

Work-Based Learning

Matthew Kreifels, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Melanie Miller Foster and Daniel Foster, Penn State

What is Work-Based Learning?

Work-Based Learning (WBL) is the practice of exposing students to a real or simulated work environment with the intention of applying technical knowledge and skills learned in the classroom within a real-world setting. The goal of WBL is career preparation for the student—giving him or her the ability to put technical knowledge and skills into practice while also developing Career Ready Practices (sometimes referred to as “soft” or “employment” skills) necessary to be successful in the workplace.

Work-Based Learning as a Career Development Strategy

Career development is a multi-phase experience for students. Working backwards, before students can find career success, they must first experience career preparation by choosing a career path or field and taking coursework and/or work-based learning experiences in order to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for that specific career. Prior to choosing a career path, students should explore the opportunities within a specific career field by engaging in activities that expose them to career opportunities in that discipline area. Finally, before a student can begin to explore careers, he or she should develop a sense of awareness about the general career fields available to them by participating in awareness activities. See the progression in Table 1.



Madison Kreifels of Syracuse, Nebraska at her sweet corn supervised agricultural experience (SAE). Photo: Matthew Kreifels

How is Work-Based Learning Implemented?

In many cases, WBL is coordinated by a teacher at the secondary level who has the responsibilities of helping students engage in career awareness and exploration activities connected to the coursework. When students are ready to move into the career preparation phase of WBL, the teacher often acts as a connector to pair students with suitable employers that match their career interests. Other times students may already have a job outside of school, whether at a local business or at home. In this scenario, the teacher will work with the employer and/or parent in order to emphasize the learning goals for the student in relation to the career interest. Outside of a job placement or internship, the teacher is also integral to WBL experience, possibly helping the student develop a business, connect with an apprenticeship or engage them in a school-based enterprise or business that operates as an extension of the school. In each scenario, the goal is the same – the application of technical knowledge and skills that can be related and applied in the career

pathway of interest for a student. Earnings and wages are incidental to learning in a properly structured WBL environment.

Table 1: Progression of a Work-Based Learning Career Development Strategy

	Career Awareness	Career Exploration	Career Preparation	
Level of Focus:	Multiple Career Fields (broad)	Within a specific Career Field	Within a specific Career Pathway (narrow)	Career Success
Example:	Student would learn about opportunities in multiple career fields: agriculture vs. manufacturing vs. health, etc.	Within the agriculture career field, students explore available pathways/subject areas: animal science vs. plant science vs. agribusiness vs. mechanical systems, etc.	Within the animal science career pathway, students practice skills and utilize knowledge in a real or simulated work environment	
Work-Based Learning Strategies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career/Job Fairs • Research Projects • Guest speakers • Videos • Interest Assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field Trips • Job Shadowing • Brief/contracted job experiences • Job simulations • Career mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement in a job • Internship at a business • Start a business • Participate in a School-Based Enterprise/Business • Apprenticeship 	
Course progression:	Introductory Career Awareness Course	Subject-specific courses within the agriculture field	Capstone-level courses that include in-depth knowledge and skill development within the chosen pathway	

Making the Most of Work-Based Learning

In addition to the practice of technical knowledge and skills by participating students, WBL can also be used to teach students additional skills to help them be successful in their careers. Integrating academic education, vocational or Career and Technical Education (CTE) and WBL, coupled with high levels of employer involvement is emphasized throughout the literature on work-based learning (Raby, 1995). Modern CTE programs provide a student with the necessary knowledge and skills to move beyond secondary school as “College and Career Ready,” or in other words, ready for “what’s next” based on a student’s desired career goals.

In addition to the technical knowledge and skills, Career Ready Practices must be mastered for students to maximize their success in life. The [Advance CTE organization](#) has developed a list of 12 Career Ready Practices, all of which are *best* practiced in a WBL environment. Trained teachers, parents and supportive employers can work with students to emphasize these practices in addition to the job-specific work that is accomplished. The Career Ready Practices may also be used in the formative and summative evaluations with the student, both on the jobsite and may be included as part of a classroom grade. (Read more about the Career Ready Practices at: <https://careertech.org/career-ready-practices>)

References



- Career Ready Practices. (n.d.). AdvanceCTE. Retrieved March 21, 2017, from <https://careertech.org/career-ready-practices>
- National Council for Agricultural Education. (2015). Philosophy and guiding principles for execution of the supervised agricultural experience component of the total school Based agricultural education program. Retrieved February 15, 2017, from <https://www.ffa.org/thecouncil/sae>
- Nebraska Workplace Experiences. (2017, March). Retrieved March 21, 2017, from <http://www.nebraskaworkplaceexperiences.com/intro/>
- New Ways to Work. (n.d.). Retrieved March 21, 2017, from <http://www.newwaystowork.org/>
- Raby, M. (1995). The career academies. In Grubb, W.N. (Ed.), *Education through occupations in American high schools: Vol. 1 Approaches to integrating academic and vocational education*, (pp. 82-96). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

innovATE

Innovation for Agricultural Training and Education

Office of International Research, Education and Development, Virginia Tech
526 Prices Fork Road Blacksburg, VA 24061-0378

innovateprogram@vt.edu

www.oired.vt.edu/innovate  @Innov_ATE  facebook.com/InnovATEAgEd



This project was made possible by the United States Agency for International Development and the generous support of the American people through USAID Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-L-12-00002