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Learning on the Job: Understanding the Cooperative Education Work Experience

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Abstract: Cooperative learning programs in Ontario provide on the job learning experiences for students. This paper analyzes three cases of student work placements described in extensive interviews with students, teachers and co-workers. Some students had enjoyed their work experience while others had not. When the student experiences were situated in the socially organized work processes of the work sites, the diverse experiences were found to have a common theme. When students are able to participate in and make sense of the work process, their work placement experience was seen to be useful for making future employment decisions. Where students were marginal to the work process, their lack of knowledge often translates into an unpleasant work experience and decisions about employment based on an experience of failure. This article suggests that our understanding of student learning on the job would be strengthened by a focus on the socially organized work process.

Introduction

In Ontario, cooperative education (CE) programs have become a popular way for high school students to "try out" a variety of jobs while they are still in school. Students are placed in part time work settings coordinated through the school and monitored by a CE teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, (MoE) 1984, 1988a, 1988b.) CE is an acknowledgement of the learning possibilities available at job sites and an attempt to expand the curriculum past the traditional boundaries available in the high school setting. "Courses involving co-operative education can provide modes of learning that take full advantage of educational resources in the community." (MoE, 1984) Students are exposed to the culture of the work site, to the shape and limits of on-the-job interaction, as well as learning some of the tasks which comprise doing the job. Cooperative education (CE) programs have been described as exciting innovations in the

educational process (e.g. Moore, 1981, 1986; Nichols, 1985; Scott, 1979; Shaunessy, 1985) and criticized as inadequate to address the changes in the relation between school and work (Cohen, 1982; Watts, 1983.)

In the research reported here, students were asked about their CE experience. They described their work experiences as enjoyable and unlikable, as successful and unsuccessful, as boring and exciting: Some students had enjoyed their placement while others had merely endured it. There was a striking lack of similarity between individual experiences and an even more striking similarity between the ways they described the work experience. Typically, their accounts focused on individual work habits, individual attitudes, individual skills.

There are a number of ways to interpret or represent experience. Individualized explanations locate the experience in the individual student: problems, difficulties and successes in the work place become directly attributable to the individual. When the success or failure of the work experience is a matter of individual preference and competence, the learning possibilities on the job become merely possibilities for learning about self--individual work habits, individual attitudes, individual knowledge. The interpretive framework of individual experience places the social sites within which individual experience occurs -- the school co-op program and the work placement -- outside the analysis. Indeed, the "world of work" that is the focus of the CE experience comes into view merely as the context within which the individual has learned about herself or himself.

In this paper, I suggest that the diverse student experiences can be understood socially as well as individually. As Moore (1981, 1986) has pointed out in his discussion of the curricular features of experiential learning, the social context of a student's work placement is an integral part of the learning possibilities of the CE work site. I want to extend that understanding to show that our understanding of CE work placements and student experiences can be enhanced by an inquiry into the textually mediated linkages, connections, communicative patterns, productive processes which constitute the social relation of the work-education program. In this way, we can begin to see cooperative education as an historical process which organizes the work of educational staff, students and workers in particular work sites. We will be able to see the social processes which organize cooperative education as schooling for the "world of work."

In this article, I outline three CE work placement sites: Marie's clerical work in a community college, Kathy's caring work in a private nursing home, and Lorraine's work in a day care center and in a kindergarten classroom. Through their accounts of their on the job experience, we can see that work is organized both experientially, as a series of tasks, and organizationally, as a work process in which one task articulates to another within an organization and often across organizational boundaries. Using a conception of work as a socially organized process linking people within and across job sites, student experience comes into view as shaped by the extent of their involvement in and knowledge about the work relation. Being able to "figure out" and participate in the work process, not simply doing the tasks of the job, shapes the quality of student work experience.

When we place individualized explanations into the larger social context, the striking dissimilarity of student experience comes into view as configured by the inter-section of the school co-op program, the social relations of the work site, and the individual's ability to organize their participation on the job.

The Data

The interviews and observations that form the data for this article were drawn from a much larger data base collected for a research project funded by the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council, "Project Learning Work." Students in several regions of Ontario were selected as "focal students" by the Project Learning Work staff. Interviews were done with these students, their friends, their co-workers, supervisor, parents, and teachers. Observations were made of the students in their schools as well as in their work placements. Students in some CE classes kept reflective journals that were made available to the researchers.

The data selected for this article was comprised of interviews and observations around three focal students as well as the reflective journal of one student. These students were selected primarily because of the breadth and depth of the information about them. The data focus on these students and their placements in clerical work, nursing work, child care work, and teaching work in a kindergarten classroom. The interviews were conducted throughout the school year by Jeff Piker with two "focal students", their families, teachers, and friends in one school district in a small city in Ontario and by Roger Simon with one "focal" student in another Ontario school district.

The Social/Textual Organization of the Work Site

Work sites are hierarchical divisions of labor. They are sites within which tasks and jobs are concerted by a production process. All work sites are socially organized work processes and it is this feature of work that I want to emphasize here.

Student experiences on the job are located in a work site embedded in the social relations of production and selected by the school as a site in which learning can occur. Students enter a work site, bringing with them their personal histories, personalities and skills. Those personal traits are selectively taken up in the work site: a social easiness aids the interaction between clerical worker and college students; an understanding of professional demeanor facilitates the interaction with a nursing home resident. Other individual skills are inconsequential in a particular work setting: for example, the ability to mend socks is not a skill required for clerical work. In this sense, the work site is super ordinate to the student entering. While students participate in the work site and thus shape the work process, the work placement is organized generally; that is as a social organization which structures the work of all who accomplish its operation.

In our society, the social relations of production are linked by textually mediated work processes (Smith, 1987; 1990a; 1990b). In a given work site, workers engage in tasks structured by the work process of the department office, of the nursing floor, of the day care center, of the kindergarten classroom. This is the work experience. At the same time, work processes are organizationally linked through documents to other work processes in the same institutional setting and, often, across organizational boundaries. That is the organizational process. Work experience is textually mediated by documents, forms, communicative strategies administratively organized to accomplish the work process. The interaction of text and worker constitutes the particular work process of the work site, producing, for example, the medication routines specified by patient records, copies of memoranda specifying the deadline for course grades, or the curriculum for early childhood education. The particular organizational character of a work site is maintained by documents which order the work of employees as well as the interactions between them. Some work processes are more thoroughly textualized than others. For example, clerical work is a primarily textual work process while day care center work is much less so. Nonetheless, both are textually mediated. To clarify this approach, let us explore a simplified description of an apparently non-textual work processes.

Work in a day care center is organized in relation to textual processes that shape but do not fully determine the work process. They are present in the everyday organization of the work process: government policy limits the number of children enrolled in the center; developmental play based on the child psychology discourse is organized for the children by the workers; descriptions of the children's day are recorded for the parents; post-secondary certifications in early childhood education are required for employment in a day care center; government subsidies are provided for some families whose children attend the day care center; accounting records are required for documenting the day care center as a business; and so on. These textually mediated relations and others intersect in day care work shaping the limits and possibilities of action within the day care setting. While the textual relations are certainly less visible than those we would see in a clerical work site, they are nonetheless present and integral to the (apparently) non-textual work of caring for children.

This conception of textuality highlights the socially organized character of work experience. It allows us to see the coordinative aspects of the job site and gives us access to the organizational structuring of the work process within the work place and across institutional boundaries.

Understanding the Student Experience

We begin in the particularity of the student experience of cooperative work placements. The students, three young women, did clerical, teaching and nursing tasks. The clerical student enjoyed her placement but both she and her supervisors did not feel she would make a good secretary. The nursing assistant disliked her work in the nursing home although other staff commended her as a good worker. The third student had two work placements, one in a day care center and one in a kindergarten classroom. The day care placement was initially confusing and often frustrating, while the kindergarten classroom was enjoyable and insightful.

There is no doubt that the clerical assistant behaved in ways that appeared to be less than responsible to her co-workers. The nursing assistant seemed to have an "aptitude" for nursing work; but she disliked the work of the nursing home, in part because it was "not real nursing work." The student placed in two early childhood education settings was critical of her co-workers and supervisors at her day care placement and was enthusiastic about her classroom experience. Different work sites produced very different experiences.

As noted above, individualized explanations which attribute the work placement experiences to the student's attitude, personality or aptitude may be experientially accurate but they are nonetheless partial. What are the common threads that link one experience to another?

In the work sites analyzed below, the textually-organized relations in the work site typically provide the framework for the tasks of the work process. The student's experience of their work placement is intimately tied to their location in that processual, textually-mediated order. Those students who were pleased with their CE placement had been able to build from their knowledge of the tasks they did to an understanding of the work process. Few could describe this process except in terms of "fitting in" or "figuring it out". Nonetheless, they characterized their work experiences as "useful" and as helping them decide whether that kind of work was worth pursuing after leaving school. Those students who characterized their work experience as unsuccessful had been unable to link the tasks they did to the socially organized work organization of the work site--they had remained marginal to the work process.

The Clerical Work Site -- Marie's Experience

(Interview with Marie's supervisor and co-worker.)

Jeff: How about tourism? Do you think that she learned much about tourism? As a field or whatever?

Sally: No, she, because she didn't get, get into that enough, like there just wasn't the opportunity or the ability, like, it was just the work that she would do was basic, general, copy this or that.

The clerical work placement was in a department office in a community college and it was Marie's first CE work placement. The department office is the center for the department's administrative activities. The complexity of the work organization is difficult to appreciate outside the setting. Some of this complexity is visible in this selection from Jeff's observations of the skills and tasks of the work site.

...typing of various sorts; responding in the tone of the office to students and anyone else who comes in -- developing the tone of the office, the warmth, the hospitality, the service -- providing a service or giving information in a certain kind of way; knowing the college and how it works -- where various things are within the college, services, information, assistance, specific people; the copying machine; the fairly complicated telephone apparatus; the process of organizing departmental and college conferences; filing and record keeping -- where the relevant files are, where to store things -- and then all the students and all the records that have to be kept for them; maintaining concentration with all the interruptions.

The quotation shows clerical work as a work process which links one set of activities with another through documents. Clerical work is a subordinate work process constructed specifically to facilitate the organizational work of managers and administrators. It maintains the textual organization of the social relations of production in which it is situated, in this instance, the textually organized relations of postsecondary schooling.

The clerical work process structures the tasks which must be done and therefore, the skills required. Sally, Marie's supervisor and coworker, described her knowledge of the work process in very general terms as: "You just have to have a feel for it." Having a "feel for it" is knowing which tasks have to be done, the order in which they must be done, and the events which are likely to interrupt the daily scheduling of work. It is knowing that clerical work is not simply a series of tasks. Rather it is a process which links one set of tasks with another; links individuals across work sites; links the department to the larger tourism industry; and so on.

At the experiential level, clerical work is easily described as a series of tasks. Marie describes to Jeff the variety of tasks she has completed that day:

"I had to type three lists out. Student's lists for this semester, second semester. I had to do that and had to alphabet one, like one wasn't in order so I had to do that. And there had to be names added so I had to type it. That's what I did, and then I went to the copier."

But conceiving of the process as a series of tasks holds us to the experiential level that excludes "having a feel for it". "Typing three lists" is creating the textual record which connects the work of individual students in tourism courses to the credentialling processes of the community college and to employment possibilities in the tourism industry. Getting the work of the department done -- the clerical task of typing student lists -- constitutes one part of the textually organized social relation of post-secondary schooling.

The tasks done by the student were part of the clerical work process of the work site but were organized in relation to her school schedule and her low clerical skill level rather than by the work process of the department. The tasks she did were not visible to her or her co-workers as "meaningful work." Her immediate supervisor suggested that:

"I actually, I just think, um, that it was sort of a waste of time that few hours every afternoon. She just couldn't get into anything and then, you know, you're gone again for another day or so, Its just, its just so hard for someone to be dropped into an area like, like a school division like this, have no knowledge of it at all and to really learn anything."

The tasks done by the student were part of the clerical work process of the work site but were organized in relation to her school schedule and her low clerical skill level rather than by the work process of the department. Where her work was "important" to the department office was in her ability to handle the student inquiries. Marie enjoyed answering the questions from college students who came to the department office; what the department administrator called her "social skills." When interviewed during her next work placement in a small retail shop, she described her work in the clerical placement as having shown her that she was "good with people" and having helped her decide that she preferred retail work to straight clerical work.

In reviewing Marie's experience, we can see that it had several features which contributed to her and her co-worker's dissatisfaction. Marie's time on the job was shortened by the college strike and she had less time to learn the job than is usual. Her supervisor was unsure of what was expected of her in a training situation, confiding her lack of confidence to the researcher. Marie was absent from her work placement more often than her supervisor thought necessary or desirable. It is indeed likely that Marie's low level of skills and poor work habits contributed to her unsuccessful work placement.

But our dissatisfaction with individual explanations pushes us to recognize individual limitations as only part of the story. We also need to pay attention to the socially organized work process and Marie's relation to that process. Prior to Marie's entry into the work site, the work process is administratively organized to get the job done. Learning the relation between the tasks of the work site and the work process allows the student/worker to get "a feel for" the organization of the work site. While this does not guarantee that student/workers understand fully the work process in which they are involved, they are at least linked to an organizational logic that makes what they are doing "meaningful".

Marie's work was not integrated into the work process of the community college department office except during her interaction with students at the front desk. Rather, it was organized on a piecemeal basis: tasks were chosen in terms of what could be done in the time available and by a student/worker who had little time and clerical skills. As Peterson points out, some "... jobs are designed and work is organized ... to inhibit learning." (1986:169) Marie's work in the department office became a series of disconnected tasks which both she and her co-workers were not able to see as "meaningful tasks." Marie was unable to participate in and learn that work process. However, in her interaction with college students at the front desk -- answering questions, directing students to teachers' offices, collecting course materials -- she was able to successfully participate in one aspect of the work process of the department office. It was this experience that showed her she was "good with people".

The Nursing Home -- Kathy's Experience

(Interview with the student.)

Kathy: "Um, like the first day you're going to notice a lot of things and it's going to put you back a little, - like, um, - you go up there and you see all these people just sitting there, lying around making noises. That can be a shock! And the smell - it could be a shock! And there's some of the things, like taking people to the bathroom and stuff -- is not your basic daily things - so it takes a bit of getting used to -- so, if you feel like, if you feel uncomfortable with it for the first couple of weeks, it wouldn't be unusual. Because it's not the type of thing that you, that's normal [laughs] -- it's not something that most people do! ha - so it's something that takes getting used to."

The second work experience we want to look at Kathy's in a privately-run nursing home. The nursing home is an Extendicare facility which means that the residents are subsidized by the provincial government. As described by the nursing home administrator, Extendicare facilities are part of a larger, interconnected and textually-organized, health care system. The entry of people into the home is on the basis of their application to Extendicare and on a record of a medical assessment for nursing home placement by medical personnel. The patients' chart accompanies them if they come into the nursing home from another hospital facility. Nursing home residents who do not need full time nursing care are charted by the staff on a "flow chart." Others who require medication and constant nursing care are charted more completely and their records kept in the nursing station. It is a work process which is organized on the basis of records which will give adequate information to each shift of nursing staff, to physicians, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and will provide for reports to the relevant government departments responsible for the Extendicare process. The documents provide for both the funding relation and the work process of individual nursing staff.

The work of the nursing home is organizationally structured by this textual relation but, experientially, revolves around the residents, their health, their moods, the managing of physical needs and the social interactions required to make the nursing home pleasant to live in and work in. The second floor of the nursing home (where the student did her work placement) had 32 residents, mostly women, and a staff of 4 nursing aides plus other non-nursing staff. Kathy describes the residents she works with as individuals with specific needs and idiosyncrasies: "They each, like, a lot of them can't talk, but are you know, are really very coherent but they all have their own little personalities and they're all kind of, they all have their own little oddities and they're kind of amusing sometimes."

Some of the residents are "difficult". Nursing work is strategically managed by staff through highly organized work routines -- activities, meals, even toileting are done at the same time each day. Kathy's caretaking tasks in the nursing home are textually organized by the funding processes of Extendicare, by the everyday routines of the nursing home, and by the medical and psychological discourse of gerontology. Kathy is learning to use concepts drawn from this discourse to describe patients and, thus, her work with them. "... like, you try, you try the, uh, the sensory stimulation and uh, reality orientation or something like that. I think that's what they call them." These textual relations, and others not described here, construct the shape of the nursing home work process as well as organize the tasks and interactions which Kathy describes as her work.

Kathy was very adept at picking up the work process of the nursing home. In contrast to Marie's placement described above, Kathy had little trouble fitting in with the work routines and learning the work process. Nursing work is a work organization that lends itself to, and indeed in some instances, requires working with another person. Kathy was able to attach herself to one of the Health Care Aides who then showed her what to do and allowed her to help with the general

caring work. Kathy describes this work organization as one which is necessary in order to learn on the job:

"I go in and the first thing I do is I find a nurse....like one of them will say, well do you want to come and help me and that type of thing and I just come and go with them, and just wherever I'm needed, like I don't know why. Now I just know where I'm needed."

Kathy's CE work placement experience was very different from that of Marie's. Kathy did not like her nursing home experience, but she was highly appreciated by the administrator and by her co-workers. She participated in all aspects of the nursing home process open to her. Kathy became as fully involved in the work process of the nursing home as was possible within the scheduling limits of the CE program. Her tasks ranged from making beds to joking with the patients/residents to filling out the nursing records when necessary. Kathy's recognized competence was tied to her ability to participate fully in the work process in terms of knowing which tasks make up the work process; therefore being able to anticipate task ordering; and being able to maintain the personal interactions with residents and co-workers which construct the residence as a home for the elderly.

Kathy's work experience met the goals for CE placements while Marie's did not. Kathy was able to learn the tasks of the nursing home; work effectively with staff and residents; and was able to use the experience to inform her choice of career after her schooling was completed. A major part of this congruence between placement and CE goals was Kathy's involvement in the work process of the work site. She was not marginalized from the work process and was able to participate in all aspects of the work. The tasks which comprised her participation in the work process were visible to her as part of the work of the nursing home and her completion of the tasks was visible to the staff as "doing the job."

Child Care and Teaching Work -- Lorraine's Experience

The final instance of CE work is the that done by Lorraine, first in a day care center, and second, in a kindergarten classroom. Lorraine's work site placements provide us with a confirming instance of the analysis presented above.

Lorraine's first placement was in a privately-owned day care center. While she enjoyed working with the children, she was critical of the administration and staff of the center. Her second placement was in a kindergarten classroom in a local school. She was given a fair amount of training and responsibility at this placement and was enthusiastic about the work of her supervising teacher. Lorraine went on to take an Early Childhood Education diploma program at a community college. Her CE work experience was instrumental in confirming her choice.

Both work sites are textually mediated, the classroom more directly than the day care center. Both work sites involve working with children but they are different work processes. In attending to the textual organization of the two work processes and to Lorraine's participation in them, we can begin to see some of the differences in the work site which helped to shape her very different work experiences.

Lorraine describes herself as "always wanting to work with kids." Her first placement was in a privately-owned day care center. She had done summer babysitting jobs and had some sense of herself as being capable of working with and caring for children. Nonetheless, while the tasks of her day care work placement were not difficult to grasp, the work process was not easily visible.

As she described her first few days:

"Well, when I, the first day I was there, I mostly stayed back a bit and watched. And I'd sit down at the table with them, as soon as I walked in, they were doing puzzles, and I goes to them: What's that; what's that. Right? And then, uh, ... the little kids were starting to talk to me and then the second day I went and I'd sort of like watched the day before, so I knew, like, sort of what the routine was. And then, they'd be drawing like they were today, and sometimes the paper has, like blue lines on the other side, because it's just like a scrap paper that they get. And the kids would turn them over and start scribbling. And then I'd be right beside them and [the supervisor would] go: No, don't do that. Like to the kid, and I wouldn't know, because she never did tell me, and I'm sort of going: Oh. And I feel stupid because I'm watching the kid and I didn't know that they weren't allowed to draw on the other side of the page [laughing]. And, it's just quite a few times that that's happened. she just does it and I'm supposed to sort of click in and see what she's doing. Because she never tells me, you know. And I always just figure out stuff myself."

In her first days, Lorraine did not know the relevances that structure the work process. After several weeks however, she knew the work routines and was able to organize her own work accordingly:

Nov.12 Reflective Writing: ... Tuesday was a great day for me. Rose called in sick and didn't come in. So until 9:00 AM I was with my kids in Louise's class. Then at 9:00 AM Louise and I took my kids downstairs. There was another girl popped in every now and then to see how we were doing. Louise and I played with them in the playroom and did puzzles also up until snack time. I made the kids get their own chairs as usual and got them at their tables and put bibs on those who required them. ... I thought it was great. I felt a lot of responsibility and loved every minute of it.

Lorraine's interviews and "reflective writing" show that she was finally able to "click in": she had learned the work process of the day care center. As she became more and more involved in the work process of the center, she was able to take more responsibility for caring for the children; for developing lessons; for recording the children's activities and "developments" in their file; and for engaging them in play which the center staff had determined would facilitate the child's development. Lorraine learned the tasks as she participated in the work process and the tasks gave her some insight into the work process. What had been invisible or simply a matter of the supervisor's "way of doing things" became understandable as the work process of the day care; routines which were composed of tasks which led from one to the other.

At the same time, she was critical of the staff of the day care, particularly of her supervisor. As we saw above, the supervisor did not give Lorraine the kind of information needed to understand the work process of the day care center. Rather, Lorraine "watched" and "figured stuff out" for herself.

In contrast, her second placement was highly structured by the kindergarten teacher who taught Lorraine the work process of the classroom. In all her interviews and writing, Lorraine is enthusiastic about the work she did in the classroom, her co-workers and the kinds of things she learns at the kindergarten placement.

Mar.4 Reflective Writing: Tuesday and Wednesday were great as usual, Mrs. Manning and I got a lot done. Our theme for the week was Jack and the Beanstalk and I was helping all the kids with

their story cards. I also made up a very large bulletin [sic] board for the subject, it took over an hour to do it and it turned out really good. Mrs. Manning was really pleased and said I did a good job and imagination. I also made two large charts for this Tuesday and Wednesday. We are having a jelly bean guess. She and the mothers helper were very happy with my work. I will be in charge of the whole exercise.

In contrast to the day care supervisor, the kindergarten teacher spent a lot of time with Lorraine teaching her how to relate to the students; how to develop lesson plans; how to analyze student behavior in child development terms; and so on. Lorraine compares the two supervisors as follows:

"Rose never gave me any explanation for doing anything. Like, I'd ask her something and she'll go: Well, I just do this because Sharon says I have to. Or she never really told me why, like in what way it was helping the kids or anything. Whereas Mrs. Manning, like when we have our breaks, she'll have three Grade Eights that come in and help, sort of, like, and play games with them on their recess after they've had their snack. And we sit there and she'll tell me, she goes: The reason I did this this morning, like put these two kids over here is because I wanted to watch how they work together."

Lorraine worked very hard for Mrs. Manning, taking initiative and responsibility wherever possible. Lorraine's knowledge of the kindergarten work process was very well developed through her CE placement. She was able to see the work of the classroom in such a way that the tasks that needed to be done were visible to her.

The work process of the classroom is organized through a series of textual relations, one of which -- the academic discourse on child development -- is also present in the day care center. In the kindergarten classroom, the child development discourse structures the kinds of toys available; the classroom "centers" the children play at; the lesson plans; the teaching aids; and so on. Teachers must produce report cards and other evaluative materials for the children to take home with them. Most kindergarten teachers encourage the participation of mothers in the work of "developing the child" and most kindergarten classrooms are "open" to the parents. As a consequence, kindergarten teachers are skilled at discussing their students and their activities in the textual terms that organize their work process. There are other textual relations which intersect in the classroom, such as the teacher certification process and the Ministry of Education dispersal of funding and resources. The child development discourse and the textual requirements of the public schooling process combine to produce a classroom work process which is necessarily visible. For Lorraine, the work process was made as observable as possible by the supervising teacher. Lorraine was able to participate in a work process through the tasks assigned by the teacher and verbally located in a textually mediated work organization.

Summary

The placement experiences of the three students were very different. The clerical worker was evaluated poorly by her co-workers for her work habits, for her clerical skills but not for her social skills on the job. Marie herself was dissatisfied with her work placement and considered herself to be better "working with people" than doing the tasks of a clerical worker. The nursing home assistant was evaluated highly by both nursing staff and administration. Kathy was not interested in pursuing geriatric nursing further but considered that her choice of future career as a nurse was a good one based on her experience in the nursing home. The child care worker was successful in both her work placements. However, the day care center was more frustrating and

gave Lorraine few learning opportunities. In contrast, the kindergarten classroom was a very exciting place for Lorraine to work. Her relationship with the teacher was one in which the teacher's work process was made available to Lorraine and became the basis on which she participated in the work of the classroom.

Conclusion

Exploring the textual organization of the work sites is one method for analyzing students' participation in the work process. Moore (1981, 1984, 1986) has recommended that the concept of "tasks" is more effective for constructing and assessing the "curriculum of experience" than a focus on work habits or attitudes to work (Moore 1981, 1984, 1986). The student experiences reviewed here show the limitations of both for understanding students' CE experiences. Work, when conceived of as a series of "tasks" or "skills" performed by workers with good or bad "work habits", obscures the character of the work sites and indeed of the labor process. I suggest it also shifts students' knowledge away from an understanding of the social processes that have shaped their work experience: the world of work becomes the individual experience of work. Pedagogically, it limits the possibilities for bringing the changing labor process under scrutiny by those moving from school to the "world of work", the criticism leveled at CE by Watts (1983).

As Simon and Dipppo point out, "Experience should never be celebrated uncritically." (1987:6) As an educational program, CE curriculum could be informed by a conception of work as a textually-mediated work process unique to each work organization but linked socially and economically through texts to other facets of the social relations of production and reproduction. This understanding of the work place that will expand students' understanding of the work process and provide the basis for descriptions of their experience that are both individually informative and socially educated.

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