occurs through practical experience.

This example again illustrates the importance of communication in maintaining a strong and honest relationship between teachers and employers. In my personal experience as a co-op educator, teachers generally appreciate employers who recognize it is a disservice to the student to accept them under these conditions. By maintaining an open line of communication with employers who are currently not in a position to mentor a student, there is still an option to reengage the employer in the future when circumstances have changed and the employer is in a position to provide the needed mentorship to a co-op student.

Although these employers have given good reasons to discontinue participation in the co-op program, other employer comments give reason for concern. One employer noted “there is not enough benefit to our organization.” Co-op education should be a win-win situation; the employer should receive a return on the investment of time spent training, monitoring, and evaluating the student, while the student should be gaining a unique education that simply can not be delivered the same way in a regular classroom. Clearly that was not the case in this particular situation.

Even more concerning are the comments that their reasons for discontinuing participation in the program were because students have demonstrated “lack of respect and consideration, [and] punctuality issues.” This comment is from a long-term supporter of co-op. Situations like this have great repercussions to the strength of the co-op program and to the opportunities for future students. This represents a substantial loss in opportunity for future students as this organization that had accepted “6 – 10” co-op students over a decade but wishes to discontinue their future participation in the program.

Based on my interactions with employers as a co-op teacher, employers often



communicate to one another and can either help or hinder the future of the co-op program. By sharing their positive experiences, employers can help to recruit new organizations. Providing negative program associations serves to drive other employers away from participation in the co-op program.

This point is further illustrated by the recent banning of all co-op participation by a few retail franchises, the result of the number of poor outcomes experienced by different managers over a period of time. Although to date this situation has been limited to only a few chains, it has resulted in a huge loss in opportunity for co-op students interested in this sector. If this trend develops in other retail chains or expands into other sectors, the result could be disastrous for both the co-op program and students.

### **Conclusions**

It is clear that the co-op program in the HWDSB is strong, but there are also areas in which improvements can be made. The two major themes of student preparation and institutional support are universally present in this research and in the literature review. They cross all geographic boundaries and are present in both secondary and postsecondary co-op programs.

All co-op employers at all levels of education have clearly indicated that institutions need to improve in their responsiveness, their communication (most specifically around clarifying expectations), and their preparation of students with respect to employability skills. The difference is that the employability skills defined in secondary co-op are much more basic than those cited in postsecondary research.

### **Sector-Specific Trends**

The Hospitality and Retail sectors indicate a much poorer co-op experience than

other sectors and rate both the student employability skills and the overall co-op program more negatively. Once again, data suggest that the themes for dissatisfaction revolve around a lack of student preparation, student fit, and a lack of basic employability skills. The fit between the student and the placement is the key to improving the outlook of employers in these and other sectors.

### **Reflections on Research Questions**

It is unfortunate that many employers from Groups 2 and 3 chose not to participate in the survey. Data from Group 2 provided support for those from Group 1, but the sample size is too small to be considered representative and further study is needed to accurately determine the reasons that some employers have for choosing not to participate in the co-op program.

This research cannot provide insight as to whether the rapid expansion of co-op Programs in Ontario has affected co-op program effectiveness as there are no baseline data for comparison. This study will serve as the baseline for future research in the HWDSB and may also inspire other boards across Ontario to survey their co-op employers. It can also begin a discourse around developing standard instruments which will not only measure the perspectives of co-op employers but will also measure the impact of co-op on the students who take it, and on the parents of co-op students. As previously noted, “program effectiveness survey[s]” are mandatory in Ontario. It is therefore logical to develop standardized instruments to ensure that data can be compared between and across boards of education, a view supported by other researchers in the literature reviewed.

## **Implications for Teaching Practice**

Many of the areas noted by employers as requiring improvement have also been listed by other employers as areas of strength. This strongly suggests that many teachers are providing a high degree of employer support, are ensuring a high level of student preparedness, and are considering the appropriate student fit when placing students. As previously discussed, co-op teachers are the public face of the school board and potentially liaise with hundreds of organizations and thousands of employers. In order to maintain co-op opportunities for future students, it is essential that employers' needs must first be understood, and then met. This research has identified employers' needs (areas in which improvements could occur). In an effort to maintain a high level of program effectiveness, what follows is a discussion of issues and strategies that might be utilized to ensure that the needs of employers are being addressed. The focus is on the most prevalent areas identified in this study as areas of employer concern. The discussion is not meant to be prescriptive in nature as the intent is to present possible strategies (based on a combination of both data from this study and the researcher's decade long experience teaching co-op) to be considered in order to improve program effectiveness.

### **Employer Support**

Ensuring a high level of communication between teachers and employers should address many of the issues identified surrounding the need for greater institutional support. In my experience, the most effective communication between teachers and employers occurs during face-to-face visits. During the initial employer contact, the OMOE mandates that the expectations on co-op employers be clearly described. In

addition, this meeting can be used to answer employer questions and to ensure the needs of the employer are understood. This communication is the key to ensuring the appropriate student fit that employers have identified as being very important.

Another aspect of communication is ensuring responsiveness when issues arise. One employer commented, “some teachers hardly visit and aren't very responsive if there are issues,” while another noted, “[a] teacher gave me a phone number that was disconnected and when the student was showing sporadically, I could not contact him and he never visited once.” Although the OMOE requires a minimum of six contacts for each co-op student each semester, some students or placements may require many more contacts than the minimum. As identified both in this study and the literature reviewed, it is essential to ensure employers have accurate contact information and that issues are responded to quickly.

The program may also benefit from some standardization with respect to assignment portions of the course, as the following employer statement illustrates; “[I] have dealt with half a dozen schools - each has different project or presentation requirements/evaluation criteria; suggest streamlining.”

### **Student Preparation**

In addition to improved support from institutions, employers feel that students need to be better prepared for interviews and also feel that students need stronger employability skills in order to be successful in the workplace. Dependability and responsibility are basic cornerstones of employability in any workplace and have been identified as specific areas in which students require improvement.

As discussed in the literature review, it is mandatory to cover interview skills and

employability skills in preplacement. The OMOE mandates that a minimum of 15 hours of preplacement occur; however no maximum is stipulated. For some students, 15 hours may not be adequate to prepare them with the key employability skills that they will need in the workplace. In such cases it may be necessary to delay their entry into the workplace until they have demonstrated an appropriate level of readiness. While this seems an easy solution, it could create tremendous difficulties for co-op programs at many schools. The OMOE mandates that once students begin at their co-op placement they must be monitored by teachers. If a teacher is out monitoring students in the workplace, they can not be in class monitoring students who have not yet met the employability standards of preparation.

One strategy to cope with this circumstance involves timetabling two teachers with co-op in the same timeframe(s). If both teachers for example have co-op scheduled in the afternoon, they can team-teach so that one teacher may monitor students in the workplace while the other remains in class working to improve students' employability skills. This strategy may have drawbacks however if there are only two co-op teachers. Since both teachers are tied to the same schedule, the co-op program may run only a half day, thus disenfranchising students who can fit co-op classes only in the other half day schedule.

While extending preplacement is a valid strategy to assist students who are close to being workplace ready, it is not reasonable to utilize with students who have grossly undeveloped employability skills. Students like this have been clearly identified by employers. One participant for example states, "I dont think its the HWDSB that needs improvement I think its the way the students are raised that needs improvement." Two

other employers note, “please tell them to turn off their cell phones or leave them at home” and “I think it would be difficult to change the way the new generation of student feels about job commitment and the importance of a positive attitude.” These comments illustrate an opinion commonly expressed in the data; young people are generally less aware of the importance of employability skills and are also less prepared for the workplace. These students need a more in-depth, holistic approach to workplace preparation than can be provided during preplacement.

One employer suggests, “Co-op should be earned by the student as a privilege and not so much as an option.” But all students will enter the workplace eventually, many of them immediately after leaving high school, so all students may benefit from experience in the workplace. For some students who lack maturity or who struggle with basic workplace skills, co-op may not be an appropriate course selection.

One possible strategy successfully utilized by some teachers in the development of student employability skills is to channel students into taking one of the two secondary school courses that have been designed specifically to prepare students for the workplace. The grade 10 course entitled *Discovering the Workplace* (GLD2O1) and the grade 12 course *Navigating the Workplace* (GLN4O1) make excellent precursors to co-op by acting like scaffolding to prepare unready students.

Regardless of how the preparation occurs, it is clear that employers do not wish to see students in the workplace until they have developed the basic employability skills such as dependability, responsibility, and a strong work ethic. The consequences of sending unprepared students into the workplace are clear from two employer comments. The first explains, “Coop is not the solution to attendance problem students at school. out

of sight, out of mind does not fly with me . . . i WILL NOT EVER take another student from that school.” A second employer describes the ultimate consequence of poor student performance in the workplace: “[If students] don’t show up each day, this can easily dissuade an employer from continuing to support your program and he/she may even talk to their network about the horrors of having a student.” Ultimately, the future of the program rests with current co-op students and the perception that their employers are left with.

Data from this study and from the literature review indicate that a number of employers utilize the co-op program as a hiring strategy. It is therefore in the students’ best interest to possess strong basic employability skills before entering the workplace. Data suggest that this will lead to higher employer satisfaction, higher success for students, and a strong future for the co-op program.

### **Student Fit**

Both reviewed literature and data from this study clearly demonstrate that employers want teachers to send them a student who has an interest in their company and in the duties associated with the position they apply for. They want a student with strong employability skills who possesses the technical and academic background that is required by their organization. Ensuring student fit with an employer involves many areas previously discussed such as communication, student preparation, and employer support. It also however, relates to another issue cited by employers. As one employer stated, “[it is essential to] ensure that you are honest about what students can/can't do.” Placing students in positions for which they are ill suited is good for neither the employer nor the student and can lead to an extremely negative opinion of the co-op program as

previously demonstrated. In situations where students are keen and capable but are perhaps lacking in a few areas, data suggest that a wise strategy is to either place the students somewhere else or to be honest with the employer about the areas in which students need work. The employer is then fully equipped with the knowledge to make an informed decision and is free to decide whether or not they have the time and patience to give the student an opportunity.

If employers choose to take a chance on this type of a student, one strategy which I have successfully utilized in placing at risk students, involves starting the student out in a short one- or two-week work experience. During this time frame the employer can evaluate the student's skills and then make an informed decision about continuing (or not continuing) the co-op partnership. This arrangement ensures transparency and allows the employer to feel empowered should the student not perform well. Offering this type of an arrangement can entice employers who might otherwise have reacted negatively to agree to give the student a trial opportunity. For a student who is dependable and keen, but who perhaps will not interview well or lacks a particular skill that employers can work around, this is an excellent strategy.

### **Hospitality and Retail**

Both of these sectors provided feedback which was much less positive than other sectors and which also had higher levels of dissatisfaction. Most issues centered on students either not being dependable or not having a good work ethic. It is essential therefore that extra care be taken when referring a student to an organization in one of these two sectors. As noted, there have already been retail chains that have chosen to ban co-op from their establishments. Should employers in these sectors continue to



experience dissatisfaction, it is possible that a trend may develop whereby franchises in the Hospitality and Retail sectors completely disassociate themselves from the co-op program.

### **Mentoring Training**

There are two pieces of data which suggest that it may be advisable to initiate some sort of mentoring process. A number of employers expressed the desire to be instructed on the role of mentorship and how to best approach it. There are also a large number of new co-op teachers in the HWDSB. Depending on the interest level from these two groups, it may be advantageous to solicit volunteers from the pool of well-established co-op teachers to serve as mentors. This could both improve the institutional support to employers and may should lead to a higher level of expertise for co-op teachers. It may also be advisable to create a digital mentoring presentation for employers who express an interest in learning how to improve their communication and training techniques.

### **Implications for Future Study**

There are a number of ways that this study can be improved upon. Solutions hinge on improving communication, organization, flexibility, and the research design.

### **Timing of the Survey**

The single biggest issue with this study was the timing of it. Initially, the survey was to be completed in January, which was timed to: allow proper preparation and training of teacher participants; coincide with the regular visitation patterns of teachers (to ensure ease and thus improve compliance); and ensure that employers are approached in period of time when business is relatively slow or moderate. Unfortunately, a lengthy

delay in receiving ethics approval disrupted the timing of the schedule significantly (see suggestion of the creation of a Survey Committee). Improving the timing of future surveys may result in an improvement of the distribution of survey packages by teachers as well as improvement in the participation rates of employers.

### **Flexibility: Use of both Online and Paper Survey Formats**

An issue that was completely unforeseen was the limitation of the online format for the survey. Many retail employers cited this as a reason for nonparticipation during survey package distribution. It was initially hypothesized that the online survey would lead to a very high response rate, as almost everyone has access to the internet. Although virtually every business had computers that were networked, a large number of employers (particularly in the retail sector) indicated that they were either “blocked” from using the internet at work or that they only had intranet access which allowed internal company communication. Although employers understood that they could access the survey from home, it was clear from discussions that the survey was considered part of work and that work was not to be taken home. Based on observations of the principal investigator, the response rate from these employers was exceptionally low. Future studies may benefit by providing employers with the option to participate either with the online survey or via paper format. Although this method of survey distribution was clearly presented to teachers in the current survey, the principal investigator was the only teacher who utilized the paper survey format. Of the eight employers offered the paper format, seven (87.5%) responded.

### **Improving Low Response Rates in Groups 2 and 3**

Another issue of note was a very low response rate for employers from Groups 2

and 3. This was expected, as these employers have no vested interest in improving the co-op program; they had either never participated in co-op or are intending to disassociate themselves from the co-op program in the future.

As noted by Hutchinson in the literature review, employers don't wish to engage in "research" but are often happy to discuss matters regarding co-op. This was often the situation when the principal investigator was presenting the survey package to employers in these groups. Although they had no hesitation in discussing why they will not participate in the co-op program, many declined to even accept a survey package and refused to participate in the study.

One option to improve response rates in these groups is to offer remuneration to participants in the form of a token fee by utilizing gift cards. Another strategy might be to have a significant prize which one randomly selected participant will win at the study's conclusion. It is also possible that higher response rates may be elicited from individuals in this group via a short oral survey. Use of one or a combination of these strategies may lead to higher response rates in these groups.

Replacing the survey method of research may also be a better approach. Based on Hutchinson's observations, a qualitative approach involving deeper discussions with employers regarding their reasons for nonparticipation may lead to richer data from these groups.

### **Development of Other Survey Instruments**

Program effectiveness implies more perspectives than that of the employer. Future surveys can involve co-op students and their parents in an effort to understand whether or not their needs are being met and whether students feel more empowered and

prepared for the workplace as a result of their experiences in the co-op program.

### **Creation of a Survey Committee**

As a final suggestion, it may be advisable to develop a Survey Committee which may include a Superintendent, research officer, Experiential Learning Consultant, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program representative and co-op teachers. This structure will serve to draw together the expertise in the school board, will allow administrative decisions or concerns to be quickly dispensed, will ensure clearer communication, and will bring a greater sense of urgency, thus ensuring timelines are adhered to.

### **Survey Design**

Generally the questionnaire was well designed. This is supported both by the fact that no employers indicated any issues with the survey and that very little data were missing. The average time taken to complete the questionnaire was only 7:17, which was well under the established target time of 10 minutes (a time chosen so as to be minimally invasive to the employer). There are, however, areas in which the survey design and delivery can be improved.

While it was made clear to the participants that the names of employer organizations were to be kept confidential, and while participants were allowed to skip any question, some employers may have declined to participate for fear of being identified. This may have led to a lower response rate.

Having the names of employer organizations is very valuable in many ways. Initially, a participant list can be generated periodically during the live phase of the survey. Utilizing the list, teachers may employ a targeted approach to contact nonparticipants by phone call, email, or visits. Additionally, organizational names may

be used to correlate how different positions in the same organization view co-op. A manager for example may feel differently about the co-op program than does the owner or an employee.

These advantages must be weighed against the possible disadvantage of obtaining a smaller sample size. If employers are asked to identify their organization in future surveys, it may be advantageous to overtly add a comment something to the effect, “(you may skip this question if you would prefer to remain anonymous).”

Although there were very few missing data, and data submitted generally conformed well to the question, some data needed to be cleaned, organized, or grouped. Time spent on some of these tasks may be decreased in the future. For example, questions which ask employers to report numerical values (Q3, Q5a, and Q6) may be redesigned to offer fixed responses (in the form of a range) instead of open-ended input. It may also be possible to design the survey (if the online format is chosen) so that only numerical responses are accepted. These efforts will eliminate the need for much of the data sorting as well as the need to replace text with numerical values. Having the response “I do not know” may also lead to fewer missing data in these questions.

Question 4 initially contained only eight responses (sectors). Having the additional response of “other” available, along with an accompanying open-ended data response, allowed for employers to type a description of their organization if they did not know where their organization fit. Open-ended data then needed to be sorted into existing sectors and new sectors had to be created. Ensuring that Q4 contains a comprehensive list of sectors will decrease the time spent sorting data for this question.

Finally, having Groups 1, 2, and 3 in the same survey may be too ambitious

depending on the number of individuals involved in organizing the survey. As previously alluded to, having different types of approaches to gathering data in each of these groups (qualitative or mixed method approaches) may yield richer data and may lead to a higher response from Groups 2 and 3.

### **Survey Implementation Process**

Response rates were low, as the majority of targeted employers, particularly in Groups 2 and 3, chose not to participate. The principal investigator was responsible for all the survey distribution for both Groups 2 and 3 as well as the survey distribution for his current list of Group 1 employers. Based solely on the experiences of the principal investigator, the highest response rates occurred with employers with whom a strong co-op relationship had previously been established, as they showed much more interest in contributing their thoughts. This again highlights the importance of cultivating community relationships. It also suggests that the best way to attain a high response rate from Group 1 employers is to involve as many teachers as possible, as each will have cultivated their own strong relationships with different employers.

The recruitment practice which had the second best response rate involved contacting potential participants first by phone. During the call, if the employer expressed interest in survey participation, they were given the option to receive either the email or paper copy of the survey package. This method also saved a lot of time driving to various organizations that had no desire to participate in the survey.

The poorest method of recruitment consisted of dropping off survey packages to employers with whom there was no previous relationship, without placing an initial phone call. This method was utilized most often when distributing the survey packages

in three of the largest malls in Hamilton and yielded very little response from employers.

Although the online survey proved to be very efficient and allowed responses and sample size to be tracked in real time, it was a barrier for some employers, particularly those in the retail sector. Future surveys may wish to have both paper and online versions available to ensure participant survey access. Although the ability to download the survey was made available to participants, this option did not prove fruitful. Only one employer chose this option, but the survey arrived past the closing deadline so was not included in the data. It was also unfortunate that the principal investigator did not have direct access to the survey data as the survey progressed. In the future, direct access to the live survey may also lead to observations which can be utilized to maximize survey results. Tracking the turn around times of employers visited may for example lead to improved methods of follow up.

### **Recommendations to the Ministry of Education**

Based on the lack of data available regarding program effectiveness, it is clear that the survey process is not being completed by boards of education as required by OMOE. There are three recommendations for OMOE to improve program effectiveness survey compliance in the future.

Initially, it would be advantageous to clarify timelines around how often program effectiveness surveys need to be completed. At present there are two documents which conflict, one requiring every 3 years, the other every 4 years.

Secondly, as suggested in the literature review, the development of a standardized instrument would allow data to be compared provincially across geographic, political and socio-economic boundaries. This would allow the tracking of trends on a provincial level

and would allow extra support to be given to areas in need. It would also alleviate individual boards of education from having to waste resources independently creating their own instruments. Furthermore, the development of standardized surveys for other co-op stakeholders would provide a larger perspective on “program effectiveness” which should include students and may also include parents and teachers as well.

Finally, OMOE may wish to consider language adding language to the co-op policy document regarding “At Risk” students or programs. Based on both personal experience and open—ended employer data, a typical co-op student today requires much more support when compared with their peers a decade ago. Scaffolding for these types of students therefore requires more institutional time and focus and should be reflected in pupil—teacher ratios with respect to staffing. Furthermore, it may be advantageous for OMOE to develop a more formalized preparation path for at risk students who wish to work towards a co-op placement, but who are severely lacking in the basic workplace skills that employers have identified are key to the student’s success.

### **Three Purposes of this Research**

Existing data on co-op employer perspectives in the HWDSB were either dated or had been collected on a very small scale (only one secondary school). There were also no provincial data available. This research now ensures that there is strong, board-wide data which can be utilized as a baseline for comparison to future studies.

The second purpose of this study is to understand the reasons that some employers had for either discontinuing their co-op partnership (Group 2) or the reasons other employers declined to take on co-op students (Group 3). Although data collected from these two groups do strongly support those of Group 1 and reviewed literature, the



subsample sizes were very small. From this perspective, the study did not adequately document the reasons for employer nonparticipation in the co-op program and further study is required.

The final purpose for this research is to provide a focus and purpose to the HWDSB co-op program. Many implications on both co-op program delivery and student preparation have been presented. These insights will be shared at a board-wide HWDSB co-op meeting in hopes of improving this already strong co-op program thus ensuring that co-op opportunities continue to exist for future students.

### **Personal Learning**

I chose to enroll in the Master of Education Program not for the purpose of career advancement but because it has always been a personal goal of mine. I love co-op and the power it has to change lives! I believe that every student can benefit from participation in co-op, provided they are interested in participating, and are placed in an environment that meets their needs. This thesis began as a labour of love but most certainly became no more than an exercise in frustration management at times. For those of you who will follow on a thesis journey, here are some words of advice from a first-time researcher.

I would advise choosing a small, targeted sample group for your first foray into research. In hindsight, targeting all of these three groups was beyond good sense in many ways. A deeper, richer understanding of a specific group may yield some very valuable data which would be more manageable and may allow your first adventure into research to be that much more enjoyable as a learning experience.

Keep the number of external people you rely on reasonably small.

Communication in this process is essential, and the more people that you involve, the greater the possibility that miscommunication will occur or that someone will miss deadlines and set you back. Of course, the more opinions that are involved, the stronger the work could be, but there is a break-even point.

As I finish writing this thesis and the end is near, I am back to finishing my labour of love. To keep the program strong, employer feedback is essential. My initial intent when starting this process was to create a standardized instrument that educators across the province could utilize. In doing so, it was my hope that boards of education throughout Ontario could use this instrument to collect and compare data with one another. In this way provincial trends could be analyzed and boards could learn from one another.

Although my desire to create a standardized instrument was not to be, I now hope that others will find value in this research and will use it as a starting point to conduct research of their own. It seems bizarre to me that in the literature review there were frequent references that more research into co-op was needed, yet very few have responded to this need. Only time will tell if this thesis will indeed act as a catalyst to inspire others to conduct co-op research, but for now at least, I'm just glad this portion of my M.Ed. journey is almost over!!!

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## Appendix A

### Survey Package With Accompanying Survey

#### Quick Cover Summary Sheet

Dear Employer:

#### **We want to Know Your Thoughts on Co-op!!!**

I've been a Co-op teacher for a decade with the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and am currently a Master of Education student conducting a study to see what you think of the Co-op Program. To gather your thoughts I've created an online survey for employers. The survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

The survey will identify strengths of the HWDSB Co-op Program, as well as possible areas in which improvements can be made based on your input. The goal of the research is to ensure that employers and students are receiving the best Co-op experience possible! Regardless of whether you are a long time employer or you have never had a student before, ***your thoughts on the program are important!***

This is a shortened version of the survey information. Attached to this sheet is an official letter of invitation which includes more details including the ***website link*** and contact information. Please do not hesitate to call or email should you have any questions or concerns about this study. The link is quite complicated, so if you have issues accurately logging in, send me an email. I'll respond with the link so that you can simply click on it and be forwarded to the correct web address immediately.

My supervising Professor, Terry Boak, can be contacted at (phone number), or by email at [tboak@brocku.ca](mailto:tboak@brocku.ca).

Sincerely,

Joe Henderson

Lime Ridge Mall Co-op Teacher  
Master of Education Student  
Principal Investigator for this Research Study  
(905) 383-6665  
[joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca)

## Letter of Invitation

### Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op

March 19, 2012

Dear **valued employer**:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study regarding Cooperative Education. As a Master of Education student in the Department of Education at Brock University, I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Professor Terry Boak on the perspectives of employers in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) Co-op Program.

I have also been a Co-op teacher for a decade and know what a valuable and transformational experience it can be for many students. Co-op allows students the opportunity to gain valuable work experience and can become the driving force that changes the direction of their future. It is only through the opportunities provided by employers that Co-op can continue to exist and flourish.

### **Study Overview**

The purpose of this study is to gather data on *employer perspectives* on the Cooperative Education Program in the HWDSB. The survey is an attempt to identify **strengths** of the program, as well as possible **areas in which improvements can be made**. All findings will be shared with the HWDSB Experiential Learning Consultant, Rich Neufeld, and all Co-op teachers. With this knowledge, teachers can attempt to provide a better experience for both the employers and their students.

### **Your Involvement**

For employers who have partnered with the board, the survey includes questions about your organization and its history with the Cooperative Education Program. You will also have an opportunity to provide feedback on your experiences with the Co-op Program as a whole as well as your experience with the students you've had. The questionnaire takes less than 10 minutes to complete.

For organizations who have never partnered with the board, the survey will only take about 2 minutes, and includes a question about the reasons surrounding your decision.

If you agree to participate, you may log into the survey website in one of two ways.

- 1) Goto HWDSB website [www.hwdsb.on.ca](http://www.hwdsb.on.ca)
  - a. Click on the programs tab which is located at the center of the webpage
  - b. Click on the Co-op tab which is the fourth tab down on the left hand side of the page
  - c. Click on the link to the Co-op Employer Survey
  
- 2) Type the following web link into your browser

<http://surveys.hwdsb.on.ca/perseus/se.ashx?s=6A0A4CEE690225BC>

The website will only be active until **4 p.m. Friday, April 13, 2012**. By logging in to this website you are agreeing to participate in this research. Participation in the survey is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to your participation. You are never required to identify yourself and the name of your organization will remain confidential and will not appear in any publication resulting from this study.

By agreeing to participate in the study you will receive a copy of the results in a summary form. If you would be interested in greater detail, an electronic copy (e.g., PDF) of the entire thesis can be made available to you.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information about participation, please contact me at **(905) 383-6665** or by email at [joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca).

You can also contact my supervising Professor, Terry Boak, by telephone at (phone number), or by email at [tboak@brocku.ca](mailto:tboak@brocku.ca).

If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, contact the Research Ethics Office of Brock University at (905) 688-5550x3035 or via email [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca). This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance both through the HWDSB, and through the Research Ethics Office at Brock University file number **11-083 - BOAK**. The final decision to participate is yours. Thank you in advance for your interest and assistance with this research.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Henderson  
M.Ed. Candidate



## Survey

### **Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey**

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) and Brock University are interested in your experience with the Cooperative Education Program (Co-op). We would be grateful if you could complete this short survey. Responses from placement supervisors are vital and will help to identify areas of strength as well as areas of improvement. HWDSB will use this information to make the necessary changes to improve the quality of the Co-op Program.

Please complete this survey to the best of your knowledge. The survey is voluntary and should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Results will be reported in summary form and no individual employer or employing agency will be identified. If you are associated with multiple HWDSB schools, you only need to complete **one** survey. For the purpose of this survey, the term "organization" is used generally to refer to where the Co-op placement takes place.

**Please complete this survey by April 13th 2012 at 4:00 p.m.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact: Joe Henderson at 905-383-6665 or by email at [joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca) or Dr. Terry Boak at (phone number) or by email at [tboak@brocku.ca](mailto:tboak@brocku.ca)

Please mail your completed survey to HWDSB research department at:

E-BEST 2nd Floor East  
100 Main Street West  
Hamilton, On L8H 1H6  
Attention: Research Officer

## **Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

There are no anticipated risks to participation and all of the information provided is confidential. No individual person or organization will be identified in any way in the written portion of the research.

If at any time during the survey you wish to withdraw, you may stop the survey and your data will be discarded. At the end of the survey you will have the option to request a copy of the survey results.

I have read the information letter and I:

- agree to participate in this study
- do not agree to participate in this study ***Please proceed to page 10.***

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

### Part A: About You

1. What is the name of your organization?

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2. What is your position within the organization?

- Owner
- Manager/Supervisor
- Recruitment/Resources Personnel
- Employee

3. Approximately, how long has your organization been in operation?

# of years \_\_\_\_\_

4. What sector best describes your organization?

- Business (e.g., Banking, Accounting)
- Retail
- Education
- Hospitality (e.g., Foods, Restaurant, PSW)
- Information Technology
- Medical
- Trade
- Government/Not for Profit Agency
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

### Part B: Partnering with HWDSB

5. Have you ever partnered with HWDSB for Co-op?

- Yes *If yes please proceed to question 5a*
- No *If no please proceed to question 5b*

5a. How many years have you been providing a Co-op placement as a part of HWDSB's Cooperative Education Program?

# of years \_\_\_\_\_ *Please proceed to question 6*

5b. You have indicated that as an employer, you have never partnered with HWDSB. Please indicate all of the contributing factors for that decision.

*Upon completion of question 5b, please proceed to page 10*

- At my organization there is not enough work to keep a student busy
- Liability issues
- Internal union issues
- Organization has a policy against having Co-op students
- Students do not have the specific skills required for our workplace
- There is too much responsibility involved in taking on a student
- There is not enough benefit to our organization
- Students require too much supervision
- Other

## **Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey**

**6. On average, how many HWDSB Co-op students do you typically accept into your organization each year?**

# of students \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Since beginning your participation in the Co-op Program, what is the TOTAL number of students that your organization has accepted?**

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-19
- 20 or more

**8. How many Co-op students have been hired by your organization (either full-time or part-time)?**

- 0
- 1-2
- 3-5
- 6 or more offer(s) made but student(s) did not accept
- not applicable (e.g., Elementary school placements cannot hire students)

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

### Part C: About your Experience with the Co-op Students.

9. Based on your overall experience, the students from HWDSB generally:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very Often	Always	Don't know
are respectful and courteous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
are responsible and accountable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
are punctual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
are organized	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
demonstrate good work ethic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
can work independently	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
can work well with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
show initiative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
work hard to achieve goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
work safely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

10. Please respond to each statement below based on your experiences with HWDSB's Cooperative Education Program.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I was advised of the program expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What was expected of me as an employer was reasonable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Communication with the Co-op teacher was sufficient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Co-op students' skills improved throughout the course of the semester	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have hired Co-op students or will consider hiring them in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involvement in the program was beneficial for our organization	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participating in the program was good for public relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

11. The number of contacts (visits and/or phone calls) from the school was:

- Too few  
 Satisfactory  
 Too many

12. Indicate any strengths of HWDSB's Cooperative Education Program.

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13. List ways in which HWDSB's Co-op Program could be improved.

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14. Specific Comments.

Remember, your organization's name will not be identified in any way, so please feel free to provide specific feedback about any aspect of HWDSB's Co-op Program.

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## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

15. I would participate in the Co-op Program again and will accept Co-op students in the future.

- Yes *Your survey is complete, please proceed to the page 10.*
- No *Please proceed to question 16*

16. Please indicate all of the contributing factors for your decision not to participate in the Co-op Program.

- There is not enough work to keep a student busy
- Liability issues
- Internal union issues
- Organization has a policy against having Co-op students
- Students do not have the specific skills required for our workplace
- There is too much responsibility involved in taking on a student
- There is not enough benefit to our organization
- Students require too much supervision
- Other (please explain)

## Employer Perspectives on Secondary School Co-op Placement Supervisor Survey

*The survey is officially complete. Thank you for your time.*

Results from this survey will be used to help improve employer and student experiences, and to strengthen the Co-op Program in HWDSB.

If you have any questions or concerns about HWDSB's Co-op Program, please contact Mr. Rich Neufeld at (905) 527-5092 ext. 2256 or via email [rich.neufeld@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:rich.neufeld@hwdsb.on.ca).

If you have any questions/concerns about this study, please contact Mr. Joe Henderson at (905) 383-6665 or via email [joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca)

If you are interested in receiving the study's findings please select 'yes' in the question below and provide your contact information.

Please note that confidentiality is very important to us. To ensure that your comments remain anonymous your contact details will be saved in a separate location from your survey responses.

Results from this study will be available by October 2012.

Thank you!

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

- Yes **Please provide your contact information below.**  
 No *You're done! Thank you for your time.*

Contact details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Email Communications

#### **1) Email from Experiential Learning Consultant to all Co-op Teachers to Solicit Names of Employers Who have Discontinued Participation in the Co-op Program**

From: Rich Neufeld Wednesday, March 23, 2011 11:47:08 AM  
Subject: Co-op employer survey  
To: Co-op teachers HWDSB Co-operative Education

Hello.

Joe Henderson from the LimeRidge Mall program is conducting some research as part of a Masters he is working on. The research includes gathering some information from employers about why they may NOT be involved in high school Co-op any more. The information he gathers, and what he learns from it will be shared with us, so I would encourage you to help him out.

For now, he is looking to gather the names of all of the employers who have stopped taking Co-op students. If you know of any employers who do not do co-op at all, or have done so in the past, but are choosing not to, can you please send us their names and contact info.

Also....if you can provide us with any anecdotal comments about why an employer stopped taking students, we'd appreciate that.

## 2) Email From E-BEST Encouraging the Pursuit of this Thesis to the Ethics Committee Stage

From: Dana Liebermann Wednesday, June 15, 2011 2:22:44 PM  
 Subject: Re: Questionnaires for co-op employers - thesis for Brock  
 To: Joe Henderson Rich Neufeld

Hello Joe and Rich,

Joe, thanks for sending the documents relating to your thesis. It looks like it will be a very interesting project.

Rich, thanks for contacting E-BEST. As Trish mentioned, all external research projects must undergo a review before they can take place within HWDSB.

I've read over the materials that Joe sent and was left with some initial questions and comments:

- Nature of the surveys.  
 The surveys are very similar to one developed a number of years ago by our department for internal purposes only. As this project is for a thesis, I would recommend changing the nature of some of the questions given that your final document will not be limited to internal distribution. For example, you may want to consider not asking which other school boards a company has partnered with. Given that data was collected using a similar survey, you may wish to look at those findings to help you in the development of your questionnaires.
- Sample size. How many companies will you be approaching? How will you select them from the database?
- Approaching employers. The surveys should come from Joe as a M.Ed. student, not just as a staff member. You will need to draft a cover letter to send to employers that would accompany the surveys.
- Dissemination of findings. How will the results be shared with HWDSB? Will they also be shared with employers?
- Approval. Once you submit your full project package to E-BEST (which should include the REB package from Brock) we will conduct a formal review. Once this review is complete, I will seek approval from a member of senior admin.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best regards,

Dana

Dana Liebermann Finestone, Ph. D.  
 Research Officer  
 Evidence-Based Education and Services Team (E-BEST)

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board  
 Maple Lane Learning Centre  
 20 Miller Drive, Ancaster, ON, L9G 2J1

### 3) Email to all Co-op Teachers Asking for Input on Survey Materials

From: Joe Henderson Monday, March 05, 2012 1:57:08 PM  
 Subject: Co-op Supervisor Survey - It is finally here!  
 To: Rich Neufeld  
 Cc: Co-op teachers  
 Attachments: Quick Cover Summary Sheet - To cover the Letter of Invitati.doc  
 Microsoft Word Document 28K  
 Letter of Invitation.doc Microsoft Word Document 36K  
 DRAFT\_ONLINE\_SURVEY\_MArch2\_VRB 2 2.doc Microsoft Word Document 84K

Good afternoon everyone! I hope all is well so far in semester 2.

As many of you know I've been working almost a year now on my thesis which involves surveying HWDSB Co-op Supervisors to see their perspectives on Co-op. What I've attached here is the final copies of the materials that will be circulated to employers. There is a small window of opportunity to make changes to the materials. Please feel free to try out the online survey and check the attached materials. E-mail me any feedback before Friday AM and I'll pass them along to EBEST if changes are required. If you have any questions/concerns, let me know. Here is the link to the functioning online survey so that you can see it and try it out (if you hold down the control key, then left click on it, it will take you there). No data will be collected at this time, so feel free to type in whatever you want while you try it.

<http://surveys.hwdsb.on.ca/perseus/se.ashx?s=6A0A4CEE690225BC>

At this point, the plan is this....

- 1) Feedback will be closed this Friday morning (March 9th), and changes will be made (if necessary) Friday afternoon.
- 2) Copies of the "quick cover summary sheet" and the "letter of invitation" (attached above) will be made available to all co-op teachers during the Co-op meeting after March Break (March 21st)
- 3) Teachers who choose to participate will then have 3-4 weeks to drop off the letters to the employers during regular co-op visits and can encourage each employer to add their perspectives.
- 4) The online survey opens March 19th and will close 4 weeks later on April 13th.

I'll be going into this in more detail during the meeting so if all isn't clear, don't worry. In the mean time, if you could take some time to look at the materials and either provide feedback or forward your questions, I'd really appreciate it.

Incidentally, the survey is not being distributed in paper form. If employers wish to do it on paper (and I'm not sure why they would, but they might) there will be a link to download a pdf version (or a teacher could download it for them if they wished) which employers can mail directly into EBEST.

Thanks in advance to all who choose to participate. The more data, the more conclusive the results and the better we'll accurately know what employers think about Co-op.

Have a great day,

Joe

Joe Henderson  
 Lime Ridge Mall Co-op Teacher  
 (905) 383-6665

**4) Emergency Email to Teachers Requesting They Hold Off on Survey Package Distribution Due to a Printing Error**

From: Joe Henderson 3/22/2012 7:45:05 AM  
Subject: Please DON'T distribute the Co-op survey materials you received yesterday!!!  
To: Rich Neufeld  
Cc: Co-op teachers

There is an error in them and I'm working with EBEST to try to correct things. I'm very sorry for this, but the web link printed in the materials is now incorrect. Please hold off distributing the materials for now and I will update this as soon as possible... hopefully this morning.

Yesterday in response to many discussions I had with various individuals, I crafted an email that you can simply forward to employers if you know their email addresses. It has the link to the survey imbedded within it so that employers can simply click on it. It will also have the survey information sheets attached so will have everything needed by the employer in one email.

I'm very sorry for this inconvenience and am working hard to quickly fix the situation. As soon as I have confirmation on a fix, I'll email the solution, and will also send a 2nd email that you will be able to send to employers.

Thanks,

Joe

Joe Henderson  
Lime Ridge Mall Co-op Teacher  
(905) 383-6665

## 5) Email to Co-op Teachers which Includes Fix for Printing Error

From: Joe Henderson Thursday, March 22, 2012 10:28:16 AM  
 Subject: Correction required on the envelopes and materials distributed yesterday  
 To: Rich Neufeld  
 Cc: Co-op teachers

Hello again everyone.

### THE MISTAKE

First off, I'd like to apologize for an error in the survey materials distributed yesterday. The website link for the survey is incorrect on all of the letters and envelopes. When the survey went live from the test mode, the link to the survey was changed. As a result, the old link will lead employers to a webpage that says, "This survey is now closed. Thank you for your interest.", so if anyone is reporting this message, it is the old link that is the issue. I deeply regret having inaccurate information after all of Sandi's hard work preparing it for the meeting yesterday, and apologize again for this. To be clear, this is not a mistake of the co-op department.

### THE FIX

Since we don't wish to reprint all the materials you have a few choices of what to do about the envelopes distributed yesterday.

- 1) Cross off the long link listed on the letters and envelopes and employers will have to use the option to follow the other procedure - they go to the board website, then Programs, then Co-op
- 2) Cross off the incorrect link and write in the link below, which is much more user friendly link to be sure. (This may be a good job for a co-op student who prints neatly and needs some hours)

<http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/programs/coop/>

As many of you discussed with me at the Co-op meeting, I will be following up this email with one that you can send directly to employers, or print off yourself for distribution. It will contain the 2 information letters to employers (now with the accurate link) and will also have a live link imbedded that employers can just click on and go immediately to the survey.

- 3) You may print off a new version of the letter, etc from the email that will follow this one in a few seconds.
- 4) You may choose to email the employer directly.

Again, I'm very sorry for this error and want to thank Rich and Sandi for their hard work on printing and organizing all of these materials.... this error is in no way a reflection on them! My goal from the beginning of this was to collect some great data in a way that is easy and reasonable for both our employers and for us as teachers. I hope that this error in no way hinders this process.

Stay tuned for the followup email to this which contains all of the corrected letters and links (which you can then forward to employers or print out if need be).

Thanks,

Joe

Joe Henderson

**6) Email to Co-op Teachers to Determine Participation and Response Rate**

From: Joe Henderson Sunday, April 15, 2012 7:11:52 PM  
Subject: Co-op Survey officially completed ... one last piece of data needed  
To: Rich Neufeld Co-op teachers

The survey closed Friday and has a total of 100 usable responses which EBEST tells me is quite good. Thanks to all who participated! So far the data looks to be excellent.

I need one more bit of information if you wouldn't mind. Because this is a thesis level of research, I'm supposed to calculate both the number of teachers who chose to participate and the total number of surveys distributed (so I can calculate what % was returned.

I fully recognize that this was voluntary and your lack of participation is not a blight at all....this is confidential. Only respond to me and not everyone (if you choose to respond to this email). If you wouldn't mind, could you please email me with 2 things...

- 1) the number of teachers who participated in distributed survey packages in your school (emailing or paper version distribution counts)
- 2) How many survey packages that you distributed broken down by type.

For example:

3 teachers participated

51 paper versions, 22 email packages.

Just to be clear this is anonymous ... and don't feel bad if you didn't have the time, or didn't feel comfortable with distribution. I'd appreciate an email from as many as possible.

Hope you all had a great weekend... and thanks for the time and indulgence on this survey,

Joe

Joe Henderson  
Lime Ridge Mall Co-op Teacher  
(905) 383-6665



**7) Written Permission to Use the HWDSB Name in the Thesis**

From: Peter Joshua Friday, June 01, 2012 11:03:53 AM  
 Subject: Re: Thesis Reminder...use of HWDSB name  
 To: Joe Henderson

Hi Joe,

I am fine with you using the board name in your thesis since you are not only a researcher, but also an employee of our board.

(portions of this email have been omitted as they do not pertain to the permission)

**8) Written Permission to Reference the HWDSB Ethics Email**

From: Rossana Bisceglia Friday, June 01, 2012 2:02:18 PM  
 Subject: Re: Permission to copy your email in thesis appendix  
 To: Joe Henderson

Joe Henderson writes:  
 Hi Rossana.

Is it alright to copy the email you sent me confirming that the ethics committee had approved my thesis?

Joe Henderson

That's fine, thanks Joe

**9) Written Permission to Reference the 2008 Steeds & E-BEST Survey**

From: Dana Liebermann Thursday, May 31, 2012 8:26:35 PM  
 Subject: Re: Written permission to use EBEST name attached to the 2008 survey  
 To: Joe Henderson

Hello Joe,

As we discussed, we would require that you reference the 2008 survey, from which your survey was derived, and cite it as having been developed by E-BEST in partnership with other stakeholders.

(portions of this email have been omitted as they do not pertain to the permission)

**10) Written Permission to Use the Steeds & E-BEST Survey from 2008**

From: Sandra Steeds Thursday, May 31, 2012 10:54:19 AM  
Subject: Confirmation to use my Cooperative Education surveys/reports from 2008  
To: Joe Henderson

On March 10, 2011 I gave my permission for Joe Henderson to use the following information for his graduate paper:

use my Cooperative Education employer/student surveys from 2008  
reference or change the surveys in any way necessary  
use any information from my written report from the 2008 survey

Please contact me if you have any questions/concerns.

Sandra Steeds

(portions of this email have been omitted as they do not pertain to the permission)

**11) Written Permission to Use Proper Name in the Acknowledgments**

From: Sandra Kelly Tuesday, May 29, 2012 11:09:55 AM  
Subject: Re: Requesting permission to use your name in my thesis  
To: Joe Henderson

Good Day Mr. Henderson,

I would be honoured and I give you permission to use my name in the acknowledgement page of your thesis.

Sandi Kelly

## 12) Written Permission to Reference Rich Neufeld in Thesis

On 2012-05-29, at 9:51 AM, "Joe Henderson" <[joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca](mailto:joe.henderson@hwdsb.on.ca)> wrote:

Good morning Rich.

In my thesis, I make reference to your position and assistance with my survey often. I thank you in the acknowledgement page of my thesis.

I've just been told that I can't use personal names anywhere unless I have written permission (email response can suffice).

If you are ok with me using your name in the thesis, please let me know.

Thanks,

Joe

Absolutely! Consider this as permission

Rich Neufeld

(portions of this email have been omitted as they do not pertain to the permission)

**Appendix C**  
**Ethics Clearance**

File # 11-083 Boak

## HWDSB Ethics Approval

Friday, February 10, 2012 12:28:11 PM

**From:** Rossana Bisceglia  
**Subject:** YOUR STUDY  
**To:** Joe Henderson  
**Cc:** Dana Liebermann

Hello Joe,

I hope all is well with you. I have some good news. Peter Joshua has approved your study and I have just finished constructing your online survey. The link is below.

Over the weekend can you please test the survey to ensure that the respondents will be taken to the appropriate questions/pages. Also can you please proof-read for spelling errors and typos. I am happy to edit any aspect of the survey (e.g., wording of things, colour etc). Once we have finalized it I'll give you a word form which we'll use to create the pdf for individuals who prefer to mail in the survey.

I am meeting with Dana on Tue, so once she's had a chance to review it and you are fine with it we can post it on the HWDSB website and you'll be all ready to go.

Last, please comment on the end date that I selected, we can change it if it's not an ideal date.

Best, and here is the link: <http://surveys.hwdsb.on.ca/perseus/asrshx?sr=8A044CEE690225BC>

Rossana

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## Appendix D

### Raw Data from Open Ended Comments - Q12 – Q14

\*\*\* For reasons of confidentiality, all identifying names of organizations, teachers or employers have been removed and replaced with generic information in square brackets

#### Q12 - Strengths

possible future employees  
 giving back to community  
 enriching students total experience in the future work place  
 creating new professionals  
 Students are interested in learning and grow from their experiences.  
 Excellent level of teacher support!  
 Excellent learning opportunity for students  
 Experiential learning and preview of potential employees..  
 Easy access to high school teachers  
 Work assignments for students  
 Specific skills placement has improved the candidates submitted for the organization.  
 Frequent contact and face-to-face meetings arranged by co-op teachers. Objectives of program are clear on evaluation forms. Program includes some structure eg major project or presentation, and weekly journals. Students always arrive well prepared on first day with all evaluation forms, WSIB, teacher contact info, etc.  
 That the students get a great perception of the roles that we have in the hospitals. It is a great experience for everyone!!!  
 Provides a learning opportunity for interested students. Is very helpful and fulfilling to work with a student for an entire semester.  
 Always willing to be available for questions even beyond the COOP program. Worked very hard to help students achieve their goals jointly with employer. The student match for the program was very good.  
 gets the students motivated  
 Gave students first hand experience to know if they like the trade before putting too much time into it  
 Lining up students with the skill sets or interests that apply to the tasks and duties that will be their responsibility.  
 Teachers  
 The teachers try to make sure that the students are strong academically, which is a necessary in this line of work, so they're not being placed inappropriately  
 I enjoy opening my door to all students because at one point, I too was a student! We all deserve a chance to show our strengths and learn how to improve. We all have to start somewhere!  
 Although we have had students with some issues, they have been eager to learn, proud of doing a job well done and have contributed to the success of projects they have been involved in.  
 work and learn program is tremendous. The major strength of this program is its leader [Teacher Name]. Supports the development and skill set of youth in need.  
 Additional strengths of the co-op program are the connections into next steps for youth in the community (i.e. apprenticeship programs)  
 Throws students into the work force  
 Good for the students. True meaning of work environment  
 Some of the students are good role models for my students. also allows coops to get a feel of if they can do the job in the future

i enjoy that the students are involved right there in the program and experience what the job really entails especially if they decide to do that career in the future  
 It is good for a student to experience a co-op placement because it gives them a chance to see if this is the field they would like to continue. It is great to have them come back as ECE students because they realized that this is what they want to do in life. The students are also a good help for the teachers.

Great way to reach out to the neighbouring community and finding prospective candidates for hire

Giving students a chance to work in a "real life" experience is great because it can help students with the direction of their career path.

Hands on experience is a great benefit to students.

i have not had a coop student from the HWDSB in awhile. so i will reserve comment

Easy to post opportunities. Have been sent good students. Easy to contact co-op teacher.

Benefits of Program for Student:

1. An opportunity to experience first-hand the day-to-day operation of a [organization] (not live TV or movies).
2. Students earn credits toward graduation diploma upon full completion of placement.
3. This placement helps students to develop job skills and gain practical experience.
4. Opportunity for student to explore potential career options.

Benefits of Program for Employer:

1. Participation in the Co-op Program allows our Service to play an active role in educating our youth.
2. It allows us to give back to the community we serve.
3. We are able to consider fresh ideas from students.
4. We have the opportunity to promote a career in [occupation name] to potential candidates.

The co-op program allows students to learn more about a career they may be considering and allows us to help them make that choice.

The strength of the program is the opportunity that both students and employers have to gain experience and to transfer knowledge and skills that can be passed along to the future workforce.

Provides students, possible, potential employees with the opportunity to decide if [this career] is the career for them.

appreciate the opportunities given to students to learn outside of the classroom

Its a good learning opportunity for students entering the work force

I have got to know many of the Cooperative Education Teachers very well, so it makes that caliber of students they send me for interviews already "more suitable" for the position.

Attempted to relate the job placement with the students area of post-secondary interest.

Students seem well prepared and eager to be at the workplace. I think a good screening and matching takes place.

promoting young student to join our industry

I love the Co-op Program overall and think it is a win/win. The student gets a lot out of it, and I can hire competent ones because I know they'll do a great job. Communication with one teacher was amazing, but some teachers (and I'm not sure that they are HWDSB as one was a [identifier removed] school) don't communicate well at all.

Great opportunity for young adults to be leaders and provides students with the opportunity to experience a possible career choice without "risk"

great program that I would encourage all secondary students to take part in

The teachers that are involved prepare the students very well not only from a academic persepective but also from a work environement one. They actively engage the hospital in the program which includes a real interview for a psotion conducted by hospital staff.

HELPS US TO HAVE A DIFFERENT PERECTIVE ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND HELPS THE KIDS TO GET AN IDEA WHAT THIS TRADE SINCE THE GOVERNMENT ALMOST

COMPLETELY REMOVE TRADES TRAINING FROM THE CURRICULUM WHAT A SAD DAY THAT WAS AND CONTIUES TO BE

Get opportunity for students to have hands on experience with working with children. To see if they would like to pursue a career in the field of Early Childhood Education

The Co-op program is essential to providing "real world" experiences for students. It is also important for employers - to think about the kind of young person they might personally want to hire.

It is great. My residents get so much more socialization with people from the community on an intergenerational level.

Great opportunity for youth

Lets students see the work force in a true light

Matching students with Job Realities. Good Communications when needed.

Concerns for students.

The current program seems very strong, organized, and accountable.

good for educating student about the work force & basic knowledge of the specified industry(s), learning new skills & applications. teaches responsibility, community involvement & helps to acquire industry contacts.

I feel this is an excellent opportunity for students to acquire hands-on experience in a field they wish to pursue. It is also wonderful to have an extra person to help out, and often the students will go to the co-op student for help first because they are closer in age and they feel less intimidated.

Good communication with the coop teacher throughout the placement terms. The teacher is very helpful in identifying with issues and implementing ways to fix any areas in which the student may be lacking.

building our future workforce

Outlined Job expectations. Responsiveness to all our concerns, both Positive and Negative. HWDSB has been flexible in permitting students to work with us after school hours and in working around in-school sessions.

Co-op teachers are very involved

Students are very motivated

Students who work better in a hands-on environment than a classroom are given a fair chance and often excel.

One teacher in particular is very accessible and honest. Most students are great!

Great opportunity for students to get a better picture of what it is like to work with children.

Students learning new skills

Helping them decide what job they want

The extra help is always appreciated



### Q13 – Areas for Improvement

students should have name tags from their schools  
 leave cell phones in school bags  
 don't wait until last day for evaluations to be completed

I'd like to see a bit more training for the mentors

Expectations surrounding missed days

Ensure that the students are being interviewed for the specific placement where they are planning to further their education/work career.

Have dealt with half a dozen schools - each has different project or presentation requirements/evaluation criteria; suggest streamlining. Also, some students arrive very under-prepared for the interview: eg not knowing anything about the employer or the profession, or not having a copy of their resume with them. Suggest providing students with info/training on what's expected, and could even follow up with a sample of employers afterwards (one school did this last fall - brief survey to be faxed back).

none at this time

Log sheet expectations - if the sheets are being filled in incorrectly/not well enough, it is our responsibility to correct this or the CO-OP supervisors?

No suggestions. I am very happy with my experience with the COOP program.

incentives that can be used and given to the employer explained and described

I don't think it's the HWDSB that needs improvement I think it's the way the students are raised that needs improvement

More students interested in the position being offered in our group - business & finance.

start co-op programs earlier

There is a lot of variation between schools on the evaluation forms. A standard form would be helpful

Better screening as to placements and more consequences for not following through on their commitment to the agency.

encouraging relationship building between local secondary schools and neighbouring businesses and NFPs.

More communication with employers before the co-op term starts, just call to see if they would be interested in taking on a co-op student

More follow-up

Help students find placement

incentive based

can't think of any ways!

We are pleased with the Co-op Program.

Giving the students a realistic view of what they will be doing, so they know what to expect and not be bored while in their placement

By making sure the students they send out on placement ARE reliable, punctual and respectful.

Make sure they match students to a placement they are passionate about.

our industry is EXTREMELY safety oriented. the following items are related to my requirements

1. screen the candidates for academics. if they are struggling in school, dumping them on an employer is not an option
2. prep them for the interview. have them research the company they are going to interview for the coop term. the first question i ask is "what do you know about our company" or "have you looked up our company on google?". if they answer no, interview is done. if they do not have time to carry out a simple google search, i do not have time to finish the interview. simple as that.
3. make sure they dress for the interview. first impressions
4. teach them interview etiquette. slouching in the chair during the interview is not going to help
5. do not send someone to us in [industry name], that you wouldn't want making your coffee or donuts. if you screw up here, you die. you break a donut, you get to eat it. i can show you an

example of what happens when someone walks in front of a [industry equipment]. the aftermath is disturbing.

6. ambition and drive are great, but so is a genuine interest in [this career]. the student that builds [identifiers removed] are excellent candidates.

7. coop is not the solution to attendance problem students at school. out of sight, out of mind does not fly with me. i get one of these type coop students, i WILL NOT EVER take another student from that school. period.

8. vet the students resume. when i get them via email, i send them back with corrections. spelling our companies name wrong does not indicate research on the students part.

9. do not expect placement without the interview process being carried out. if you do, you will be disappointed. i cannot add a coop student on the floor on the word of someone else - they get hurt or killed, so does our company, both reputation and financially.

Would like to see what other organizations offer that are in a similar field as us.

Teachers and students need to pay more attention to detail and accept more responsibility when making application for a Co-op student placement. HWDSB & potential employers do not have time to chase after students and teachers for required documentation and/or for the student to attend interviews as scheduled in the job descriptions. Attention to detail is a reflection on whether student is suitable for a placement or not. Some teachers also need to brush up on the process.

We are comfortable with the task of supervising but hear from others that they don't know "how" to work with students. The expectation of mentorship should involve some training for mentors.

We have provided a few suggestions on how the program could be improved:

1. Teachers who prepare their students, for the real-world, through pre-placement activities, greatly increase the success and the expectations of the student. We have seen, over the years, an extremely weak work ethic which takes time to engender into a healthy one. If teacher's had experts/guests into their pre-placement activities it would reinforce the importance of a work ethic. As, in all honesty, it's the work ethic that allows for increased responsibilities, tasks and opportunities. I don't necessarily think that this is valued with students.

2. The strength of the co-op program, in most cases, is dependent on the teachers that are allocated to administer, manage and track the student. In our experience, HWDSB co-op teachers (for the most part) are dedicated to ensuring that the appropriate match is made. We have though, however, received students who were not interested in the placement which made for a difficult semester. It is important to note that this is crucial for employers, when they are welcoming a student(s) into their place of business.

3. Making both teachers and students aware of the additional amount of work that co-op students bring to an organization. This would perhaps create a different sense of responsibility and interest when students are being placed within the community. If an employer has spent a lot of time and energy planning and preparing for a student, and, for example they don't show up each day, this can easily dissuade an employer from continuing to support your program and he/she may even talk to their network about the horrors of having a student.

More communication with the employer to see if the needs of the student are being met.

More communication between the placement, teacher and student. I have had very little contact with most teachers, and the communication fro the students is poor.

Make sure that students know the expectations of working in a store placement

More detailed explanations of what is expected for Coop students final projects.

Screening students/informing employers of students history (criminal, or behavioral).

This is my first year with having a co-op student. I think by the end of the co-op term I may have better input into the process.

more public education

Ensuring that you are honest about what students can/can't do. Ensure that you are available and respond to issues/questions quickly. One teacher gave me a phone number that was disconnected and when the student was showing sporadically, I could not contact him and he never visited once! In the first few years I got great students. In the past year and a bit, I've had students that are not ready for the workplace and they have not worked out.

very happy with my experiences

N/A

Working very well!

**WE ARE PLEASED WITH THE PROCEESS**

I think it would be difficult to change the way the new generation of student feels about job commitment and the importance of a positive attitude.

Possibly to make sure they really understand the tasks/department and or business the student will be going to, ie; perhaps have a little more understanding of software programs the student might be working with or other "special" skills the employer is looking for more active involvement in the placement of the students & employers, i.e. employers should have the opportunity to speak in front of the class so it's a two way street.

Cannot comment at this time

Give students a better understanding of expectations prior to starting.

Maybe better interviewing for the placement on the teacher's end.

none i am extremely happy with 17 years worth of taking on students

seems to work well. at the end of the day it is up to the employer to teach and let the student learn new skills. at the same time the student must be open to learning and accept new challenges.

I honestly can't think of anything. I just wish more students participated in the program.

Any ways in which the HWDSB can assist in ensuring that the coop students understand that the position needs to be treated like job vs. just another class. I feel the understanding of this needs to be clear in the student's mind in order to ensure that student punctuality, professionalism and work ethic are at the appropriate required levels.

rotational experiences not only half day placements

I think the weekly sheets the students use are not a good medium to use for their thoughts and experiences. It leads them to brief and perfunctory comments

Other biz owners i know are afraid to take on students because they are unsure that they will have enough worthwhile tasks for the students. This means you may be getting an overrepresentation of employers who see co-op as free labour rather than a reciprocal relationship where the student is learning from varied experience. I have my students do everything from emptying the garbage to assisting on shoots, to entering accounting information. It may be helpful to create a seminar or web site that outlines categories of tasks and their benefit to students and employers both, so that employers are not lost about what to ask, and students are not bored or understimulated.

Some teachers hardly visit and aren't very responsive if there are issues.

## Q14 – Specific Comments

Ensure that the teachers emphasize the requirements of the placement concerning confidentiality, punctuality and communication. If there is a concern with a student, we want to be sure that it is addressed by the teacher/school. Finally, please tell them to turn off their cell phones or leave them at home!

[Organization Name]. Very happy to provide my name. I hope one day that I am able to be a colleague to my very first COOP student [student name]. She is going places !!!

if the employer and student know all of what there is to gain then both can benefit more.

I think its a great program for the students but I think the qualifications should be raised to a higher level to be able to participate in co op. Meaning that co op should be earned by the student as a privelege and not so much as an option

More emphasis needs to be put on responsibility on the students parts. We have a great student this year, but this has been the first time in a number of years. Students not showing, not doing paperwork, lack of care on their part, but the co-op teacher has been very supportive and we work through the issues. Two students have failed because they did not keep their commitment. But then we get gems and they really show you that high school students can make a difference.

The leadership that happens within the [School Name] co-op program is exemplary. Both [Teacher Name] and [Teacher Name] is a model of how to work together with local organizations to build opportunity for youth in our community.

Would like to be able to partner with neighbouring schools in the same format

Students have a sense of entitlement where they seem to feel everything needs to be handed to them on a silver platter. Generally, I have had no issue with their work ethic, which is good, but dependability around attendance has been an issue.

i have not had a HWDSB coop student in 2 years. not that i won't, but i deal with a [Board Name] coop teacher that is on the same page as i am with regards to safety and promotion of the student. if the student isn't willing to put out the effort or is not safety aware, he does not get an interview. he is up front and honest and cares for the program, the students, and the role it has in the workplace. i have specific requirements that need to be met, and he understands that. i carry out my interviews usually in May, and i usually fill both spots. calling me after the semester has started is a wasted effort. poor planning on your part does not make it my problem you can't find a placement. i do interviews. there is no garentee of placement until that is completed. some of my co workers do not see the value in the program, so i have to fight to keep it.

Getting a Vulnerable Sector Screening Clearance from the police can dealing starting the student. THE cost is also getting expensive for students.

We have no complaints.

The Co-OP program seems to be effective. Most students leave the [Organization Name] with a idea as to what they want career wise. Unfortunately due to privacy issues they cannot always be allowed to do a lot of things but all attempts are made to provide a positive experience.

This will be my last time supplying placement for co-op students. I spend too much time chasing the students for information and trying to find out why they do not show up for shifts.

We are happy to help students to aquire work experiece and it is benificial to us having the extra help at the store level

I've hired 5 HWDSB students. One got as high in the company as assistant manager.

Recently Co-op students have not been as reliable and have had to be let go.... or have quit.

Success of thi sprogram is largely due to the fit of the teachers and background in healthcare is a huge advantage.

IF THE EMPLOYER WAS NOTIFIED LONG IN ADVANCE OF KIDS DAYS OFF AND TRAINING DAYS

Every student is different - some have a different work ethic than others. However, recently, we have found that the students lack social skills (talking to others, penmanship, showing up on time) and TURNING OFF THOSE CELLPHONES!

We thoroughly enjoy our partnership with the co op program. We have experienced many wonderful positive students over the years in our program

The co-op experience is a job experience for the student and a learning experience for the employer!

keep it up!

The Coops help us a lot... especially with your cutback but there is one employee here that treats them poorly. I hear the word "slaves" from a lot of her kids. She is on them none stop and I hate that. I think that attitude that were getting them credits for being here is wrong. To me this should be a positive life lesson for them.

The program is very valuable to [Organization Name] and I hope the students who get a taste of the work-a-day world.

i do have one minor concern, dont take my students away for any inschool workshops lol once they are in we count on them as part of our staff

I have been very fortunate to have 2 co-op students who have been excellent. They have excelled at initiative in the classroom and have been a huge help to me. Both students were persuing a career in either education, music or art (or combinations thereof) and often they would comment how it is good to see all the backgroup preparation that goes into what I do. Normally they would not see this until Teacher's College. An early insight can help further prepare them for the workload to come.

The endorsement to allow us to develop our people as co-op supervisors, has benefited our store. Our Managers are not always responsible or even available for the one on one interactions with the students on a daily basis. Therefore we use our in house Leaders to mentor these students, this creates daily feedback, constant training and coaching, not only for the students, but develops our staff for potential leadership roles in the future. This works tremendously well in our store, and is a big part of the reason we support the program.

my name is [Employer Name] and i myself is a former co-op student for [Teacher Name], i am now full time employer at my original co-op placement where i started at 5 years ago. out of all the teachers i have never met an individual as responsible and dedicted to his work as [Teacher Name]. if there were more students to be in his class i feel the number of students would improve in school and do better. my experience was amazing and i wouldnt take it back at all

Hi – [Employer Name] will also be answering this questionniare, and he might have a better handle on the various numbers of students....and so on....but to me, having co-op students for [Organization Name] has been an excellent experience, and has allowed us to fulfill our mandate to offer opportunities to youth, and has helped us with our partnership with [School Name] and with the Board in general.

[Employer Name]

I think co-op is very important both as a student learning environment, and a help to small business. In order for it to work best, business owners/managers must know how to handle the relationship as teachers, employers and mentors, so I feel this should be the focus of any future development.

I love the co-op program. I haven't been approached to do co-op this semester and this is the first time in years I haven't had one. I really miss them because having an extra set of hands that you can rely on when it gets busy is amazing. I'm hoping to get another student soon. We have not had a coop student recently but we have enjoyed a good relationship with the students and with the coop teachers.

My experiences through the program have always been good, and I highly recommend it to other organizations.

## Appendix E

### Raw Tallies of Comments Organized by Insight

#### Areas of Strength Noted By Employers

##### Benefits Received by Organization

Intrinsic Reward (total of 18 tallies)	
Giving back to community/partnership	11
Enriching experience for employer	7
Help from Students	12
Co-op as a strategy for hiring	10
Staff Development (7 tallies)	
Employers learn from students	4
Staff become mentors	3
<b>Total Tallies Of Employer Benefits</b>	<b>47</b>

##### Student Benefits

Employability Advantage (56 tallies)	
Real world experience/skills	36
Assistance on insights into their future	18
Leadership	1
Contacts in industry	1
Miscellaneous Advantages	
Motivation	5
Achieve Success	4
Self esteem	2
Community involvement	1
<b>Total Tallies Perceived Student Benefits</b>	<b>68</b>

**Strength of Teachers**

Placement Supportive factors (17 total tallies)	
Support of placement/student	7
Partnership with placement	4
Responsive/available	3
Their involvement	2
Visits	1
Ensured a good student/placement fit	9
Communication	8
Miscellaneous Teacher Strengths (13 total tallies)	
Organized	4
Caring	4
Structure in objectives/assignments	3
Program strength - listed the teacher	2
<b>Total Tallies</b>	<b>47</b>

**Employability Skills Posessed in Students**

Globally characterized as very capable	4
Well prepared	2
Motivated	2
Organized	1
Hardworking	1
Role models	1
Positive	1
<b>Total Tallies</b>	<b>12</b>

**Indicators of Overall Program Strength**

Program needs to improve in the following ways	
None/we are happy with the program	12
Indicated under program strengths	
General happiness with HWDSB Co-op Program	7
<b>Total Tallies</b>	<b>19</b>

**Total number of positive insights 193**

### Program Areas to Improve

Improve Employer Supportive factors (49)	
Improve communication	15
Place students purposefully to ensure a good fit	12
Follow up and/or visit/be responsive	9
Train employer mentors	4
Improve their organization	4
Be honest with employers	2
Standardize assignments/evaluations	2
Be flexible	1
Improve student preparation (15 tallies)	
Improve student preparation	11
Improve the quality of students on co-op	4
Build community partnerships/relations	7
Get rid of log sheets	1
<b>Total Tallies</b>	<b>72</b>
Students need to improve Employability Skills	
Dependability	8
Responsibility	5
Work ethic	4
Cell phone etiquette	3
Communication	1
Commitment	1
Social skills	1
Safety	1
Organization	1
<b>Total tallies</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Total number of critical insights</b>	<b>97</b>