Exploring Critical Reflection in Cooperative Education: A Case Study

by

Patricia Rose Lucas, MHSc (hons)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

November, 2015
I am the author of the thesis entitled

**Exploring critical reflection in cooperative education: A case study**

submitted for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

Full Name: Patricia Rose Lucas

Signed: [Signature Redacted by Library]

Date: 25 January 2016
DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I certify the following about the thesis entitled:

Exploring critical reflection in cooperative education: A case study

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

a. I am the creator of all or part of the whole work(s) (including content and layout) and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

b. The work(s) are not in any way a violation or infringement of any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person.

c. That if the work(s) have been commissioned, sponsored or supported by any organisation, I have fulfilled all of the obligations required by such contract or agreement.

I also certify that any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

Full Name: Patricia Rose Lucas

Signed: Signature Redacted by Library

Date: 4 November 2015
Acknowledgements

I am proud, and relieved, to say this ‘marathon’ of academic endeavour has come to an end and I have made it to the finish line. An epic journey such as this is not achieved alone. I am incredibly fortunate to have had an amazing support crew, who have shared all my successes and kept me going when I ‘hit the wall’. There has been a myriad of well-wishers en route spurring me along. There are many people that I must acknowledge and thank for their enduring encouragement and support. To all of these people, I am profoundly grateful:

• My husband, Mark Turnwald. You have been there every step of the way. Thank you for your unwavering support and belief in me, your enthusiasm for my topic area and your willingness to engage in endless doctoral-related conversations as we went about the farm. You are my rock.

• My daughters, Rose and Tui. Lately, we have journeyed together as mutual support agents in the world of academia. Thank you for understanding, and sharing the journey. Learning is for life.

• My primary supervisor, Professor Chris Hickey. I wish to express my sincerest thanks and appreciation for your ongoing positivity, patience, wise advice, knowledge, critique and encouragement throughout my doctoral journey. I feel immensely privileged to have had such an experienced coach guiding me. Our conversations have fortified my desire to continue improving my students’ learning experiences.

• My associate supervisors, Associate Professor Bernadette Walker-Gibbs and Dr Amanda Mooney. A special thanks, Bernie, for your willingness to talk me through the difficult ‘emotional’ phases of the doctoral journey, our photo exchanges and your feedback on my final draft. Amanda, although you were a late addition to my doctoral panel, your feedback in the latter stages of my thesis completion has been invaluable. I wholeheartedly thank you.

• Deakin University. I am deeply grateful to the School of Education for the exceptional support offered to higher degrees by research candidates. In particular, each year of my candidature I had the opportunity to attend an all-expenses-paid summer school in Geelong and winter school in Auckland. These events have been an invaluable break from the isolation of being a part-time distance student and a highlight of my doctoral
journey. They have given me a sense of belonging to a rich, vibrant, caring academic community. Thank you, Christine Schultz, for being part of this community and for your sterling advice just prior to my colloquium. A special thanks, Shaun Rawolle and Andrea Gallant, for your words of wisdom, inspiration and motivation at winter school. And last but not least, thank you, Robyn Ficknerski, Sarah Buckler and Kylie Koulkoudinas, for your superb management of these events and your never-ending assistance with ‘all things’ administrative.

• Auckland University of Technology (AUT). I wish to thank AUT for generously supporting my research through granting me a Vice Chancellor’s doctoral study award. This award gave me a period of six months to focus on advancing my doctorate towards completion.

• My colleagues and friends in the School of Sport and Recreation, AUT. I wish to thank every one of you. Each of you has touched on and fortified my journey in some way; all your contributions have been graciously received. In particular, I wish to extend a very special thank you to (Dr) Jenny Fleming, my colleague, friend and fellow doctoral traveller. You inspired and motivated me to take the ‘doctoral leap’ to travel on the education pathway at Deakin, and you have enabled me to sustain my journey with continuous support and encouragement. For that, I am truly appreciative.

• My participants. You made this study a reality. Thank you for your time, interest and willingness to share your thoughts and experiences.

• My extended family and friends. Especially Nicky, Sam and Rich, Kevin and Georgina, Nikki, and Maria. Thank you for always being there and keeping me going.

• Finally, my mum. Thank you for sharing this moment and your endless support. I know Dad would have been proud too.
# Table of contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................ iv  
List of figures ........................................................................................................................... x  
List of tables ............................................................................................................................. x  
Abstract ................................................................................................................................... xi  
Publications .......................................................................................................................... xiii  
  
Chapter 1 : Introduction .......................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Beginning the journey 1  
  1.2 Background and rationale 4  
  1.3 Purpose of the research 9  
    1.3.1 Research questions 9  
  1.4 Context overview 10  
    1.4.1 Sport tertiary education 10  
    1.4.2 Sport cooperative education 11  
    1.4.3 BSR degree and cooperative education 12  
  1.5 A brief overview of this thesis 13  
  
Chapter 2 : Contextualising critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education ................................................................................................................................ 15  
  2.1 BSR cooperative education programme placement profile 15  
  2.2 The purpose of critical reflection within BSR cooperative education 18  
  2.3 Reflection before workplace learning 20  
    2.3.1 Learning contracts 21  
  2.4 Reflection on learning 22  
    2.4.1 Reflective journals 23  
  2.5 Other strategies for learning 26  
    2.5.1 Applying learning across strategies 27  
  2.6 Assessment 28  
  2.7 Chapter summary 29  
  
Chapter 3 : Critical reflection in higher education and cooperative education .................. 30  
  3.1 Higher education 30  
  3.2 Work-integrated learning 31  
  3.3 Theory and practice in higher education 34  
  3.4 A brief history of cooperative education 35  
  3.5 The concept of cooperative education 36  
  

3.6 Learning theories in cooperative education ................................................................. 37
3.7 Integration of theory and practice in cooperative education ........................................... 39
3.8 Assessment of student learning in cooperative education .............................................. 40
3.9 A brief historical perspective of critical reflection ......................................................... 41
3.10 Defining critical reflection ............................................................................................... 42
3.11 Models and frameworks of critical reflection ................................................................. 46
3.12 Quality of reflection ........................................................................................................ 50
3.13 Critical reflection in cooperative education .................................................................... 51
3.14 Critical reflection in sport cooperative education ............................................................ 53
3.15 Reflective writing ............................................................................................................ 54
3.16 Chapter summary ........................................................................................................... 55

Chapter 4 : Research methodology .................................................................................... 56

4.1 Location within a research paradigm .............................................................................. 56
4.2 Researching from the inside ............................................................................................. 58
4.3 Case study research ......................................................................................................... 61
4.4 The BSR case study ......................................................................................................... 62
  4.4.1 Case selection .............................................................................................................. 63
  4.4.2 Data collection methods ............................................................................................. 63
  4.4.3 Participant recruitment and ethical considerations .................................................... 66
  4.4.4 Participant description ................................................................................................. 68
4.5 Data collection phases ..................................................................................................... 71
  4.5.1 Phase One ................................................................................................................ 72
  4.5.2 Phase Two ................................................................................................................ 73
  4.5.3 Phase Three .............................................................................................................. 74
  4.5.4 Phase Four ................................................................................................................. 76
4.6 Data analysis and representation .................................................................................... 77
  4.6.1 Organisation and familiarisation ................................................................................. 77
  4.6.2 Coding ....................................................................................................................... 77
  4.6.3 Narrative representations of data .............................................................................. 78
  4.6.4 Narrative construction ................................................................................................. 80
4.7 Thematic interpretation of the research narratives ......................................................... 81
4.8 Chapter summary ............................................................................................................ 82

Chapter 5 : Narratives of experiences and critical reflection ............................................... 83

5.1 Dana’s story – Learning the ‘ropes’ in the outdoors ......................................................... 83
5.2 Maia’s story – A ‘balancing act’ ...................................................................................... 95
5.3 Fergus’s story – Playing the game .................................................................................... 108
5.4 Lydia’s story – Self-discovery and managing adversity 118
5.5 Phillip’s story – Schooled in a different way 134
5.6 Darren’s story – A coaching ‘drill’ 146
5.7 Chapter summary 158

Chapter 6: Discussion ................................................................................................. 159
6.1 The learning environment 160
   6.1.1 Types of workplaces 160
   6.1.2 Sociocultural influences 164
6.2 Learning experiences within a cooperative education arrangement 166
   6.2.1 Negotiating professional tensions 167
   6.2.2 (Mis)Educative learning 172
6.3 The learning self 175
   6.3.1 Prior experiences 175
   6.3.2 Intrapersonal 179
6.4 The utility of critical reflection as learning strategy 183
   6.4.1 The place of critical reflection in cooperative education 184
   6.4.2 Enabling capacity of critical reflection 185
   6.4.3 Understood but unresolved 191
6.5 Chapter summary 201

Chapter 7: Implications and future exploration ....................................................... 202
7.1 Students 202
   7.1.1 Challenging assumptions 203
   7.1.2 Critical reflection in work readiness 204
   7.1.3 Scaffolding critical reflection 205
   7.1.4 A notable silence 207
7.2 Workplace 207
   7.2.1 Workplace mentors 208
   7.2.2 Incentivising critical reflection 209
7.3 University 209
   7.3.1 Connecting the classroom to the workplace 210
   7.3.2 Supervision encourages critical reflection 211
7.4 Closing comments 213

References .................................................................................................................... 215

Appendices ..................................................................................................................... 228
Appendix A: AUT ethics approval 228
Appendix B: AUT ethics approval amendment 229
Appendix C: Deakin ethics approval 230
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Deakin ethics approval amendment</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Participant information sheet</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Interview consent</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Journal consent 1</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Journal consent 2</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Expressions of interest</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Confidentiality agreement</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Interview guidelines</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Gibbs’s stages of reflection</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of figures

Figure 2.1 The BSR cooperative education programme profile. Source: Mackaway et al. (2011). ..................................................................................................................................... 16
Figure 2.2 Relationships between BSR cooperative education learning strategies (within the boxes) and assessments. .................................................................................................................. 20
Figure 2.3 Reflective journal forms a pivotal link with between concepts, experiences and assessments. ........................................................................................................................... 24
Figure 4.1 BSR student numbers placed within various sectors of the sport and recreation industry. Source: Auckland University of Technology (2014). .......................................................... 71
Figure 6.1 The four themes identified within the research narratives and their subthemes.. 159
Figure 6.2 A transactional model of critical reflection (CR) within a cooperative education framework where E = experience, TP = theory and practice, A = assessments / pedagogy / academic supervision. .................................................................................................................. 184

List of tables

Table 3.1 Three philosophical models of critical reflection. ................................................................. 47
Table 4.1 Student demographics – Age and gender................................................................................. 69
Table 4.2 Student demographics – Ethnicity and gender........................................................................ 70
Table 4.3 Interview participants’ organisation type and general activities............................................. 70
Table 4.4 An overview of the four phases of data collection ................................................................. 72
Abstract

In more recent times, universities, both locally and globally, have been under considerable pressure from government, employers, parents and students to produce work-ready graduates. In response to this demand for work-ready graduates, there has been an increase in the number of workplace-based learning programmes offered by universities. Cooperative education, a form of work-integrated learning, is one example of such programmes directed at preparing students for the world of work and beyond. Critical reflection is recognised as being an important part of cooperative education, as it has the capacity to bring together students’ workplace and university learning, as well as to contribute to greater depth of understanding and learning. The practice of critical reflection within these programmes aims to develop and advance students’ skills to enhance employability, encourage lifelong learning and foster a desire to contribute meaningfully to society. Within the academic context of cooperative education, little is known of the challenges, practicalities and approaches of critical reflection, or the issues surrounding the teaching of theory and practice of critical reflection.

This research focuses on the integration of critical reflection in an undergraduate sport and recreation cooperative education programme. Specifically, the research tracks the perceptions and practices (barriers and enablers) of student engagement with critical reflection within a Bachelor of Sport and Recreation (BSR) degree. An interpretive case study methodology was used to explore critical reflection as a learning strategy within the BSR cooperative education programme. This case study was underpinned by the educational theories of John Dewey orientated around experiential and reflective learning. When the BSR students completed their cooperative education paper/units (and degree), data were collected in the form of qualitative questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documents (reflective journals and university material).

The data are represented as six research narratives created from the contents of students’ reflective journal postings and post-placement interviews. Using this form of data representation has kept the student voice at the forefront of the study. Thematic analysis of the narratives made visible four intersecting and interacting themes that had a significant impact on students’ capacity to critically reflect. These themes include the learning environment, learning experiences, the learning self and the utility of critical reflection. This research highlights the complexity of developing critical reflection within a cooperative education tripartite arrangement comprising the student, the university and the workplace.
The students’ practice and uptake of critical reflection was highly variable, seemingly dependent upon many factors that might either enable or constrain their genuine engagement with their practice. That is, something enabling critical reflection for one student might be constraining for another and vice versa, thus highlighting the need for flexibility in any approach directed at developing and advancing student critical reflection within a cooperative education setting. Among the core findings of the research are the challenges to improve engagement of students and their workplace supervisors, create a culture of more purposeful engagement by university mentors and increase the perceived usefulness of critical reflection among students.
Publications

Listed below are peer-reviewed publications produced directly as a consequence of undertaking the research presented in this thesis.

Refereed papers in conference proceedings


Conference presentations with refereed and published abstract


Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter begins with a reflection on my role as an academic supervisor and administrator (paper leader) in the Bachelor of Sport and Recreation (BSR) cooperative education programme. It is presented here as a heuristic device to convey the importance of my active participation within this programme in igniting my interest in critical reflection. I developed this reflective narrative as part of an early communication with my doctoral supervisor. It was meant to provide a snapshot of my professional engagement in cooperative education and my growing interest in critical reflection. Reading back on it now, I recognise its significance in naming and framing my research orientation as being intensely rooted in improving the practice of critical reflection in ways that could connect with real cooperative education students in real cooperative education settings. Accordingly, I think it captures my start point well.

1.1 Beginning the journey

Given my active role in the cooperative education programme, it is appropriate that I identify my reasons for proposing this study and how I understand myself within it. For a number of years I have been actively involved in the supervision, teaching, administration and leadership within the BSR cooperative education programme at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), New Zealand. For the uninitiated, cooperative education can be understood as a structured, work-integrated learning programme in which learning occurs through the experience of work in a workplace that is related to the students’ academic and career goals. Consequently, students are provided with opportunities to integrate classroom theory with workplace practice (see Cooper, Orrell, & Bowden, 2010; Eames & Coll, 2010, for a fuller discussion of the philosophical and operational foundations of cooperative education).

All BSR students must take two compulsory consecutive cooperative education papers in the final year of their degree, with each student having an academic supervisor based at the university. My involvement in this cooperative education programme began approximately 10 years ago when student numbers in the BSR degree were on the rise. At that point in time, more academics were needed to fulfil supervisory roles. I was one of those approached by the cooperative education manager to consider reducing my human science teaching to become involved in the cooperative education programme. Perceiving this situation as an opportunity to expand my horizons, I took the chance to do something new. Although I knew little about...
the processes and practicalities of cooperative education, I agreed with the principle of work-integrated learning. Today, with larger cohorts of students entering the BSR degree, there is an expectation that all 30 plus academic staff members in the School of Sport and Recreation will supervise cooperative education students.

The academic supervision role is primarily one of mentoring, supporting and guiding students as they progress through the cooperative education programme. One-on-one academic supervision or mentoring of cooperative education students presented me with a completely different approach to teaching and learning. This was especially obvious as I compared it with the more traditional style I had experienced when teaching anatomy and physiology to large groups of undergraduate health science students. My pedagogical expertise was to shift from that of a content specialist instructing students to that of a teaching mentor, assisting students with developing their capacity to learn through their experiences (see Tennant, McMullen, & Kaczynski, 2010, for a comprehensive summary of this pedagogical distinction).

In the early phases of my involvement in cooperative education, a number of new students would be allocated to me for academic supervision for the duration of the academic year. Student allocation, at the discretion of the paper (a unit of learning over one semester) leader, is usually based on the student’s discipline area, placement organisation type and location. Occasionally, at the request of the student or an academic, or sometimes because of special considerations, there was a more deliberate attempt to best match particular students with particular academic supervisors. For the duration of two academic semesters, the students were expected to make arrangements for regular meetings with me (ideally, every two weeks) to discuss and reflect on their cooperative education experience. Most discussions revolved around concerns with assessments, seeking guidance and feedback on written work, matters regarding the workplace and reflecting on experiences. In general, I saw my role as one of mentoring and guiding the students through issues they encountered throughout the process. This supervisory arrangement meant I became very familiar with the way the individual students approached their learning and what their specific learning goals were. Through my engagement in cooperative education, I began to develop close, collaborative relationships with the students I supervised, which started to have a profound impact on the way I thought about the teaching-learning nexus.

As my interest and involvement in cooperative education progressed, I was given the opportunity to become involved in paper leadership (which was largely administration), and in planning and delivering workshops. The administrative component of this role encompassed a
range of tasks, including communication with academic and industry supervisors, timetabling of workshops, overseeing assessments, fulfilling university requirements for monitoring student progress, administration of the online related activities, such as reflective journal set-up and maintenance, and dealing with student requests and demands. Of these tasks, the most challenging for me to date has been the planning and facilitation of ‘placement workshops’, which are predominantly structured around helping students manage and achieve their academic and work-placement commitments that are integrated through cooperative education. The students’ feedback on these workshops consistently confirmed they are helpful and important in providing guidance in how to make sense of and reconcile the respective demands and expectations of the different stakeholders involved in implementing and assessing the cooperative education experience. That said, based on evaluating students’ written and oral presentations, I began to feel we needed to improve the facilitation of developing specific capabilities, in particular, critical analysis and reflection.

During my time mentoring students and facilitating workshops, I became increasingly concerned that the students’ capacity to actively and purposefully engage in critical reflection was very limited. Though it was an expectation of the cooperative education programme, writing, and therefore possibly thinking, in a critically reflective manner was clearly beyond the reach of most students. My reading of the literature, conversations with colleagues and moderation of students’ written work did nothing but reinforce the magnitude of this issue. Within an overall lack of meaningful engagement, there were clearly differing student views of the processes and practices of critical reflection. There were some students who embraced the whole cooperative education experience and did attempt to embrace critical reflection. However, many students did not appear to appreciate the value of the reflective process, though there was a tendency for students to come to some realisation of its potential value nearer the completion of their placement. My sense was that even those students who were trying to engage in critical reflection in their journal writing did not know how to approach it in a practical way, and certainly did not see its value.

The more I looked into the placement and purpose of critical reflection in the cooperative education programme, the more I was convinced that some sort of intervention was needed. Like it or not, there are several exercises and assessments that are rooted in the students' application of the reflective process. Many students have told me they feel that there is too much expectation and demand placed on them doing critical reflection and they do not see why it is important. The recurring pattern of such views and comments provoked my interest in
understanding what is at the heart of this disconnection between the aspiration and implementation of critical reflection. As a relatively recent convert to the power and potential of critical reflection, I was left wondering why students had such difficulty with critical reflection and if there was some way of improving their understanding and practice of it. Professionally, I felt that it was vital to resolve this disconnect if I was to continue to champion critical reflection as an important aspect of the cooperative education programme. Propelling me was research evidence to support my view that critical reflection can be a powerful tool and a valuable part of the learning process in promoting self-directed professional growth (Boud & Walker, 1998; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Hayward, Blackmer, & Raelin; Moon, 2006; Rolfe, Jasper, & Freshwater, 2011; Schön, 1983/2009).

From a practical standpoint, I recognise that the ability to critically reflect may develop over time with the right feedback and support (Bates, Ramirez, & Drits, 2009); however, it is difficult to put a finger on precisely what good critical reflection is and how to provide the necessary stimuli or environment to enhance this student capability. Like Van Gyn (1996), I believe that critical reflection can be learnt, and that it requires deep thinking, regular practice, timely feedback and a genuine appreciation of the process. As with any cognitive process, reflection has several developmental phases with varying levels of complexity and meaning. My personal and intellectual interest in this topic area stems predominantly from my curiosity and interest in understanding how students might come to appreciate the value of embedding critical reflection in their professional practice and how I might support them in this journey.

An in-depth study of student experiences of critical reflection will advance the knowledge and understanding of it within an academic programme of study. It is my hope that what is learnt from this research process is utilised to enhance the facilitation of students' understanding of critical reflection, improve associated pedagogy and practice, identify future research avenues and add to the growing body of knowledge invested in improving the field of cooperative education.

1.2 Background and rationale

What makes learning unique in a cooperative education programme is that students assume responsibility for their learning with guidance and support from within the university and the workplace. There is a strong focus on learning through the experiences of work, which is situated within a socially interactive setting, namely the workplace, that is concurrently integrated back into the university. Within this model, students are invited to critically reflect on
their workplace experiences to make meaning in a distinctive and personal way. Within this context, critical reflection has a strong practice orientation, where something, such as a premise, experience or incident, is subjected to an internal examination to gain deeper understanding of why it existed or happened in a particular way. As the processes of critical reflection mature, they facilitate a higher order of thinking that can be used to develop new or better ways of being and doing. While this orientation does share some lines of synergy, it does not align itself with the ideological aspiration of a critical theory orientation towards reflection – which has its roots in the pursuit of enlightenment, empowerment and emancipation.

Cooperative education lends itself to students learning in many ways, including through active engagement with co-workers, direct or indirect guidance from workplace mentors, feedback and support from academic mentors and critical reflection (Eames & Bell, 2005; Fleming, 2014; Tennant et al., 2010). Rather than conventional knowledge transfer from teacher to student, workplace learning occurs amidst workplace activities (Raelin, 2010). Within this context, I believe that critical reflection has an important role to play in encouraging the students towards deeper learning – beyond the ‘there and then’ and into a more future-focused and developmental frame of reference. I hold a strong professional belief that through the practice of critical reflection, students can explore deeper understanding of a particular experience in ways that can create new knowledge and have the potential to impact on future practices. If mobilised effectively, critical reflection has the potential to assist students with the generation, acquisition and application of new knowledge and practice (Rolfe et al., 2011). In preparation for their work placement within a cooperative education programme, students need to understand how critical reflection can enhance their learning experience (Tennant et al., 2010).

Historically, much of the research undertaken within the field of cooperative education has focused on programme implementation and administration (Sovilla & Varty, 2011) within a vast array of educational institutions and disciplines. Coll and Kalnins (2009) conducted a large (141 articles) critical meta-analysis of cooperative education qualitative research studies published over three decades and identified four key research themes across this body of work. The themes included students' personal growth, cooperative education's contribution to broader educational and societal needs, issues in cooperative education practice and management, and employer and other stakeholder views. Based on their analysis, they concluded that most research articles in the field lacked a strong theoretical underpinning and
rarely attempted to create new theory. Accordingly, Coll and Kalnins encourage future cooperative education researchers to explore aspects of their programmes with these two factors in mind.

Research studies focused on student learning have primarily used quantitative research approaches based on large survey data collection and the use of educational achievement tools. Recognising the limitations of this work, Eames and Cates (2011) argued for more research-driven evidence focusing on understanding student learning – not just what was learnt but how learning occurs through placements. This, they believe is needed to lead educational and institutional discussions around the academic merit and legitimacy of cooperative education programmes.

Recent research effort has looked towards producing new insights through qualitative approaches with a view to understanding the characteristics and processes of learning within cooperative education (Eames & Cates, 2011; Fleming, 2014, 2015b). These studies have been orientated towards reviewing and understanding features of curriculum and the associated learning characteristics commonly or not so commonly implemented and connected within cooperative education. According to Groenewald, Drysdale, Chipuka and Johnston (2011), qualitative research has the potential to explore the value of experiential learning, adult learning practices, learning through reflection, self-directed learning and transformative learning as it may be implemented within the ever-evolving cooperative education context arena.

Coll and Zegwaard (2011b) argued that student learning and student assessment in cooperative education are two areas ripe for further research. This contention is supported by Linn, Howard and Miller (2004), who suggest that cooperative education needs to establish itself as a legitimate form of higher education through documentation of the learning outcomes of students who participate in cooperative education, including a better understanding of the role critical reflection plays in this learning context. Indeed, to this point, very little research has been conducted on the implementation and uptake of critical reflection (Harvey, Coulson, Mackaway, & Winchester-Seeto, 2010) including within sport and recreation cooperative education (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011b; Fleming, 2014).

In a small case study undertaken in 2007, Smith and colleagues identified that the complexity associated with developing reflection in work-integrated learning is considerable, with many students not able to understand or implement a reflective approach to their learning. Against
this backdrop, my own pilot work identified the limited depth of reflection that appears to be commonly practised by cooperative education students. Within a context of a sport and recreation programme, my small case study revealed that students' reflections were mostly descriptive and lacking in depth, analysis and interpretation (Lucas & Fleming, 2012). Within our cooperative education papers, the students must apply critical reflection to identify, examine and evaluate what they have learnt from their experiences. This is a key learning strategy within our cooperative education papers.

While critical reflection is widely acknowledged to be a complex process, it is well recognised by educators to contribute to greater depth of understanding and learning (Bolton, 2010; Dewey, 1910/1997; Higgins, 2011; D. Kolb, 1984; Moon, 1999; N. Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Whereas young learners' engagement with it is seen as difficult to achieve, there are strong arguments for supporting the inclusion of critical reflection within higher education. Within cooperative education, critical reflection is thought to encourage students to be willing and able to question, explore and critique ways of behaving and thinking as they engage in workplace experiences (Higgins, 2011). Boud and Walker (1998) argued that students are better able to understand and gain insights into their skills, competencies and knowledge by encouraging critical thinking, self-assessment, problem-solving and professionalism. The skills and aptitudes associated with critical reflection are thought to enhance student learning in cooperative education and their potential as future professionals.

Bulpitt and Martin's (2005) brief overview of the literature identified a number of significant gaps in knowledge concerning the facilitation of reflection within educational environments. More recently, their observations were reinforced by Smith (2011), who argued there is little known about the difficulties, practicalities and methods of critical reflection, or the issues of teaching the theory and practice of critical reflection in an academic context. The gaps identified by Bulpitt and Martin (2005) included the student experiences with and understandings of critical reflection, functional strategies for facilitation and effective means of exploring an experience or phenomenon. Interestingly, critical reflection is strongly advocated in the literature around effective leadership and management. However, despite this acknowledgement, there is little empirical evidence of approaches used to facilitate critical reflection in either the workplace context or how it can be best practised or how to improve its effectiveness (Gray, 2007; Harvey et al., 2010; Raven, 2014). Rolfe et al. (2011) highlight the many blind spots that appear in the carriage of critical reflection, arguing that “little has been written that addresses the needs and concerns of the reflective student” (p. 197).
The fields of teacher and nurse education have a long history of engagement with critical reflection as a form of professional development (Webster-Wright, 2009), whereas the sport and recreation area is a relative newcomer to the practices of critical reflection. BSR students are situated within a multidisciplinary degree programme from which they may choose a specific discipline, for example, coaching or exercise science, that is developed through pathways of distinct academic papers. This characteristic in itself provides a unique insight into the experiences of BSR students, who do not come from a specific training perspective of ‘one size fits all’ as might be experienced in teaching or nursing. Indeed, students in the BSR programme experience a diverse array of workplaces within the sport and recreation industry.

Critical reflection is considered an essential part of the BSR cooperative education papers. It is deeply embedded within student assessments for cooperative education, where students are expected to bring their industry learning experiences into their academic activities and academic study into workplace practice. The premise here is that students will be learning something beyond what they would learn by merely ‘doing the job’. As a pedagogical strategy, critical reflection is intended to make the cooperative education learning experience richer, broader and deeper, by examining and deconstructing what the students might organically learn by being on the job. This requires students to be self-directed, though it is well recognised that not all students have the developmental skills to do this effectively, at least not initially. Through building an understanding of student perspectives, engagements and application of critical reflection in the sport context, this research aims to develop new insights into how we might improve student engagement in critical reflection and therefore make a more effective cooperative education experience. Accordingly, this study seeks to identify factors that might enable or constrain the usefulness of critical reflection in the cooperative education programme.

The warrant for this research is built on my own experiences and the findings of some key researchers in the field of cooperative education. I am propelled by the advice of Shulman (2002) who argued that “an educator can teach with integrity only if an effort is made to inquire into the consequences of one’s own work with students” (p. vii). This challenge presents as a powerful motivation for me to pursue my interest in the area of critical reflection research, while recognising there are many complexities associated with this undertaking. Although the theoretical underpinnings of critical reflection have been widely discussed in the literature, there has been much less attention paid to the examination of students’ or practitioners’ experiences of this practice (Gray, 2007; Raven, 2014). This research seeks to bridge this gap
by examining students’ experiences of critical reflection within the context of sport and recreation cooperative education. Therefore, a case study methodology was employed to mobilise this research. This approach supports the fundamental aspirations and practices of this research, and accommodates its highly contingent and contextual nature. Further, case study research is underpinned by a particularistic epistemology wherein the intent is to advance understanding and practice of critical reflection in a particular setting and academic field.

1.3 Purpose of the research

The specific purposes of this research are to (i) advance our understanding of pedagogies and practices that support critical reflection, (ii) progress our knowledge of student learning within cooperative education, (iii) provide some evidence for the validation of the academic credibility of cooperative education programmes, and (iv) contribute new insights into the broad field of critical reflection within higher education. The aim of this study is to explore students’ perceptions and practices of critical reflection as a learning strategy in sport and recreation cooperative education.

To this end, the broad focus of this study is on how the participants experience the process of critical reflection. At no time do I attempt to quantify or assess their experiences. Rather, this study seeks to explore different students’ experiences with workplace critical reflection as a means to understand how they engage with its processes, how they learnt and what factors enable or constrain their engagement. This focus attempts to interact with the gaps in the theory and practice of critical reflection to explore its uptake within a cooperative education context.

1.3.1 Research questions

Within a case study framework, this study explores the following research questions:

1. How is critical reflection facilitated within a higher education sport and recreation cooperative education programme?

2. How do higher education sport and recreation students perceive and practise critical reflection within a cooperative education programme?

3. What factors within the cooperative education programme enhance and/or constrain the way students think about and practise critical reflection?
The significance of this study centres on exploring whether critical reflection can serve as an effective strategy to support, improve and advance learning in cooperative education, with implications for work-integrated learning and higher education more broadly. As well, it has the potential to improve our understanding of pedagogical strategies that seek to facilitate the development of critical reflection in higher education settings. The outcomes of this study may be used to inform and improve current understanding and teaching of critical reflection. This study will make a significant contribution towards helping to understand how critical reflection can contribute to the integration of university learning and workplace learning to enhance the overall undergraduate learning experience and create more work-ready graduates. A recently published New Zealand government document, the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014–2019 (New Zealand Government, 2014), stated that “the priority is to ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs” (p. 10). This highlights the contemporary positioning of this research, and endorses the warrant on which it is being conducted.

1.4 Context overview

The following section includes a short history of sport tertiary education both locally and globally, a brief outline of cooperative education in sport and a short overview of the BSR degree, including the place of the cooperative education programme.

1.4.1 Sport tertiary education

The field of sports studies is by no means a traditional discipline of study. The origins of sport studies have been traced to the United States of America (USA); however, historical research is uncertain about this lineage (Pitts, 2001). The emergence of sport studies courses within Australia and New Zealand is reported to have occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and certainly later than their emergence in the USA. Although it is unclear exactly when and who introduced courses of this nature to Australian and New Zealand universities, there is a suggestion that they appeared as a result of increasing professionalism and bureaucracy of sport management (Shilbury & Kellett, 2011). The expansion of the sports industry led to increased employment opportunities in a range of related areas (Ferkins, 2002; Fleming & Ferkins, 2011), including fields within exercise sciences, sports coaching and sport management. As sport became increasingly professionalised, the demand for qualified experts to identify, manage and train athletes grew rapidly.
Within North America, studies in sport seem to have evolved from physical education, whereas in Australasia and the United Kingdom, sport management derived as a branch of recreation and leisure studies situated within sociology (Ferkins, 2002; Pitts, 2001). Today, most New Zealand universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics offer one or more programmes providing a qualification in sport, ranging from certificate to postgraduate levels. These programmes often have links to courses or contain elements focusing on recreation, outdoor education, and health and well-being, the latter area being more recent, possibly because of greater local and global emphasis on and interest in the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Sport qualifications at a tertiary level have been developed primarily for vocation purposes, given the industry growth, and therefore naturally lend themselves to workplace-based learning (Ferkins, 2002).

1.4.2 Sport cooperative education

Professional preparation of graduates in sports studies recognises the success of using learning models such as cooperative education (Fleming, 2014; Pitts, 2001). Although the cooperative education literature is rapidly developing, there is little published research in the sport studies context (Fleming, 2014; Fleming & Ferkins, 2005). To date, the design of cooperative education curriculum in sports studies has heavily relied on the knowledge acquired from the application of cooperative education in other discipline areas. There is a need to identify and recognise the unique characteristics of the sport industry that may impact on the development and management of cooperative education specific to this context (Fleming, 2014, 2015b). A preliminary study of eight international cooperative education programmes by Fleming and Ferkins (2005) found that there was consistency overall with course aims, but variation in structure, placement context and modes of supervision. Accordingly, it may not be applicable to transfer research findings from one context to another, given the differing teaching and learning cultures within the various industries. In respect of these differences, it may be more appropriate to think about their relative contribution to developing a deeper understanding of cooperative education as a curriculum practice in higher education (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005, 2011).

Unsurprisingly, sport degrees typically attract individuals with a strong biography of participation and keen interest in sport and physical activity. Zegwaard and Coll (2011b) acknowledge that students typically chose programmes of study that are of interest to them but are often less clear about their future career prospects. Generally within sport degree programmes, students are able to choose between a specialist degree programme and those
with a major study in a sport-related field, but that is embedded in other broad course requirements. These majors often include areas such as sport and exercise science, coaching, physical activity and nutrition, sport management, health and physical education and outdoor education (Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Southall, Nagel, LeGrande, & Han, 2003). The sport industry, including commercial, government and not-for-profit sporting organisations, provides students with opportunities to participate in a wide variety of experiences through their cooperative education papers/units. This wide variety of experiences has implications for the cooperative education curriculum, which must be flexible and able to be personalised to meet the needs of the university, the students and the industry.

1.4.3 BSR degree and cooperative education

The context of this research is located within the three-year BSR degree, which was first offered at AUT in 1997. The sport and recreation industry in New Zealand is very diverse in nature, and this diversity is reflected in the major study areas offered within the BSR degree that were identified in the previous section. From its inception, this degree has included a component of cooperative education within the curriculum, as it was deemed an important characteristic of the degree that would assist with meeting university and industry graduate requirements. Cooperative education helps prepare students for a particular occupation or career (Van Gyn, 1996), such as a sport scientist or coach. The changing nature of the workplace, generally due to technological advancements, means that continuing education and professional development is necessary in each of these fields of employment (Jarvis, 2010).

In the final year of the BSR degree, all students must complete the two compulsory (30 credit point) cooperative education papers. These papers, namely Sport and Recreation Cooperative Education 1 and Cooperative Education 2, are structured so the students spend the equivalent of two days a week during the two semesters of the academic year situated within one sport and recreation organisation. This yearlong experience provides flexibility for the seasonal nature of many sport and recreation organisations (Fleming & Ferkins, 2011). This is termed the ‘student placement’, and students must have approval by the programme leader before they are able to commence their work placement. During Cooperative Education 1, the students complete 200 hours of workplace experience, while 100 hours is allocated as academic time for the students to reflect on their experiences and to design an industry-based project. During Cooperative Education 2, the students are required to complete 150 hours in the workplace and the remaining 150 hours allows time for the students to complete, evaluate
and present their industry-related projects. They are also expected to evaluate the overall learning experience and critically reflect on their achievements, measured against negotiated individual learning outcomes and graduate capabilities. The workplace experience, which is dovetailed with other university learning, must be relevant to the students’ academic development and their potential career path, therefore making it an ideal setting to study.

1.5 A brief overview of this thesis

This thesis is presented as seven chapters. A brief summary of each of the remaining six chapters follows:

**Chapter 2: Contextualising critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education**

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the context for this case study on which this thesis is based. This chapter commences by highlighting the characteristics of the BSR cooperative education programme as identified on a placement profile continuum. The primary focus of the chapter is to provide an overview of the contextualisation of critical reflection within the programme, including opportunities afforded for the students to engage with critical reflection. Reference is made to educational theories, derived predominantly from the work of Dewey, Kolb and Schön, as support for the educational strategies adopted within the programme.

**Chapter 3: Critical reflection in higher education and cooperative education**

This chapter establishes the position of critical reflection within higher education learning contexts, with a specific focus on its place within cooperative education. The review examines the location and purpose of work-integrated learning – an umbrella term encompassing cooperative education – in higher education. A brief history of the development of cooperative education is presented. The principles and practices underpinning and defining what constitutes a cooperative education programme will be discussed. Learning in cooperative education, in particular the practice of critical reflection as a learning strategy, is examined.

**Chapter 4: Research methodology**

This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological approach undertaken in the study. Integral to this chapter is an introduction to a pragmatic epistemology, acknowledgement of issues related to insider research and a justification of undertaking an intrinsic case study approach to explore the research topic. The research design, including data collection strategies, is presented and justified. An explanation for utilising data representation as research narratives, the demographic details of the participants and the context that make up
Chapter 1: Introduction

This case study are presented. Specific issues regarding ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study are addressed within the body of the chapter.

Chapter 5: Research narratives of experiences and critical reflection

This chapter presents the data or findings of the study in the form of six descriptive research narratives. This approach has been adopted as a way of exposing the uniqueness of sport and recreation cooperative education experiences and to illustrate how these students engaged with practising critical reflection in order to make meaning from experience. The narratives were created from student reflective journal postings and interview transcripts to allow the reader to gain an appreciation of the students’ experiences and learning through the duration of their work placement. Maintaining the student voice at the forefront of the research, the narratives develop a strong sense of factors that can influence sport cooperative education critical reflection.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The discussion highlights and examines four major intersecting themes identified through thematic analysis of the research narratives. These four themes include learning environment, learning experiences, learning self and utility of critical reflection. The four themes, along with a number of subthemes, address the three research questions underpinning this research. Using a Deweyan lens, each of the four themes is discussed through exploring factors that exist within, between and across the research narratives.

Chapter 7: Implications and further explorations

This final chapter highlights the challenges faced by students as they learn about and through critical reflection, within the context of cooperative education. The challenges are located within the three dimensions of cooperative education: the student, the workplace and the university. Each dimension presents significant challenges that have implications for improving student engagement with, and practice of, critical reflection within cooperative education. From this study, avenues for further exploration have been identified.
Chapter 2: Contextualising critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a foundation for this case study through contextualising critical reflection within the BSR cooperative education programme at AUT. This overview begins with a focus on the unique characteristics of the BSR placement. This is followed by an insight into how the concept and practice of critical reflection is embedded within the design and delivery of this particular programme in such a way that each student determines his or her own learning outcomes, and works towards achieving the predefined learning outcomes.

Although there is no one set of educational strategies that facilitate critical reflection, there are conditions that enable the students to engage in and practise the process of critical reflection. This chapter identifies and describes the structured opportunities to critically reflect within the BSR context. Included in this chapter is an overview of the educational framework implemented within this programme to incorporate and integrate both the experiential and academic components of student learning through critical reflection.

2.1 BSR cooperative education programme placement profile

A successful work-integrated learning programme must consider a number of placement operational variables (identified in Figure 2.1), as they may influence the design and implementation of the programme (Mackaway, Winchester-Seeto, Coulson, & Harvey, 2011). These variables are important, as they have implications for the students, and their academic and industry supervisors. I have utilised Mackaway et al.’s (2011) placement profile, along with my professional judgement substantiated by programme documents, to position the BSR placement within the placement continuum, with the intention of providing a forum for comparability of the BSR placement with that of other possible placement profiles. As evident in Figure 2.1, the majority of the crosses, representing the BSR placement on this placement continuum, are situated to the far left. The overall positioning of the BSR programme on this continuum is based on expected generic conditions for all students on placements, as it is rare for variations to these conditions to occur.

There are a small number of exceptions to the dominant left-side positioning on the continuum. The first exception is the ‘duration of placement’ feature at the top of this list, where BSR placements are yearlong; therefore, the cross was positioned to the far right. Near
the bottom of the features listed are two further exceptions. All students enrolled in the BSR
degree must find a placement in their final year, thus positioning the BSR profile to the far
right. The final exception is the feature that indicates academic supervisors are familiar with
assessment procedures but possibly less familiar with educational theories (an area requiring
further research to fully understand this feature), resulting in a cross positioned near the
middle of the continuum. This placement profile tool highlights a set of criteria that can be
applied across different ‘learning through participation’ programmes, including cooperative
education. Additionally, this profiling tool could be used to identify similarities and differences
that exist between cooperative education programmes, as well as for developing a new
programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short placement (hours or a few days)</th>
<th>Long placement (months to a year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupted placement (a day per week)</td>
<td>Block placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local placement</td>
<td>Distant placement eg student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lives away from home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student and academic able to communicate quickly and regularly</td>
<td>Student and academic able to communicate only sporadically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive preparation of student before placement</td>
<td>No preparation of student before placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic able to provide ongoing support and feedback during placement</td>
<td>Academic unable to provide ongoing support and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large degree of input by student/academic into work/project design and execution</td>
<td>Work/project design and execution determined by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High degree of control by student in the execution of project/work and output</td>
<td>Control of execution of project/work and output held by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Host” supervisor is interested, has time for supervision and/or extensive experience</td>
<td>“Host supervisor” has little time, interest and/or experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student in later stages of degree/program</td>
<td>Student in early stages of degree/program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory part of degree program</td>
<td>Elective part of degree program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only specially selected students undertake placement</td>
<td>Placements must be found for all students who enrol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic familiar with educational theory, including assessment</td>
<td>Novice academic less familiar with educational theory, including assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High degree of institutional support for program</td>
<td>Program is not well supported by the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.1** The BSR cooperative education programme profile. Source: Mackaway et al. (2011).

A key feature of the BSR programme is the commitment that appropriate industry placements
will be established for all students who enrol. Operationally, the onus for this is placed on the
students, who are responsible for negotiating their own placement with facilitation from the university through an industry placement expo and online advertising of organisations with placement opportunities. The placement pursued by the students must be relevant to, and considered appropriate to support their academic major selection (see Chapter 1 for further details). With the students in control of selecting and negotiating an appropriate industry placement, they are well placed to take into consideration personal preferences, logistics (such as travel time) and so forth. There are potential limitations to this process, including but not limited to the ability of the students to recognise, locate and negotiate a suitable placement. However, the overall intention of this practice is to prepare students for future employment seeking.

The BSR placement approval process begins with the completion of a form that is signed by the student and the student’s prospective industry supervisor prior to the placement commencement at the beginning of the semester. The completion of this form requires the organisation to indicate the nature of their organisation, the type of activities the student will undertake during the placement and identification of an industry supervisor. The dialogue throughout this process plays an important part in the establishment of an official commitment between the student and the organisation. Furthermore, the completed form provides sufficient information for the programme leaders to determine whether the organisation is a suitable placement capable of providing the types of experiences required for the student to undertake and complete the cooperative education papers. Upon approval of the placement by the programme leaders, the student is allocated to an academic supervisor, whose role it is to provide academic support and guidance throughout the student’s placement.

The positioning along the continuum for each feature has produced a (unique) profile of the BSR cooperative education programme. This positioning, however, does not imply that one or other end of the continuum reflects ‘ideal practice’. Many of the features compiled within the ‘placement profile’ have influenced the learning approaches undertaken to achieve the desired outcomes for the BSR degree. As a consequence of these conditions, there are certainly advantages and limitations that impact on how to implement the programme. Although a placement profile may remain relatively static, changes to the university and workplace environments, as well as student needs and demands, may lead to repositioning of some features across time. Therefore, it is important to be able to reassess these features from time to time.
2.2 The purpose of critical reflection within BSR cooperative education

The key focus of the BSR cooperative education programme is to create an educational environment that nurtures and supports learning through critical reflection (Fleming, 2014). Critical reflection is embedded within this programme to enable and encourage students to reflect in ways that will enhance learning (Moon, 2004), including the achievement of the espoused learning outcomes of the programme. The following list highlights the role of critical reflection within the BSR cooperative education programme, as noted within academic documents:

- Development of ability to learn through experiences and provide evidence of that learning
- Integration of theory and practice
- Development of a deeper understanding of workplace practices
- Development of professional practice
- Advancement of critical analysis capacity
- Development of personal insights through self-awareness and confidence
- Development of a social conscience (politically and socially responsible)

Critical reflection is a learning strategy within the BSR cooperative education programme that encourages learning in a way that differs from that used in most other academic papers. Moore (2004) has identified a powerful educational dynamic occurring when workplace learning, or educationally productive engagement with workplace experiences, and university learning, or encouragement of meaningful reflection on experiences, come together. The learning content is provided through the student having workplace experiences, although it is at the discretion of the learner which experiences become the focus of reflection. The practice of reflection itself is an intellectual challenge for many students (Benade, 2012; Fleming, 2014; Rodgers, 2002). However, as Harvey et al. (2010) contend, reflection throughout a placement plays a significant role in academic learning, skill development and lifelong learning.

To assist with developing a capacity to critically reflect, there are multiple opportunities for BSR students to practise critical reflection through specific learning strategies implemented within the cooperative education programme. These learning strategies include learning contracts, reflective journals, action learning projects, presentations and final reports. The
expectations for critical reflection are made explicit to the students through workshops and assessment criteria in the form of rubrics. In addition, there are times when reflection may be an implicit part of engaging with an activity, for example, during the construction of a learning contract, as illustrated in Figure 2.2, where reflection is seen as supporting the writing involved in this learning strategy. Harvey et al. (2010) explained that the alignment of curriculum, reflection and experience and the transparency of expectations are pivotal concepts for creating an effective learning environment within this context. They have identified a synergy termed transparent alignment of reflection to experience, which we aim to demonstrate within our programme.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that our understanding of critical reflection stems predominantly from the theory and practice of key influential thinkers in the field, such as Dewey, Kolb and Schön. The confluence of these particular educational and reflection theorists has occurred primarily because they are recognised as the seminal theorists of cooperative education, reflective thinking and experiential learning. In recognition of Schön’s (1983/2009) suggestion that reflection may occur in two situations, in action and on action, plus a further option, before action, multiple opportunities to practise reflection are incorporated within the BSR programme. This enables a strategic approach to developing and practising reflection, and consequently learning through experience. This learning strategy supports Dewey’s argument that education must be founded on the engagement with and through the enhancement of experience (Dewey, 1916/2007, 1938). The theoretical underpinning of the practice of critical reflection (as advanced by Kolb) within the BSR cooperative education programme will be developed further in the literature review.

The occurrence of critical reflection and the relationship between each of the learning strategies within the overall BSR cooperative education programme are identified in Figure 2.2. This yearlong programme is seen as an ongoing progressive approach to learning in this context; that is, the two consecutive papers build upon each other over two semesters (see Chapter 1). Each structured learning strategy within the diagram is represented within a framed textbox. Embedded within each learning strategy is a requirement for students to actively engage in critical reflection. The knowledge created and understood in one learning strategy may be used to inform another (indicated by the arrows), therefore illustrating an interconnectedness of each strategy and the potential transfer of learning. The reflection situated outside the learning strategies indicates that some form of reflection may be required or takes place in order to engage in the writing process involved in that particular strategy.
Within both papers, there is vertical interplay between the strategies, while there are horizontal transfers of learning from Cooperative Education 1 to Cooperative Education 2. The interplay between strategies in the vertical and horizontal planes represents the transfer of knowledge from one area to another as it becomes a resource for further learning (Moon, 2004).

![Diagram of Relationships between BSR cooperative education learning strategies and assessments.]

**Figure 2.2** Relationships between BSR cooperative education learning strategies (within the boxes) and assessments.

### 2.3 Reflection before workplace learning

The following two sections focus specifically on the use of the learning contract and the reflective journal and their pedagogic intentionality of engaging students in the practice of critical reflection. Within the context of cooperative education, I have introduced a phrase to Schön’s reference to reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action – *reflection-for-action* – to signify the application of reflection within a learning situation rather than an approach taken by a practising professional to inform intended practice (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). *Reflection before workplace learning* involves the deliberate consideration by students of what they know about themselves and the workplace where the learning will take place. This reflection is necessary to construct a learning contract that will assist them with planning ahead for activities to be undertaken in the workplace, including their identified learning outcomes. The
approach to the construction of this learning contract could be undertaken from a theoretical, practical or moral/ethical perspective. Generally, students approach it from a practical perspective, as they frequently consider this planning a means to developing professional skills, with an emphasis or priority on practice and technical expertise. The development of a learning contract in relation to critical reflection will be discussed further in the next section.

2.3.1 Learning contracts

The construction of a learning contract at the commencement of both papers establishes a basis for students to determine their own professional and personal learning outcomes along with a set of predefined learning outcomes that fulfil the university requirements. The development of the learning contract, particularly the first one, relies heavily on students reflecting before learning (on what they already know and what they would like to learn more about), as well as collaborating with others, especially their workplace supervisor, to create the document. Reflecting to develop a learning contract requires students to think carefully about what they already know of themselves as learners and examine the nature of the workplace they intend to enter (Fleming & Martin, 2007). The development of the learning contract has the students considering a number of factors, including graduate capabilities, employability skills, technical skills, personal strengths and weaknesses, personal and professional goals, and specific workplace mechanics. Initially, students are intrinsically more inclined to focus on the development of skills rather than to be thinking more broadly about what could be learnt within the workplace. In general, the learning contract provides a flexible plan for learning that can be revisited and revised in situ. Mostly, it gives the students structure to help prevent them from ‘fumbling in the dark’ and provides a sense of having some control over the direction of their workplace learning (S. Thompson & Thompson, 2008).

The development of professional learning outcomes requires students to consider what qualities they would like to gain or enhance during their placement. This may come about through questioning what the organisation has to offer as a means to developing specific professional capabilities. The students must also be prepared to look internally and scrutinise their current knowledge and skill levels. The writing of personal learning outcomes also requires inward reflection on present abilities and where they can potentially improve performance. The development of both the professional and the personal learning outcomes relies on the students reflecting on themselves in relation to their own perceptions of what is required to be a professional working within the sport and recreation industry. This is most challenging with the first learning contract, when the students often have little experience or
knowledge of their organisation within the industry and are therefore reliant on guidance from their industry and academic supervisors. The second learning contract can be more specific because the students will have gained a greater understanding of what their organisation can offer. At this stage, they are able to recognise valuable skills or capabilities that need to be improved upon and have an appreciation of how they can participate in this workplace.

Collaboration with supervisors, in particular the industry supervisor, can play a vital role in the development of the learning contract. The workplace activities each student is to participate in must be negotiated as part of this contract. Therefore, conversations at this early stage provide important opportunities for both parties, industry and student, to clarify their expectations, develop an understanding of each other, establish purposes and processes for working together and negotiate intended outcomes (Cooper et al., 2010). The active participation of both parties resonates with Dewey’s notion of reflection in the community. Here, the process of articulating ideas and expectations to others can reveal strengths and weaknesses of one’s thoughts ( Rodgers, 2002), wherein clarification and modification of the contract can occur in a spirit of collaboration. As a consequence of this act of sharing, the supervisor and student become ‘partners in a common undertaking’ (Dewey, 1916/2007), which is a principle of cooperative education. Additionally, the learning contract covers all parties as a strategic management tool for responding to difficult situations should they arise, and students commonly refer to this document to monitor their own progress within the workplace.

The exercise of writing a learning contract has embedded opportunities for students to develop reflective thinking skills that are translated into the development of specific learning outcomes, strategies for enacting their outcomes and ways of recognising when each outcome has been achieved. There is an expectation that the students will have considered the availability of opportunities in the workplace to perform the necessary activities to develop each of their learning outcomes. Naturally, there is a strong relationship between the learning outcomes created and the workplace opportunities afforded to them. The learning contract identifies what the students intend to learn and frames how the students might drive their own learning, or learning experiences.

### 2.4 Reflection on learning

This section is based on an adaptation to Schön’s (1983/2009) reflection-on-action – a process whereby professionals evaluate their practice in order to consider other approaches
to practice and make changes to practice if required. In this case, reflection on learning is an intention where students evaluate an experience to make meaning from it and to consider changes to their future practice or behaviour. Reflective journals are commonly used within work-integrated learning programmes, as they are a valuable strategy for facilitating the practice of critical reflection and are a place for students to make sense of their experiences. The use of reflective journals in cooperative education relies on the student taking responsibility for actively engaging in the process of their own learning (Van Gyn, 1996). Although guidance is given, the learning process is placed firmly in the hands of the student. Consequently, students must be committed to engaging in the process, and must be able to recognise opportunities for learning and be able to make decisions to advance their own learning. The pivotal role of the reflective journal in the BSR programme will be discussed further in the following section.

2.4.1 Reflective journals

Reflective journals are used primarily in the BSR programme as a vehicle for learning from experience, as well as to develop and practise critical reflection. For the duration of their placement, students are expected to maintain regular inputs to a private, online reflective journal. The primary focus of their journal entries is for students to critically reflect on experiences that contributed to their learning. Figure 2.3 contextualises the centrality of the reflective journal as a key linkage between concepts, experiences and assessments. Importantly, the journal is not positioned as an isolated strategy but is an integral part of an integrated learning approach. This diagram is a guideline to the following section.
Figure 2.3 Reflective journal forms a pivotal link with between concepts, experiences and assessments.

There are two important dissemination points around the expectations and practices of reflective journal writing embedded in the BSR programme. These are the cooperative education (paper) guide and the cooperative education workshops presented to all students, with both providing explicit detail of the expectations around journal writing, and the purpose and practice of critical reflection in cooperative education (see top of Figure 2.3). The purpose of the paper guides and workshops are to provide support for the development of critical reflection. Specific content pertaining to the use of journals and the practice of critical reflection within the paper guide frequently form the basis upon which further elaboration and discussion occurs within the workshops.

Frameworks for critical reflection are identified and discussed within the workshops along with group work activities that focus on evaluating exemplars of reflective writing. The two frameworks provided for students to use as a guide for their reflective writing are from Borton (Borton, 1970) and Gibbs (Bolton, 2010; Gibbs, 1988). Borton’s framework has three easy-to-remember steps: What happened? So what does it mean? What next? This framework is easy for students to manage in the early stages of reflective writing.

The second example provided is Gibbs’s framework for writing critical reflection. This guideline has been included in the programme documentation since the original planning of the cooperative education papers over 15 years ago. Gibbs’s framework provides ‘the ultimate goal’ for the students’ reflective writing, as a six-staged guideline (these frameworks are
elaborated on in Chapter 3). For ease of access, it has been published within the paper guide, as well as in workshop notes. The offer of these two frameworks allows students to use them as stepping stones from one to the other if desired. This progression from a simpler framework to a more complex framework is intended to support students as they gain confidence in reflective journal writing. However, some students take the option of sourcing their own guidelines, as they are provided with the flexibility to find an approach that suits their style of learning, and writing.

From an operational perspective, students are provided with information in the paper guide regarding accessing their journals within the online learning management system, Blackboard. Each journal is private; that is, only the students and their academic supervisors have access to the journal entries, and there is an explicit expectation of confidentiality regarding the content of entries. Within Blackboard, the students are expected to complete and maintain a minimum of one journal entry per week over the duration of their placement. The frequency of journal writing is intended to encourage students to practise reflecting, take notice and be observant within the workplace, and identify an event or issue within the workplace or within their academic endeavours that can initiate learning or enhance the development of new understandings. By observing from within their workplace community, the students are encouraged to explore their understanding of an experience through documenting the experience, highlighting their learning and considering future action.

Although workplace experiences are most likely to be the key focus of their reflective writing, there are other factors that may provide content for a journal entry. Learning contracts and academic supervision are two key factors identified on the left-hand side of the diagram presented in Figure 2.3. The first factor is the learning contract, which, as mentioned earlier, helps formalise the placement relationship between the student, workplace organisation and university. An integral part of the document is focused on what the students intend to learn through their workplace experience. The process of documenting and evaluating their workplace experiences delivers an opportunity to monitor the progress of a specific learning outcome related to a particular experience and the development of strategies to advance or complete a particular outcome.

The second factor signifies the role the academic supervisor plays in guiding the students’ reflective journal writing, and consequently their development of critical reflection. The two-way process associated with academic supervision recognises the part the academic plays in supporting student participation with their journal writing through online feedback and
reflective conversations. As part of academic supervisory meetings, students’ journal writing is a topic for discussion, along with support with other written work and workplace activities. Students are invited to focus on specific journal entries to discuss during such meetings. The discussion about specific journal entries or identified activities within the workplace assists with encouraging students to think more about their experience, to identify a critical learning moment and to critically reflect on the experience. The intention of these discussions is to assist students with identifying critical learning moments and improving their entries by moving, if necessary, beyond simply describing an experience or event to critically analysing their experience. As the students develop their relationship with their academic supervisor, they may choose to disclose and discuss difficult situations, both during meetings and within their journals.

The students’ reflective journal entries accumulate to become a vast repository of information about their workplace experiences, their learning opportunities and themselves. Consequently, the contents of the raw journal can be drawn upon to fulfil critical reflection requirements embedded within several subsequent or secondary learning strategies (Moon, 2006), such as a second learning contract, presentation, progress report or final report (to be briefly outlined in later sections). An advantage of utilising raw journal data in a secondary learning strategy is that it provides an opportunity to deepen and enhance learning. At the time of constructing secondary reflective writings, the journal entries become a window from which to look back on experiences where learning has taken place. Through the act of re-reading journal entries, the student is able to revisit learning, realise personal progress and identify areas for further improvement or development. Therefore, the information collected within the journal can inform, inspire and support thinking and writing within other documents that contain ongoing critically reflective elements. For example, a second learning contract, written at the beginning of the second semester, is constructed based on reviewing the success of learning outcomes from the first semester. Meanwhile, the presentations include a component of critical reflection on a learning experience. Although the intention is for critical reflection to be developed and situated within the reflective journal, it is not exclusively placed here.

2.5 Other strategies for learning

The learning contract and reflective journals are not isolated learning strategies within the programme, but are integrated with other strategies to form a complex learning system (as illustrated in Figure 2.3). Central to this system of learning is a shared understanding between the students and supervisors around how to explore their own learning through experiences.
Chapter 2: Contextualising critical reflection

and how to build upon these experiences. The additional strategies for supporting the student, as they determine the goals of this learning experience, include the paper guide and workshops. The utilisation of reflective writings in the preparation of presentations, proposals and reports contains a reflective element to reinforce the value placed on critical reflection for learning within this programme.

2.5.1 Applying learning across strategies

Other learning strategies within the programme require the students to apply their learning from one strategy to another. That is, the content of a reflective journal entry can provide valuable knowledge for the preparation of a presentation or report. This transfer of learning between these learning strategies creates a clear and authentic link between the programme learning strategies and the workplace experiences.

One assessment task is a 10-minute oral critical reflection delivered to an audience of peers and an assessor. During this time, the students are expected to utilise their reflective journal writing to critically analyse two of their learning outcomes. As members of the audience, the students listen to the experiences of their peers, gain insights into workplace activities of other organisations in the industry, witness the practice of critical reflection by their classmates and observe various presentation styles. At the conclusion of all the presentations, there is a group discussion to provide feedback on the overall presentation delivery, content and critical reflection. In preparation for their presentations, this strategy encourages students to revisit journal entries for preparation of the presentations, reflect on personal progress through benchmarking their own experiences with those of others and potentially discover strategies that may support future learning. This assessment task is an example of learning how to learn from the sharing of others’ experiences within a structured format. At the time of data collection, a progress report was embedded within the journal writing context. However, because of the overlap of content between the progress report and the subsequent presentation, the progress report has since been removed to reduce student workload burden and the presentation content has been adjusted accordingly.

Industry-related projects provide students with an opportunity to explore and potentially resolve ‘real life’ situations that are consistent with the realities of workplace practices. These projects are intended to enhance students’ personal development by extending opportunities to foster responsibility, motivation and engagement, through which the students may develop greater self-confidence, creativity and resourcefulness. Professional development is also
encouraged through project work as the students apply a range of academic theory to resolve a genuine workplace issue. While these projects need to be meaningful to the students, they should be useful but not vital to the organisation to allow student learning to happen through making mistakes and reflection (Ferkins & Fleming, 2011; Fleming, 2015a).

The industry-related projects adopt an action learning approach, a subset of action research, where the students’ inquiry is collaborative in nature. This approach is consistent with the pedagogical aims of cooperative education, as it also combines doing and reflection (Ferkins & Fleming, 2011). All three parties, that is, the student, industry and academic supervisors, have input into the conception of the project, while the student is the key driver of the overall development and implementation of the project. These action learning projects typically follow several stages, including identification and selection of a topic for inquiry, an examination of literature related to the topic, creation of a plan, implementation and evaluation of the plan, and reflection on the overall process. At the completion of the Cooperative Education 2 paper, a final report is written that requires the students to critically reflect on the outcomes of their action learning project and development of each graduate capability. As the students reflect on the graduate capabilities, their experiences recorded and examined within their reflective journals become a resource for identifying personal and professional development.

2.6 Assessment

Assessment of learning through experience is a complex yet integral part of a work-integrated learning programme (Mackaway et al., 2011; Winchester-Seeto, Mackaway, Coulson, & Harvey, 2010; Zegwaard, Coll, & Hodges, 2003). The linking of learning strategies with assessment places more emphasis on the broader learning process and students’ growth and development than on “accountability” and “judgment” (Zegwaard et al., 2003, p. 12), which is the thrust of more traditional assessment practices (Mackaway et al., 2011). In addition, assessments can be used as an incentive to foster students’ engagement with specific learning strategies (Moon, 2006; Zegwaard et al., 2003), such as reflective journals. Unfortunately, not all students are keen to apply themselves to their learning. Moon (2006) describes “strategic students” as those “who are intent on success for the minimum output and will therefore not put any effort into tasks that are not assessed” (p. 109). My experiences with student engagement or motivation to learn are similar to those of Moon, therefore providing justification for requiring students to engage with learning strategies that can be assessed. The learning arrangement (depicted in Figure 2.2) supports Moon’s (2004) statement that “the
need for reflection can be worked into most of the assessment tasks” (p. 167) as a means to encourage learning and to capture what has been learnt by the student.

Each formal assessment within the BSR programme requires, either in part or in its entirety, the students to think about experiences that have been identified for their personal value to their learning. Although there is considerable debate about the use of reflective activities as assessment points (Mackaway et al., 2011; Moon, 2006; E. Smith, 2011), the BSR programme values the contribution that critical reflection can make to student learning and considers it a desirable skill for students to develop as budding professionals. To this end, students’ attention is focused on learning through critical reflection by locating it within multiple learning strategies that, in turn, become assessable items.

2.7 Chapter summary

Critical reflection is an important part of learning in cooperative education, as it brings together workplace and university learning. For learning strategies and assessments within cooperative education to be meaningful, the complexity of the placement process and the situated nature of the learning environment must be taken into account (Zegwaard et al., 2003). Within the BSR cooperative education programme, the practice of critical reflection has been deeply embedded within learning strategies rather than situated outside or independent of the intended learning. In order to foster critical reflection within the BSR cooperative education programme, reflection is integrated and woven within and across several aspects of the learning process. The key conduit for this process is a reflective journal, where the students’ journal entries become the raw data for subsequent secondary reflection that occurs within a subsequent report or presentation. Consequently, the role of the reflective journal in this context moves beyond being ‘just’ an assessment to being a learning tool, which allows for freedom to explore and experiment with ideas and knowledge (Moon, 2006). This arrangement strongly aligns with Kolb’s process of learning, whereby learning extends beyond simply replicating knowledge received from another (E. Smith, 2011) to the active construction of one’s own knowledge. This chapter highlights the context created in this case study for learning through critical reflection.
Chapter 3: Critical reflection in higher education and cooperative education

The purpose of this review is to provide a background to the philosophies, practical foundations and issues underpinning the place of critical reflection within the context of cooperative education. The review also provides support and justification for this research through the presentation of three key areas within this field of study. The first section briefly overviews recent changes to the expectations of higher education and how work-integrated learning is positioned in this context. The second section provides an overview of the history of the principles and practices of cooperative education, including a brief discussion of related learning theories. The final section provides general background to the history, positioning and importance of critical reflection within higher education, with a particular focus on cooperative education. Issues and concerns regarding students’ understanding and practice of critical reflection in sport cooperative education are highlighted in this section.

3.1 Higher education

The newer ‘pragmatic university’ differs from the traditional (Humboldtian) autonomous university through the strong relationships it has with society, business enterprises and the academic world. Pragmatic universities have high social accountability that influences pedagogy, educational practices and knowledge production while considering the globalisation of education markets (Jarvis, 2000; Peach, Cates, Jones, Lechleiter, & Ilg, 2011; Peach & Matthews, 2011; Tynjälä, Välimaa, & Sarja, 2003). As a consequence, over the past few decades, there has been a change in the positioning of higher education providers from elitist institutions for a minority of individuals towards mass higher education and more vocational degrees. This global trend has seen more students, with differing profiles, participating in higher education to obtain undergraduate degrees across a wider range of disciplines and fields of specialisation (Heerde & Murphy, 2009; Leach, 2014; Parker, 2012; Waller, Holford, Jarvis, Milana, & Webb, 2014; Zepke, Nugent, & Leach, 2011). Globally, governments are investing in higher education by widening the social base for participation in an attempt to produce a well-educated workforce that can advance the prosperity of the nation (Waller et al., 2014). This diversity makes the transition from the university to the workplace complex and challenging (Cooper et al., 2010; Tynjälä et al., 2003).
Leach (2014) claims that over the past decade, higher education in New Zealand has experienced a significant shift from an emphasis on “empowerment, equity and active citizenship” to that of “preparation for employment and skills for work” (p. 705). The recently published *Tertiary Education Strategy 2014–2019* (New Zealand Government, 2014) supports this claim, as it identifies six strategic priorities with a clear focus on preparation for employment. Strategic priority one reads, “delivering skills for industry”. The key focus of this priority is to “ensure that the skills people develop in tertiary education are well matched to labour market needs. It also means ensuring tertiary education supports the development of transferable skills. These skills include the ability to communicate well, process information effectively, think logically and critically and adapt to future changes” (p. 10). The goals delivered within this strategy document highlight the contemporary positioning of this research, as it explores understandings of learning within an existing university workplace-based programme that aims to deliver skilled, knowledgeable, work-ready graduates. Therefore, this document endorses the warrant on which this research is being conducted.

### 3.2 Work-integrated learning

Many universities, both locally and globally, have responded to industry's need for work-ready graduates (Zegwaard et al., 2003). Corroborating this is an increasing expectation from students, and their parents, to see clear relevance in their learning for their future in the workplace (Cooper et al., 2010) along with potential career prospects. This increased emphasis on the need for future earning capacity emanates from the realisation that most of today's students emerge from their degrees with significant student loans to repay. That said, universities continue to shy away from apprentice model learning where students learn the trade or skills on the job. Instead, there has been a strong move over time for universities to head more towards applied, integrated or practicum-based learning models. Cooperative education is one such example of a work-integrated learning model offered by universities.

Although applied learning or work-integrated learning is not an entirely new concept for the university setting, there has been considerable growth over the past decade in courses requiring students to undertake some of their learning in ‘the workplace’ (Jones, 2007; Peach et al., 2011). The integration of theoretical study and workplace-based experience has historically been situated within professional programmes such as medicine and veterinary science, where both these elements within the degree are essential for professional registration and a compulsory requirement to a degree programme. The ‘newer’ degree programmes, such as nursing, teaching and social work, also tend to include work-based
learning experiences. When student cohorts in these programmes were smaller, such as they were in nursing, placements were largely managed from the university academic domain, with registered academics accompanying and supervising students in the workplace. These arrangements required academics within the disciplines to maintain strong links to their specific industry partners and maintain a current registration in their specific field. Although this arrangement was preferred by universities, it has not always been sustainable, with growing student numbers resulting in specific clinical educator roles being established within the organisation rather than the university (Grealish & Stunder, 2011).

According to Cooper et al. (2010), students in these programmes are proactively managed to ‘work in order to learn’ while they simultaneously ‘learn to work’ (p. 25). Thus, the learning environment crosses between the workplace and the university, creating complex inter-relationships that must be considered for successful work-integrated learning (Peach et al., 2011). Tynjälä et al. (2003) claimed there are several areas that require further analysis regarding these inter-relationships, including the examination and comparison of supervised interaction patterns in collaborative work, analysis of the events around boundary crossing between organisations, innovated learning related to the boundary crossing and identification of the barriers that may hinder student engagement in innovative learning situations. Although Tynjälä et al.‘s research is over 10 years old, the issues they raise remain topical. This study explores the latter issue within a context of sport cooperative education.

There are several drivers of work-integrated learning that influence the curriculum design, programme management and resourcing (Harvey et al., 2010; Mackaway et al., 2011; Tynjälä et al., 2003). These drivers include opportunities to; achieve professional accreditation, enhance learning in a specific discipline, assist and potentially confirm career choices; develop social responsibility and prepare for the workforce, transfer knowledge from one institution to another; and finally, develop and enhance partnerships between universities and the related industry (Cooper et al., 2010).

Work-integrated learning is an umbrella term used to describe a conceptual framework that encompasses a variety of terminology related to several areas of higher education, including but not limited to internship, practicum, sandwich course, fieldwork, service learning and cooperative education (Groenewald et al., 2011; Rowe, Winchester-Seeto, & Mackaway, 2012; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011b). To date, there remain inconsistencies regarding how the term ‘work-integrated learning’ might be interpreted. Despite this, Cooper et al. (2010) have identified seven dimensions that commonly characterise forms of work-integrated learning.
These dimensions include purpose, context, nature of the integration, curriculum issues, the learning, partnerships between the university and the industry, and lastly, support for the student and the workplace provider. Work-integrated learning is a rich blend of formal academic education, tacit practical workplace knowledge (non-formal) (Cooper et al., 2010) and self-regulated learning (Jarvis, 2010; Tynjälä et al., 2003). The student learning in these two environments, the workplace and the university, is different but this difference may not always be clear (Tynjälä et al., 2003), therefore implying there are opportunities to explore students' understanding and experiences of learning within the context of work-integrated learning.

The integration of theory and practice occurs through a range of work-integrated learning approaches described as experiential learning, problem-based learning, inquiry learning, team-based learning, practice scenarios, active learning, and so forth. Many of these approaches develop skills and attributes necessary for the future work environment and development of professional expertise, as well as extend the student to develop self-confidence, self-awareness and reflection. Several researchers in this field of education argue that the understanding of the learning processes, both formal and informal, in workplace learning is poorly understood and there is a need for intensive process-orientated research in this field (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a; Cooper et al., 2010; Tynjälä et al., 2003). This study is focused within this gap.

It is argued that a work-integrated learning experience, as part of a higher education programme, should go beyond preparing the individual to be work-ready and extend to being life ready (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011b). Further to this, it is felt that if graduates are given exposure to critical pedagogies, they will be better equipped to survive in an ever-changing social and employment environment through being able to reflect on, deconstruct and/or critique their experiences as promised by critical pedagogy. Giroux’s paper discussing Paulo Freire’s promise of critical pedagogy defined it as:

the task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationship between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change. Critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens; it provides a sphere where unconditional freedom to question and assert is central to the purpose of public schooling and higher education, if not democracy itself. (Giroux, 2010, p. 717)
However, there have been few attempts to explore whether the changes in power dynamics that may occur inside or outside an educational setting can be attributed to the practices of critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989). As an extension of this, there is currently a paucity of literature in the cooperative education context that considers elements of a critical pedagogy that may align or connect within these higher learning aspirations.

3.3 Theory and practice in higher education

Professional occupations require the learning of a specific body of knowledge that is necessary to practise effectively (Jarvis, 2010). Traditionally, this body of knowledge is known as ‘the theory’. As a consequence of the changes to higher education examined in the previous section, the role of the educator has become more complex as our understandings of knowledge develop and the volume of knowledge expands. In addition, technology has altered how we process and assimilate information. Theory may be espoused theory – the theory acknowledged by the practitioners and gained in preparation for practice – or theory in use – theory developed through performance (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Jarvis (2010) suggested that knowledge could be theoretical or (academic) discipline based, and practical or integrated. The student must learn the theory, understand the significance of the theory and learn how to apply the theory in practice (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009).

Practice is the usual pattern of action or the work of a professional, as well as a site of learning and source of practical knowledge. Jarvis (2010) argued, “knowing how to perform the action is not the same as having the skill to do it, and so learners can be taught the procedures about how to perform a skill, but they still have to learn how to do it themselves” (p. 260). The understandings taken from experience and the classroom are different; therefore, the best learning environment is an integration of both, rather than the two being divided throughout the course curriculum. The concept of integration will be developed further in later sections of this review and more specifically within the context of cooperative education. Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) summarise this area, arguing, “there is nothing more practical than a good theory” (p. 258), implying that theory should readily be able to put into practice. Within this construct, practice is seen to be dependent on the understanding and ability of the person implementing the theory, that is, whether the person is an expert or a novice or somewhere in transition towards becoming an expert.
3.4 A brief history of cooperative education

Cooperative education is a viable pedagogy that has been adopted by educational institutions for more than a century. In 1906, the educational strategy began in a small engineering college in the USA as a controversial experiment by an engineering professor, Herman Schneider. Informed by his own experiences, Schneider felt that professional concepts and skills could not be effectively learned in a classroom and that it required practical experience in the industry to develop understanding and expert skill. By the 1950s, most students in cooperative education programmes were studying engineering or technology. However, some institutions did offer cooperative programmes in business administration, physical sciences and liberal arts. Cooperative education had become an established educational pedagogy, but it had not been widely adopted by colleges and universities (Sovilla & Varty, 2011).

The greatest period of change for cooperative education in the USA occurred between 1968 and 1996 because of increased federal funding that resulted in large increases in numbers of cooperative education programmes on offer. However, there was lack of evidence supporting this as a valuable educational strategy, so with the support of the Ford Foundation Fund for Advancement of Education, a two-year study of cooperative education began. This study resulted in publications that identified the value and benefits of the cooperative education as pedagogy. Earlier in 1962, the National Commission for Cooperative Education was incorporated, with the express purpose of promoting cooperative education, raising funds and increasing programme engagement in the USA. This body lobbied the federal government to secure funding for cooperative education, at a time when society was changing and demanding increased access to higher education that was relevant to the workforce. This was timely for cooperative education models. There was, however, much debate about what constituted a cooperative education programme – a debate that to some extent continues today. The capacity to attract federal funding during this time was highly influential and much was learnt about the development and implementation of cooperative education programmes (Sovilla & Varty, 2011).

Over the past three decades, cooperative education has been adopted globally by more tertiary educational institutions, but not to the extent that keen advocates may have anticipated. Many newer programmes, such as the BSR degree at AUT in New Zealand, have embraced and implemented cooperative education within their framework. Such programmes continue to survive and form solid foundations for the expansion of this pedagogic model (Cooper et al., 2010; Haddara & Skanes, 2007; Sovilla & Varty, 2011).
3.5 The concept of cooperative education

World Association for Cooperative Education (WACE) (2015), based in the USA, defines cooperative education (co-op) as:

an academic program integrating classroom learning and productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic and career goals. Co-op provides students with progressive learning experiences integrating theory and practice. As an academic program, co-op serves as a partnership among students, educational institutions and employers. (para. 4)

In general, this educational model can be interpreted as encouraging students to integrate their academic study with workplace experience, therefore providing students with opportunities for personalised, contextualised learning. While the above definition clearly points to students learning through experiences, there is a degree of ambiguity about what is meant by the terms ‘integration’ and ‘productive work’.

The cooperative education model is situated under the broad umbrella term ‘work-integrated learning’ to reinforce the notion that cooperative education is more than simply combining academic learning with work-based experience. Here, students’ learning is developed through the integration of theory and practice between the classroom and the relevant workplace, resulting in a graduate equipped with both the knowledge and the skills required for lifelong industry engagement (Eames & Coll, 2010; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011b). Cooperative education is often confused with cooperation or group learning, which it is not, as it is more than working together collaboratively (Groenewald et al., 2011). Although there is an element of collaboration or partnership, it is the integration of the on-campus and off-campus learning that is the identifying and distinguishing feature of cooperative education (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011b). Overall, cooperative education provides students with the two distinctive learning domains that are both different and complementary (Cooper et al., 2010; Eames & Coll, 2010).

Within an effective cooperative education programme, graduate capabilities are clearly understood; students are seen as ‘work-ready’ and holding an appreciation of the less tangible features of a specific workplace environment. Many students secure their first job directly from their placement or networks developed through their workplace experience, or at the very least, they obtain a reference that may enhance future employment prospects (Dressler & Keeling, 2011).
3.6 Learning theories in cooperative education

There is a growing body of literature arguing that cooperative education programmes enhance student development in a variety of ways (Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay, Hodges, et al., 2009; Cooper et al., 2010; Dressler & Keeling, 2011). These include the identification of career pathways, improving their ability to negotiate the workplace, improved self-confidence, enhanced employability (Weisz, 2000), an appreciation of the industry expectations, and the development of lifelong learning skills (Billett & Choy, 2011; Dressler & Keeling, 2011). A study by Eames and Fleming (2005), specific to the sport context, identified a number of clear benefits for students who participated in a cooperative education programme. These included development of hard and soft skills, relationship building and enculturation within the workplace community, opportunities to develop a better understanding of the industry and enhanced learning over time through industry-based project development and implementation.

Although there is a range of theoretical concepts that can be utilised to explain learning in cooperative education (Eames & Cates, 2011; Eames & Coll, 2010), the scope and focus of this study does not allow for an extensive review of these. Therefore, this section will focus on concepts related specifically to experiential learning, reflective practice and sociocultural views of learning.

Dewey’s ideas are extremely valuable in highlighting the importance of experience for learning. His concept of experience provides a key underpinning theory of all forms of education, including cooperative education. Dewey argued that immersion in an authentic learning environment, such as a workplace, can provide opportunities for problem-solving and the potential for behaviours and attitudes to change as a consequence of the experience. However, he warned that not every experience will be educational, but rather its value is contingent on the engagement, motivation and aptitude of the learner (Dewey, 1938). For an experience to be meaningful, it needs to be valued by and relevant to the learner. It also needs to be the subject of some form of reflection if learning is to ensue (Eames & Coll, 2010; Weisz & Smith, 2005). Several researchers have argued that the most relevant learning theory for cooperative education is Kolb’s model of experiential learning (Cooper et al., 2010; Eames & Cates, 2011; Howison & Finger, 2010; Martin & Fleming, 2010; Weisz & Smith, 2005). Kolb’s activity and experience-based model may be used in a variety of situations while the user should remain cognisant of different social and cultural contexts. There is a strong element of reflective practice embedded in Kolb’s cyclic approach to experiential learning. The
reflective element within Kolb’s model is supported by the writings of Dewey, Schön and Boud, and will be developed further in the critical reflection section of this review.

It has been argued within the cooperative education community that the use of reflective practice in cooperative education programmes enhances the likelihood of an experience leading to learning (Eames & Coll, 2010; Raelin, Glick, McLaughlin, Porter, & Stellar, 2008; Van Gyn, 1996). Embedded within the cooperative education programme rhetoric is a requirement for students to reflect on their experiences in the workplace as a means to consider the learning that is taking place. Here, this practice of reflection is positioned as the ‘tool’ that links the theory and practice in the workplace (Eames & Coll, 2010) and vice versa. Reflection is the bridge between experience and learning, and is especially linked to ‘deep learning’ (Weisz & Smith, 2005), involving both cognition and feelings, in which critique of one’s assumptions occurs. The result is about developing personal knowledge through relating the new concepts to prior knowledge and experiences (Gray, 2007) and ultimately being able to transport this new knowledge to problem-solve future situations (Weisz & Smith, 2005). As an integral part of cooperative education programmes, students should be encouraged to look back at their placements and think about what they have learnt from the many experiences in which they engaged. Unfortunately, while this aspiration is a widely accepted part of the cooperative education experience, there has been very little written about students’ experience and understanding of critical reflection, and almost none related to the sport and recreation cooperative education contexts.

Learning theories related to social and cultural environments of the workplace can assist with explaining how students learn within cooperative education. Drawing on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), Eames and Cates (2011) argued that students learn from their own action and from the actions of others. Situated learning theory positions learning within a social context, arguing that learning is a ‘situated participatory activity’. The learning occurs through the experiences of the activities related to the particular placement culture (Lave, 1991; Ovens & Tinning, 2009). Over the duration of the placement, students may apply and learn specific knowledge and skills while gaining a sense of the expectations and standards required in their discipline area (Martin & Fleming, 2010).

Eames and Cates (2011) briefly examined several learning theories, including Piaget’s cognitive-development theory, Bandura’s social learning theory, experiential learning and reflection, and sociocultural views of learning. They concluded that no single theory can explain the learning outcomes attained through cooperative education. This can be explained,
at least partly, by the fact that student learning in this context is multifarious and complex in nature (Eames & Cates, 2011). As a result, there is a burgeoning need for further understanding of the learning outcomes of students who participate in cooperative education (Linn et al., 2004), using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Eames and Bell (2005) reinforce this, arguing that there is a serious paucity of research examining what cooperative education students learn, how they learn and from whom they learn it. Eames and Cates (2011) suggest that any such examination of student learning in cooperative education needs to incorporate multiple perspectives. Dewey’s educational philosophies are an example of one such model, as they encompass multiple factors that influence learning, such as experience, environment, social, cultural and cognitive processes, reflective thinking, inquiry, and moral, ethical and political influences.

3.7 Integration of theory and practice in cooperative education

The key concept of cooperative education is the notion of ‘integrating’ knowledge and skills gained at the university with workplace-based activities (Cooper et al., 2010; Eames & Coll, 2010; Tynjälä et al., 2003). Here, integration relates to the students taking what is learnt in the classroom and applying it to the workplace, and conversely, taking their learning in the workplace back into their academic learning (Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay, Ayling, et al., 2009; K. Smith et al., 2007; Zegwaard & Coll, 2011a). According to Cooper et al. (2010), “work-integrated learning is based on the assumption that theory and practice are complementary parts of a whole. Each informs, challenges and shapes the other and without the other, progress is limited. Without integration there is merely either work or a limited form of learning” (p. 13). There appears to be a little research in this area that reports on how students integrate their learning (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011a), specifically the transfer from the workplace back into the academic classroom (Eames & Coll, 2010).

Insights into the concept of integration are situated around the practice of critical reflection as it is directly applied to learning and a critical component of the pedagogy of cooperative education (Martin & Fleming, 2010). Eames and Coll (2010) claimed that integration is very specific to a particular area of practice and that little is known about how students take ideas from one context to the other. Indeed, the transfer of ideas from one area to the other may be limited (Paku & Lay, 2008), or at least require some form of facilitation (Eames & Coll, 2010). A multidisciplinary study in cooperative education conducted by Coll and colleagues (2009) suggested that integration can and does occur, although it is generally rather ad hoc unless explicitly encouraged. This work recommended driving the integration of theory and practice
through explicit learning objectives, various forms of reflection and developing workplace-based pedagogies. More specifically, Coll et al. (2009) argued that all three forms of reflection: ‘reflection-on-action’, ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-before-action’ are necessary for integration to occur from classroom to workplace and vice versa. They concluded by arguing that further studies in this field are required – specifically, the role pedagogies such as critical reflection activities have in the process of integration.

3.8 Assessment of student learning in cooperative education

The students’ work-placement learning environments are many and varied; consequently, their learning experience is far less predictable than that of the formal style of traditional university learning (Hodges, 2011). Therefore, suitable guidance and a planned approach to the learning experience are essential if student learning is to be effective. A partnership arrangement between the student, academic supervisor and industry supervisor needs to be fostered through clearly identified outcomes. These outcomes include clear role expectations and responsibilities, negotiated learning contracts and strategically aligned assessments (Stupans & Owen, 2009). Capturing some of the elements of the informal learning that occurs in the workplace setting or context is important, as it is instrumental in the enculturation of the student into the particular culture of the industry or workplace (Eames & Bell, 2005).

Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development suggests that an individual’s learning can be enhanced or accelerated through structure and scaffolding within the programme of learning (Wertsch, 1984; Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009). This notion strongly aligns with Dewey’s concept of ‘practical starting points’, where learning approaches should be based on the needs of the individual learner (Hildebrand, 2008).

Good assessment and student learning are fundamentally linked. However, the learning that takes place within cooperative education is complex, broad, individualised and influenced by many factors in the work placement that are beyond the control of the student or the university (Zegwaard et al., 2003). Each student will have a different starting point, and different needs and expectations of the cooperative experience, as well as a learning style that is personalised (Hodges, 2011; Jarvis, 2010). All are important factors that need to be considered when assessing students’ workplace learning experiences.

Within the cooperative education nexus, the use of ‘sustainable assessment’ (Boud, 2000) is applicable, as it considers the need to judge the consequences and effectiveness of student learning. This mode of assessment enables students to develop knowledge, skills and abilities
that are transferrable to meeting future learning needs, as well as the ability to self-assess through reflection. Considering that a key role of cooperative education is preparation for future employment, this approach encourages the students to acknowledge their own performance in relation to institutional and self-predefined expectations. The students need to be active participants in the assessment process and have an opportunity to identify areas of learning that may require focus in the future (Hodges, 2011). This concept pushes the boundaries of traditional assessments that are generally limited to formative and summative assessments on the specific content being learnt.

Critical reflection on workplace experiences is one way that students can capture the uniqueness of their personal learning experience. Students are encouraged to utilise critical reflection of their own experiences to validate and justify what they have learnt and how they may approach a similar situation in a future encounter. This learning is documented through the use of reflective journals and within elements of larger pieces of writing such as final reports, forming a significant portion of the student assessment in cooperative education.

3.9 A brief historical perspective of critical reflection

This section focuses on three key influential writers in the field of critical reflection, beginning in the 1930s with Dewey, who as an American educator and philosopher founded the idea of ‘discovery learning’ and argued that “we learn by doing and realising what came of what we did” (Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001, p. xi). Within this framework, reflection is understood as being about making sense of our experiences through examining them. It is more than simply pausing to think about an experience. Clear links need to be made between thinking, questioning and the experience for learning to result from reflection. The rhetoric suggests that it is through reflection we are able to learn from our experiences and make important links between theory and practice. In reality, this may be true, but the latter is not clearly understood. Dewey argued that thinking and reflecting with the guidance of an educator is the essence of education – as it provides a connection between past achievements and present issues that exist within the experience (Dewey, 1938). Dewey’s writings on education and experience have formed the backbone of contemporary understandings of critical reflection in cooperative education. The longer term benefits of sustained critical reflection are thought to be the development of better knowledge, skills and self-confidence.

Schön was another influential educator who has an interest in how professionals link their specific knowledge base within their practice. He argued that professional knowledge does not
necessarily give practical guidance on what and how to do a particular task. Schön’s work identified ‘reflection-in-action’ as a way thinking while we do something, and ‘reflection-on-action’ for thinking after the experience and trying to learn from it (Schön, 1983/2009). I contend that, ideally, they are interconnected and involve a degree of interplay; however, the former is more commonly applied to experienced practitioners, whereas novice practitioners will generally apply the latter to their practice. Reflection-on-action is considered an active process of transforming experience into knowledge and therefore may be referred to as critical reflection (Rolfe et al., 2011). However, Rolfe’s view is rather narrow, as reflection-in-action is also an active process and both are essential parts of critical reflection, although the dynamics may alter as one becomes more experienced as a reflective practitioner. Schön contended that both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are useful for developing reflective practitioners (Schön, 1983/2009).

Thompson and Pascal (2012) argued that there are several shortcomings in Schön’s approach to reflective practice, including a lack of ‘reflection-for-action’ where there is an element of planning and thinking in advance for what is likely to occur. This preplanning assists with making the most of a learning experience. Schön’s discussions seemed to neglect the importance of language, meaning and narrative in reflective practice. In addition, his work has a very individualistic focus, which does not take into account the wider social context of learning (N. Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

Mezirow’s (1990) view of learning stems from constructing meaning by “making sense of an experience” (p. 1). From here, this interpretation of events becomes a guide for future decision-making whereby the meaning making becomes learning. Mezirow claimed that when we learn to enact meaning, it is different from when we simply learn what is communicated to us. Reflection, he argued, encourages reviewing and adjusting our beliefs and processes of problem-solving as a result of an experience.

3.10 Defining critical reflection

Critical reflection takes the reflective process a step further to include “the critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs are built” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1), as such critical reflection is concerned with the reasons for our actions, as well as their consequences (Dewey, 1910/1997; Mezirow, 1990). There lacks a universal definition or a clear understanding of critical reflection, as it is a contested term that may reflect the ideology of the user. Depending on one’s perspective, critical reflection can be understood to mean very different things and
varies significantly from person to person, and context to context (Boyd & Fales, 1983; Brookfield, 2009; Fook, 2006; F. Gardner, 2009; Harvey et al., 2010; Hatton & Smith, 1995; E. Smith, 2011; van Woerkom, 2010). Regardless of its seeming ambiguity, critical reflection is widely recognised as a key component in the learning processes and is advocated in many areas of professional development and practice (Brookfield, 2009; Leijen, Valtma, Leijen, & Pedaste, 2012). This is especially so within programmes where there is a strong integration of experiential learning (Harvey et al., 2010). Mezirow (1990) claims that “thought that involves critical reflection involves learning” (p. xvii). There is increasing interest in the concept of critical reflection across many fields of education and research (Boud & Walker, 1998; Brookfield, 2009; Ryan & Ryan, 2012).

The terms reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice, reflective thinking and reflexivity appear to have similar meanings and applications in the broad educational literature (Rogers, 2001). According to Black and Plowright (2010), the current literature indicates that the terms reflection and critical reflection are often used interchangeably and are not clearly distinguished from each other. There appears to be a lack of consensus in the literature regarding how to define critical reflection. Many authors concur that not all reflection is critical and that critical reflection is seen as a higher level of cognition that challenges the learner and the teacher (Cowan, 2014; Fang-tao & Hong-mei, 2014; Harvey et al., 2010; Lewis & Smith, 1993; Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Mezirow, 1990). Accordingly, they contend that this form of reflection is complicated and often quite challenging for the learner (Hatton & Smith, 1994). There is a view that critical reflection is built on multiple stages or phases of a reflective process, wherein deeper unpacking is required to invoke the true intent of critical reflection. However, Fook (2006) argued that more work needs to be done from a common basis of understanding so that the practice of critical reflection can be refined and improved.

Professional bodies, such as the Pharmaceutical Society, have taken the view that reflection on professional practice is central to lifelong learning and continuing professional development (Black & Plowright, 2010). In addition, Larrivee (2000) argued, in the context of teacher education, that critical reflection is the distinguishing attribute of a reflective practitioner. She explained:

Critical reflection is a combination of critical inquiry, ethical considerations and outcome of teaching methods, with self-reflection, examination of personal beliefs and assumptions about human potential and learning. Critical reflection is not only a way of approaching teaching – it is a way of life. The path to developing as a
critically reflective teacher cannot be prescribed with an intervention formula. The route cannot be preplanned – it must be lived. (Larrivee, 2000, p. 306)

Consistent with Mezirow’s (1990) work, this review implies that it is this deeper level of reflection that is a precursor to transformative learning – learning that leads to changes in personal understandings and potentially behaviour. Learners may also utilise critical reflection as a means for engaging in metacognition (Eames & Coll, 2010) or developing knowledge of their own learning processes.

Critical reflection is advocated in many areas of learning that are orientated towards professional development and/or practice. This includes all areas of health care education (Brookfield, 2009), teaching (Boud & Walker, 1998; Larrivee, 2000), management (Gray, 2007; van Woerkom, 2010), research (E. Smith, 2011) and cooperative education (Harvey et al., 2010; Martin & Fleming, 2006), as it encourages practitioners to gain insight into their professional identity (Larrivee, 2000). These programmes and courses generally require some form of fieldwork to be closely integrated with academic study, that is, strong links between theory and practice. Consequently, there is wide variation in the techniques and approaches used in the practice of critical reflection. Approaches may range from informal discussions to highly structured formats. As a result, there is little unified agreement on the best way to develop critical reflection, or on how to effectively teach the theory and practice of critical reflection in an academic context (E. Smith, 2011). Although there are countless reflective strategies available (Martin & Fleming, 2006), guidelines in the literature on how to determine, facilitate and assess critical reflection in practice are very limited.

Critical reflection is frequently associated with a number of learning outcomes, including improved thinking, learning and assessment of self and social systems (E. Smith, 2011). Dewey (1910/1997) argued that while we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn how to think well, particularly to acquire the habit of reflecting. To use knowledge critically we do not accept the ‘face value’ of the situation or experience. This requires a depth of thought or perspective, or an ability to look beneath the surface to identify factors that appear to influence a given situation. Further to that, critical reflection involves the ability to look at the bigger picture and view the situation holistically. Such perspectives enable us to develop a fuller understanding of an experience so we are better able to recognise and manage similar situations in the future (S. Thompson & Thompson, 2008). While it is a complex skill, the ability to think critically can be developed over time with suitable guidance and support (Crowe & O’Malley, 2006).
Rolfe et al. (2011) claim there are three key points to critical reflection that should be considered. Firstly, it is retrospective, in that it typically occurs after and often away from the site of the experience. Secondly, there is an assumption that the experience is underpinned by knowledge of some kind. Finally, a process of analysis and interpretation of the experience may uncover new insight and knowledge. Therefore, critical reflection goes beyond the direct recall of an experience to focus more on learning from the experience through the analyses of meaning and the implications for different individuals. To this end, Rolfe et al. (2011) recommend that critical reflection be both systematic and rigorous. They suggest a pragmatic approach to critical reflection by likening it to a form of research where practitioners conduct critical inquiry into their own practice, which then can be used to inform future practice. The views expressed by Rolfe et al. (2011) are closely aligned with Dewey’s notions of reflective thinking. However, some commentators, such as Harvey et al. (2010), continue to argue that there is limited concrete evidence that students change their approaches to work or life as a result of reflective practice. Likewise, Hatton and Smith (1994) argued that although teacher education programmes are designed to encourage reflective practice, overall, there was little evidence of critical reflection; however, other forms of reflection were taking place. A pilot study by Lucas and Fleming (2012) had similar findings in the context of cooperative education, suggesting that further interrogation of this area is warranted.

The area of critical reflection is generally understood to be a difficult and contested terrain. Although it appears to be attractive on paper, its complexity when put into action is widely recognised. Despite this, there are many educators who believe that critical reflection is an important capability to develop, for its potential to contribute to greater depth of understanding and learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009; Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Moon, 2006; Wolf, 2010). The wide range of approaches to critical reflection suggests the focus of translation tends to be placed on the processes rather than the purposes and outcomes of critical reflection. The processes of critical reflection need not be a prescriptive or recipe-like activity (Moon, 2006), but can be more orientated towards broad guidelines that support the learner to develop practical approaches that are both contingent and contextual. However, within a university setting, the type of reflection generally required is professional in nature, rather than personal, because of clear linkages with assessments to demonstrate evidence of learning and professional growth (Ryan & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, it can be argued that utilising particular models or frameworks may be better suited to developing reflective capacity as part of a developmental process.
3.11 Models and frameworks of critical reflection

This section overviews three broad philosophical models of reflection in which certain assumptions underpin the technique of reflecting (Fook, White, & Gardner, 2006; Rolfe et al., 2011). Each model can be identified with a number of frameworks or specific methods that provide assistance and guidance for developing reflection. A short description of two framework examples for each model is presented, although it is acknowledged that many examples may be representative of each philosophy (see Table 3.1). Models may help students with the process of actively engaging with reflection; however, they are not necessarily intended to impose a prescription of what reflection is or how to practise it. Generally, it is not considered essential to follow a model to guide reflection, and many reflective practitioners consciously choose not to prescribe a model. While there is some criticism of models and frameworks for reducing the reflective process to levels or recipes (Fook et al., 2006; Moon, 2006; Ryan & Ryan, 2012), models are also seen as useful for teaching the uninitiated what the focus of reflection might entail. As such, a model to guide initial reflection can be predetermined and situated within a programme, providing there is scope to progress the learners towards making decisions about aligning with a reflective model that suits their own worldview. As with other forms of academic writing, students may choose whether to adopt a particular model to guide their reflection. Practically speaking, a student might choose to adopt a framework as an introductory measure until confidence in the reflective activity is gained and understood.

Smith (2011) argued that if critical reflection is taught from a more structured and theoretically informed basis, student learning could be enhanced. Based on these understandings, she argued that students may be “made aware that the distinctly personal component of self-critical reflection is crafted at one’s own pace and to one’s own taste” (p. 221). In contrast, Boud and Walker (1998) suggested critical reflection should be flexibly deployed and highly specific to the context of the learning environment. Both formats are challenging, as critical reflection is seen as difficult to assimilate into undergraduate teaching because of the complex language and the terminology that is used in different ways, in different contexts (Fook et al., 2006; E. Smith, 2011). To this end, there is a strong belief that a developmental approach to facilitating critical reflection should take into account both structure and flexibility. According to Moon (2004), two key principles should be considered when approaching reflection. These include recognising that the learning process is dynamic with multiple influencing factors and that learning is individual and social. Essentially, reflective models or frameworks are situated
within an overall education strategy, with those utilised being heavily contingent on the specific context.

**Table 3.1 Three philosophical models of critical reflection.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model of critical reflection</th>
<th>Framework based on each model</th>
<th>General comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dewey's model of reflective learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge can be constructed through active reflection on past and present experiences. Pragmatic approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibb's six stages of reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>A cyclic generic framework. A general and non-specific approach to reflection. Novices may find it too vague requiring further guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holm and Stephenson's framework</td>
<td></td>
<td>A detailed set of cue questions. Focuses on consequences of actions and examines practice knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habermas's model of critical reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>Based on 3 areas of knowledge: technical, practical and emancipatory. Critical theory approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor's framework</td>
<td></td>
<td>Describes activities associated with 3 types of reflection: technical, practical and emancipatory. Highly structured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kolb's model of reflexive learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attempts to integrate thinking and practice. Experiential learning approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolfe's framework</td>
<td></td>
<td>Extended Borton's framework. Questions added to each step. Turned the last step back to form reflexive cycle. Generic and easily adapted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Adapted from Rolfe et al. (2009)
Reflection has a long history, stemming predominantly from Dewey’s educational philosophies (Rogers, 2001). A basic assumption of Dewey’s model is that through observation and active reflection on past and present experiences, knowledge can be constructed through interaction with the world. A pragmatist’s notion of reflection is where routine action and reflective action are identified. Therefore, to reflect is to be conscious and thoughtful about one’s actions in challenging situations, as opposed to trial and error responses (Leijen et al., 2012). Gibbs’s model (1988), based on Dewey’s philosophy, has been adopted by several disciplines, including but not limited to health care practice, teaching and sport (Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Rolfe et al., 2011). This six-step cyclic model includes the core skills of reflection, understood as describing what happened, thoughts and feelings, evaluation of the experience, analysis of the situation, what else could be done and future action plans (see Appendix M). This model has the capacity to be applied to reflection before, in and on action (Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay, Hodges, et al., 2009). Although it is represented as a cyclical process, it naturally tends to stop at the point of an action plan, as there is no clear linkage back to the original event or obvious step forward to another event. The non-specific nature of the framework provides much scope for deliberation; however, a novice reflector might find it too inexplicit. Holm and Stephenson’s framework (1994) was developed in a medical setting and is based on a detailed set of cue questions focused directly on consequences of action. This framework supports Dewey’s idea of learning by thinking about the consequences of one’s actions. Dewey’s model takes a strong cognitive position on reflection, where there is less emphasis on demonstrating how to apply new knowledge back into practice (Moon, 1999; Rolfe et al., 2011). Within this framework, Dewey’s examination of reflective thinking does not stand alone; rather, it should be viewed along with his other educational philosophies, in particular experience, to make sense of his holistic approach to understanding the educative process.

Habermas (eminent German sociologist and philosopher) drew upon the Frankfurt School’s approach to critical theory to consider the generation of knowledge and practice of reflection. He described three primary domains of knowledge generation (1974): the technical domain, where we control and manage the environment (technical and scientific disciplines); the practical domain, which involves social interaction and the understanding of meaning (humanities and social sciences); and the emancipatory domain, which is concerned with the knowledge of self, the reality of the world (social and institutional power) and perspective transformation (Fook et al., 2006; Leijen et al., 2012; Moon, 1999; Rolfe et al., 2011). The practical challenge with this approach relates to how each domain can be conceptualised.
within differing contexts, as it assumes the process involved in developing critical reflection can be staged.

Taylor's framework (2006), based on Habermas's model, also identifies activities related to three types of reflection: technical, practical and emancipatory. Each type of reflection is further broken down into a series of detailed, directed questions. Taylor argued that each type of reflection has its own merits depending on its intended purpose. This framework is wide-ranging with its inclusion of a sophisticated form of critical reflection. Meanwhile, Kim's framework (1999), called a 'critical reflective inquiry', is less structured than Taylor's, as it was developed mainly for reflective researchers as a method of data collection. The use of detailed instructions for application makes Kim's framework very attractive for practical situations. Kim identifies the role of a facilitator as important in the development of reflective practice. Her framework forms a developmental continuum to enable the practitioner to gradually develop a reflective capacity, unlike that of Taylor, who suggests that users choose a type of reflection depending on the circumstances (Rolfe et al., 2011).

Kolb's cycle of experiential learning (1984) has evolved from Dewey's educational philosophy. Kolb encourages knowledge development arising from practice rather than being applied to practice. This approach encourages learning from a past experience being applied to future experiences. Kolb's model integrates thought and action so that one does not make sense without the other, thus rendering this model reflexive. This cyclic model includes four stages: experience, observation and reflection, generalisation and conceptualisation and active experimentation (A. Kolb & Kolb, 2005; D. Kolb, 1984). Similarly to Gibbs's framework, the linkage back to the start of the cycle is vague; however, it does imply a natural progression to the next event. Borton's framework (1970) reduces Kolb's cycle to three simple questions: What? – asks for a description of the situation or experience; So what? – prompts some analysis and interpretation of the situation to make meaning; and What now? – action or an intervention are planned that may be different from before. This framework is simple in structure, making it well suited to beginner reflective practitioners. However, Borton's framework is also somewhat limiting, as the explicit details for facilitating deeper reflection are lacking. Rolfe's framework (2002) embellishes Borton's work by providing sets of cue questions at each stage along with an indication of a final step to form a reflexive loop (Rolfe, 2002; Rolfe et al., 2011). As with many frameworks, it can be adapted and modified to suit different learning situations while maintaining underlying premises. An advantage of cyclic models is that they are able to continue cycling until the situation has been resolved. On the
other hand, a distinct disadvantage of the cyclic frameworks is that it is often difficult to think in such an orderly or staged manner, particularly where repeated interplay between the steps may be required before a resolution can be made.

To date, the collection of reflection frameworks has continued to expand, driven largely by the increasing demands of specific discipline areas. Within this context, the pursuit of ‘one fits all’ frameworks seem increasingly limited if they cannot align with the specific expected learning outcomes of a particular programme, hence the pressure for the development of custom-made or flexible frameworks. Examples of adapted frameworks of reflection include the description, examination and articulation of learning (DEAL) model in service learning (Ash & Clayton, 2004); the 5R reflective writing framework (reporting, responding, relating, reasoning and reconstructing) in teacher education (Bain, Ballantyne, Mills, & Lester, 2002); teaching and assessing reflective learning (TARL), a university-wide initiative (Ryan & Ryan, 2012); and Scalon and Chernomas’s three-stage reflection model in nurse education (Thorpe, 2004).

### 3.12 Quality of reflection

In general, the literature provides little evidence of students’ capacity to critically reflect, but suggests that students are able to demonstrate technical and practical types of reflection (Hatton & Smith, 1994; Lucas & Fleming, 2012). Van Manen (1977) distinguishes these three levels of reflection as technical or application of technical knowledge; practical or understanding of meaning; and critical reflection, where personal activity is analysed in wider societal, cultural and political contexts. Leijen et al. (2012) analysed the written self-reflections of a small group of dance students by applying a grid that incorporated four levels of reflection – description, justification, critique and discussion – along one axis and focus of reflection – technical, practical and sensitising (critical reflection) – along the other axis. The outcomes indicated that the focus of reflection was on technical and practical elements with no critical reflection, as the students’ focus was concerned with their own actions and not that of others. The first three levels of reflection were relatively even, with few reaching the highest level, thus highlighting the difficulty of fostering deep reflection, and possibly being able to recognise it when assessed. The outcomes from this specific context were similar to those of other studies (Doel, 2009; Fang-tao & Hong-mei, 2014; O’Connell & Dyment, 2006; O’Connell & Dyment, 2011; Threlfall, 2014), suggesting the need to explore more sophisticated approaches to determining the focus and quality of reflection in other educational contexts.
Many academic programmes, including but not limited to teacher education, outdoor recreation, management, service learning and engineering, use journals and other forms of reflective writing to monitor students’ progress and to guide them in their learning. These forms of reflective writing are often used as assessment tools because they provide good access to the students’ thinking and depth of learning (Bolton, 2010) at that particular time. However, the subjective nature of these documents can make it very difficult to determine the quality of the reflection, as the writing is likely to be highly contextualised. Moon (2006) highlighted the need to discuss whether the student is being assessed on the content or the writing, that is, the process of the writing or the product of the writing. Understanding how students go about reflecting and how to determine the quality of reflection is an area that requires further exploration within specific learning contexts, including sport cooperative education.

3.13 Critical reflection in cooperative education

According to several authors in the field (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a; Cooper et al., 2010; P. Gardner & Bartkus, 2014; Groenewald et al., 2011; Martin & Fleming, 2006), cooperative education is more than work experience; it is a recognised pedagogical approach to learning. Critical reflection is an essential component of the pedagogy of cooperative education that needs to be incorporated into the structure and design of a programme (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011a; Harvey et al., 2010). However, students may not have well-developed skills for reflecting when they enter a cooperative education programme; therefore, the activity of critical reflection needs to be facilitated with structured strategies within the course to encourage active engagement with reflection (Harvey et al., 2010). It is also important to create a culture where reflection is valued as a learning tool, wherein it is safe to be open and honest. Practice and feedback on reflection throughout a programme are important to enable the student to progress through their learning experiences. To this end, Van Gyn (1996) argued that reflective practice to enhance student learning outcomes requires an organised partnership between the student, the academic supervisors and the industry supervisors.

Within the realms of cooperative education, reflection is generally employed and reported on as a practice that supports learning (Fleming, 2014; Harvey et al., 2010; Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Martin & Fleming, 2010; Van Gyn & Grove-White, 2011). There is a widespread assumption that reflection has positive outcomes for student learning in this type of programme. Harvey et al. (2010) conducted an extensive search of the literature examining the role of reflection in work-integrated learning and concluded that the relationship between
reflection and positive student learning outcomes was questionable. They argued that there is “limited empirical evidence and theoretical underpinning to support the use of reflection in higher education” (p. 146), and little evidence of the application of reflection to learning in cooperative education, therefore suggesting that there is wide scope to explore the role of reflection in learning within cooperative education. Presently, a sound theoretical basis for the inclusion of critical reflection within cooperative education is not clearly established; rather, its inclusion is presented more as a practical undertaking (Harvey et al., 2010).

In its purist form, cooperative education is understood to be student-driven learning, which increases the need for students to be self-motivated, proactive, organised and reflective. In addition to the academic demands, there are expectations and requirements to be fulfilled from the academic institution and workplace. Students may face new challenges when initially entering their workplace setting, and some may experience withdrawal from peers and teaching staff (Paku & Lay, 2008). Consequently, it is important to prepare cooperative education students for entry into the workplace to ensure that they are not too overwhelmed and can participate in meaningful learning experiences (Paku & Lay, 2008). The importance of the social context (Fook et al., 2006) should be considered, as personal reflection is part of the broader context of the organisation culture and structure (N. Thompson & Pascal, 2012). The workplace or industry context is complex and may challenge dimensions of reflection often not focused upon – such as the emotional demands of the learning experience, power relationships and time constraints that may influence the quality of reflection.

Another gap existing in the literature is in the understanding of the workplace as a learning environment. Eames and Coll (2010) argue that the kind of educational environment in which cooperative education occurs is central to its success. Boud (1999) also acknowledged that context is the single most important influence on reflection and learning. Although learning occurs in workplaces, usually as a means of upskilling workers, these environments are not exclusively structured with learning in mind (Tennant et al., 2010). Rather, workplaces are orientated to producing particular outcomes, mostly for financially based reasons (Moore, 2007). Bailey, Hughes and Moore (2004) draw our attention to the additional dimension of cooperative education learning arrangements by claiming that learners are engaged in two putatively but problematically related contexts, that is, the workplace and the education provider. This amplifies the complex nature of how students might learn to make connections between their academic theory and workplace practice, that is, to transfer knowledge from one domain to another (Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay, Hodges, et al., 2009).
Within cooperative education, a wide range of strategies are used to facilitate critical reflection. These strategies seek to cater for the individual needs of the students, suit the learning environment and guide the development of reflective skills in the students (Martin & Fleming, 2010). These strategies include assessment and feedback of learning contracts, reflective journals, progress reports, final reports and oral presentations. The learning contract and reflective journals will be discussed further in the next section.

### 3.14 Critical reflection in sport cooperative education

Globally, the literature specific to sport cooperative education is relatively sparse; however, it may be possible to apply principles from other disciplines to this context to some degree (Fleming & Ferkins, 2005; Sotiriadou, 2011). Within sport cooperative education, the students typically begin the process of critical reflection via ‘reflection-for-action’ through the development and negotiation of a learning contract. The development of the learning contract requires the students to reflect on their own learning to identify areas needing to be developed or enhanced. The students are required to review their current situation and to carefully consider what they intend to achieve and learn through their cooperative education experience (Fleming & Martin, 2007). This process gives the students an opportunity to identify and review their own strengths and weaknesses, and then, in consultation with their industry and academic supervisors, create a personal set of learning objectives. To some extent, self-awareness may develop during this process, through a commitment to a personalised learning plan that meets the needs of the student, university and organisation. It is important that the learning outcomes are purposeful and meaningful to the student. Overall, the purpose of professional and personal learning outcomes within the learning contract is to encourage workplace learning (Cooper et al., 2010). This anticipated workplace learning and the issues encountered during their cooperative experience form the basis of the student’s reflection.

Critical reflection is considered an important part of sport cooperative education in New Zealand (Fleming & Martin, 2007; Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Martin & Fleming, 2006), as it is recognised as contributing towards deeper learning (Boud et al., 1993; Lay & McGuire, 2010; Moon, 2006). It is richly embedded within the student assessments for cooperative education, wherein students are expected to bring their industry learning experiences into their academic activities and vice versa. This underpins the need to examine the structure and scaffolding of critical reflection in sport cooperative education programmes.
Students who are engaged in their learning are more likely to be successful and learn to a greater depth through reflection, questioning, evaluating and discussions with others (Billett, 2002b; Cowan, 2010; Moore, 2013; Zepke et al., 2011), whereas the disengaged student relies on superficial approaches to learning such as rote learning, jumping to conclusions and non-critical modes of learning (Zepke et al., 2011). Teacher education literature focuses on factors that may influence student engagement in deeper learning. This area of the literature is complex, as many of the contributing factors are viewed from differing epistemological lenses. However, key considerations for augmenting student engagement include motivation and agency, teaching practices, learning relationships, and environmental factors that are internal and external to the learning environment (Zepke et al., 2011).

A small pilot study comparing hard copy journals with online blogs in the BSR cooperative education programme found the writing style was in the first person, often informal and at lower levels of reflection (Lucas & Fleming, 2012), suggesting there was limited engagement with this learning strategy. Beyond this, there is a paucity of literature in the sport cooperative education area that specifically discusses the application, mobilisation and engagement of critical reflection to enhance student learning. It is unclear if there are unique features specific to this context that influence student engagement in their learning.

3.15 Reflective writing

Journal writing in higher education has many different purposes (Boud, 2001; Cowan, 2014; Moon, 2006; O’Connell & Dyment, 2006). Within the context of cooperative education, journals are commonly used to encourage the recording of events in order to make meaning from them (Ayling, 2006; Boud, 2001; Lucas & Fleming, 2012). Here, students are required to write reflective journals of their experiences during their cooperative placements. These documents are used to assess student reflection during their programme and create a record of their cooperative education journey or progression. Many educational programmes, including but not limited to social work, teaching, business, outdoor recreation and sport, use journals to encourage students to engage in reflective practice as a means to access and assess their learning experiences. Therefore, students need to be reflecting in effective ways rather than simply running through a mental checklist of their new or developing knowledge (Parkes & Kajder, 2010; Threlfall, 2014). Although journals may be useful for recording experiences, they may not be seen by students as a tool to improve thinking and enhance learning.
When students are required to write a reflective journal, there are several important factors that need to be considered for this approach to be an effective learning tool (Threlfall, 2014). The students must feel comfortable and supported if they are to be honest in their reflections (Moon, 2006). Boud (2001) suggested that the key inhibitors to students’ reflective writing becoming critical is their knowledge that someone will read the journal and their concern about how it will be judged as part of an assessment. These factors, Boud argues, can influence the nature of the students’ writing and what they consider suitable material to write about. To this end, developing students’ skills of reflective writing may require prompts, guidelines and supportive feedback (Moon, 2006; Parkes & Kajder, 2010; Threlfall, 2014). To date, very little research has been done to explore how sport and recreation students go about critically reflecting and what they consider important experiences to reflect upon.

3.16 Chapter summary

Cooperative education is a pedagogical approach in higher education that espouses the integration of academic theory with practical, industry-based experience. There is no prescribed content in cooperative education, as students have control of their own learning through the identification of specific learning strategies within learning contracts that include predefined and personalised learning outcomes. The industry-based learning environment is encouraged to provide students with experiences that are relevant to their future career goals and are meaningful. Within this context, critical reflection is used to encourage the integration of theory and practice, as well as to enhance and deepen student learning. While implementation of critical reflection in higher education continues to be seen as highly complex, there is broad support for its potential to promote and enhance ‘deeper’ learning. It is here that a clear warrant exists for further exploration into new domains of study, such as sport cooperative education, where very little is known about the practice and product of this mode of learning.
Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter will describe and justify the research methods engaged with in order to address the research questions. It will begin with background around the choice of methodological approach undertaken and then present the data collection methods, recruitment processes and ethical considerations, and analysis and representation of data. Features of case study methodology related to the concept of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability and authenticity, are discussed within the body of the chapter.

4.1 Location within a research paradigm

The framework for a research design involves the interconnection of the philosophical worldview (paradigm) assumptions held by the researcher, strategies of inquiry relating to the worldview and specific research methods supporting this approach (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Making explicit the philosophical worldview will help explain the researcher’s choice of methodology, whether it be quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.

The aim of any research is to advance knowledge; however, there is considerable debate around what knowledge actually is and how it can be acquired. Positivism and interpretivism are two distinctive approaches to the nature of knowledge. Each approach has its own epistemology (how knowledge is acquired) and ontology (philosophy of existence), which consequently impacts the methodology used by the researcher, the type of data collected, and the analysis and interpretation of the data (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Positivism follows an objective scientific model, where the data are derived from careful observation and measurement, often leading to the acceptance or rejection of a theory. In contrast, the interpretative approach aims to explore meaning or qualities that are not readily quantifiable, such as thoughts, feeling and experiences (Stake, 2010). Engagement with the pursuit of ‘meaning’ demands a degree of subjectivity. The choice of approach is determined by the nature and direction of the research questions (Coll & Chapman, 2000a) and the researcher's particular worldview (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

Qualitative research generally focuses on understanding a particular situation in great depth (Stake, 2010) and asks different kinds of questions that cannot readily be asked using quantitative methods. In 2000, Coll and Chapman claimed that research in cooperative education predominantly followed a quantitative mode of inquiry and few qualitative studies
were found in the literature. Historically, cooperative education research has focused on issues such as programme development, administrative practice, benefits of participation and programme outcomes, to name a few (Coll & Eames, 2004). Such research orientations have been preferred to orientations that require greater depth of understanding into experience, perceptions and learning. More recently, research and development of theories in work-integrated learning has expanded and is stronger as a consequence of more studies having been conducted from a qualitative paradigm (Coll & Eames, 2004).

Most qualitative research is experiential, studying personal knowledge rather than objective measures (Stake, 2010). Rich, thick description conveys the nature of the experience to the reader (Lincoln & Guba, 1990). Thus, the qualitative researcher frequently makes the phenomenon more complicated rather than simpler; therefore, the context and situation become a very important aspect of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1990; Schram, 2006). Qualitative inquiry is essentially interpretative and critical, as the data may be objects and/or situations that the researcher notices, and then attempts to understand and describe. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) used a quilt-making metaphor to describe this approach, as the choice of interpretive practices may not be set firmly at the start but is pieced together along the way. Therefore, qualitative researchers must be flexible with their research materials, be they methods or data, in order to do justice to themselves, their participants and the topic of their investigation.

The paradigm aligning with my philosophical stance is based on four interpretive worldviews, as identified by Creswell (2009): post-positivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory and pragmatism. At the outset of my doctoral journey, I positioned myself as spanning both constructivist and pragmatist paradigms, with an expectation of developing my understanding of paradigms further, such that I might align myself more closely with one particular paradigm. However, as I progressed with my reading, thinking and writing on education and theories of experience, I was drawn more towards the pragmatic paradigm, in particular, the writings of John Dewey. Actively reading Dewey’s work, with Creswell’s summaries of constructivism and pragmatism in mind, I noticed there were significant areas of overlap that related to each paradigm. The overlapping areas included the way participants construct meaning, social and historical construction, multiple views, consequences and so forth. Interestingly, these overlapping areas are supported by Hickman (2007), who argued that Dewey had developed his own form of constructivism and had anticipated concerns related to language and power relations (called ‘structures of culture’), as later discussed by others such as Foucault. This
sentiment confirmed my confidence in utilising a Deweyan lens as a guide to understanding the multiple complexities of critical reflection in cooperative education.

John Dewey’s philosophical writings on education and experience have remained as topical and relevant to current theoretical discussions on education as they were when they were written in the late 1900s (Jones, 2007). He wrote passionately, prolifically and extensively about learning, with a particular focus on learning through experience and reflective thinking that was connected to and of interest beyond the realms of the academy (Hildebrand, 2008; Saltmarsh, 1992). The resurgence in Dewey’s popularity over recent decades is due to a number of factors, including his insightful genius; his ability to articulate concepts both intelligently and engagingly; his deep concern for a moral, ethical and democratic society; and the ability of his philosophies to resonate and hold value in today’s world (Hildebrand, 2008). Contemporary theorists in the field of experiential learning, notably Kolb and Schön, have attempted to advance some of Dewey’s thinking and their work will also be drawn upon within this study.

4.2 Researching from the inside

Acknowledgment of the researcher’s place within the research is important, particularly when the research is undertaken within the researcher’s place of work. Mercer (2007) stated that insider research is an under-researched methodological issue faced by many educational researchers in the current research environment. This characteristic stems from an increase in part-time educationally based research degrees being undertaken by individuals who remain employed while conducting their research within their own learning institution. My research endeavour is one example of this type of situation.

Mercer’s work has identified ‘insiderness’ in a place of research as a continuum from insider (native) to outsider (stranger). The relationship between the researcher and the researched has multidimensional factors, such as researcher identity, time and place; power relationships; personalities; and topic of discussion. Using the term ‘endogenous research’ to encompass insider research, Trowler (2011) supported Mercer’s concept of a continuum by adding a qualifier that insiderness also depends on the researcher’s own ‘identity positioning’. Being on the inside generally constitutes being part of the group being studied (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), studying one’s colleagues or all group members co-researching (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). However, in light of this, my research was undertaken within an organisation where I am currently employed and was based in a programme of study in which I am actively involved.
Although I do not belong to the student group in this study, I am very familiar with the processes and practices of our cooperative education programme. Therefore, I have acknowledged and situated myself within my research as an insider researcher. Accordingly, my position within the university and my involvement with the cooperative education programme has provided benefits, as well as challenges, during the design and implementation of this study.

There are definite benefits to being an insider researcher. I am able to bring a wealth of cumulative knowledge of history, culture and developments within my research context to my research topic. My position within my research is unlike that of external researchers, who are often new or unknown to their research context, and therefore less familiar with the nuances of the organisation involved in the study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Edwards, 2002). The subjective nature of this case study is reliant on, yet strengthened, by my being well versed in the intricacies of the case being explored. Mercer (2007) takes an objectivist viewpoint in his argument, claiming that an outsider is more capable of providing an objective account of interactions within the study, as there is more distance and detachment from the research participants. I would argue that such distance and detachment of the outsider might lead to limited understandings of the peculiarities of the research setting, as the outsider does not have the sensitivity inherent to an insider. Armed with a richer understanding of the issues being explored, an insider may provide insights outside the grasp of an outsider. However, a researcher, whether an insider or not, is likely to have some influence on the research context and will bring certain biases, depending on the researcher’s position within the research context and the nature of the topic in question. These biases and assumptions must be recognised and addressed during the research process. Within this study, these factors are considered and addressed through the choice of an interpretive research methodology that acknowledges and accepts subjectivity as its core assumption.

Researching from within brings with it inherent risks and tensions that need to be identified and dealt with to ensure the research is ethical and credible. According to Humphrey (2013), the educator–researcher is undertaking ‘sensitive research’, while Floyd and Authur (2012) identified degrees of ‘insiderness’ of the researcher that might either enable or constrain certain aspects of the research process.
This list, compiled by the researcher, illustrates some of the risks that can eventuate through insider research:

- Revealing of delicate information specific to the stakeholders
- Formal and informal power of the researcher
- Researcher role conflict and confusion
- Tensions concerning loyalty issues and claims of certain individuals’ behaviours
- Response of researcher to participants and participant responses to researcher
- Interpretation of data that may not be from an unbiased viewpoint (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009)
- Desensitisation to potential role conflicts (Humphrey, 2013)
- Privacy and confidentiality

Risk assessment and management strategies within my study happened at the time of the project planning, ethics approval process and in an ongoing manner throughout the study.

A particular risk that I believe was both advantageous and disadvantageous to my study was my professional relationship with the research participants. This point raised issues related to power dynamics perceived by the participants, as well as the maintenance of privacy and confidentiality. These factors had to be addressed within the study but were not insurmountable. As the participants knew me as a lecturer, some may have had a pre-existing sense of rapport and trust. This established relationship in a teaching situation could lead to a more rapid and complete acceptance of the research situation, and consequently a greater willingness by some to participate. This relationship may have led to greater depth to the collected data or may have resulted in branching into areas previously unforeseen (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Conversely, my teaching position may have made students feel pressured to participate if the invitation to participate was taken as some kind of course requirement (Humphrey, 2013). Furthermore, my being familiar to potential participants could reduce the likelihood of volunteers (Floyd & Arthur, 2012) for a variety of reasons beyond the students’ apathy, lack of interest, being too busy and so forth, to include students’ feeling I was not supportive of them, perceiving that I would get ample volunteers because of my position and feeling they did not have anything significant to contribute the research. These issues related to recruitment, privacy and confidentiality were minimised and managed through the
appointment of an independent administrator who interacted with the students to anonymously recruit participants on my behalf (to be discussed later in the chapter).

Sustained moral integrity of the insider researcher is vital to maintain the anonymity of participants and resolve dilemmas related to relationships and priorities as the research unfolds (Floyd & Arthur, 2012). My intentions during the research process were always to remain open-minded to all possibilities encountered in the hope that the findings of this study, whether they are positive or negative, may contribute in some way towards improving current practices and influencing change. Conducting research on students within an educational organisation raises numerous ethical issues for consideration. These issues must be addressed within stringent organisational ethical approval processes. The management of these processes will be described later in this chapter. The conceptualisation of this study is drawn together through an insider researcher engaging in a case study methodology underpinned by the theories of John Dewey.

4.3 Case study research

In this thesis, case study research was utilised as the methodological framework. Case study was chosen for this research because it is an approach commonly used in work-integrated learning, as well as other areas of education research. This approach is highly suited to practice-orientated fields because of their highly contextualised nature, in particular, educational programmes such as cooperative education in sport and recreation (Coll & Chapman, 2000a, 2000b; Coll, Eames, Paku, Lay, Hodges, et al., 2009). The strategic value of the case study lies in its ability to highlight what can be learnt from a single case (Schram, 2006), while readers are invited to draw inferences that may be applicable to their own situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

Schram (2006) defined case study by its analytical focus not by the methods used for the study. He argued that it is able to be adapted to a wide range of academic disciplines through the use of different methods to examine the case from various perspectives. According to Stake (1995), a case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, that is, coming to understand its activity within specific circumstances. Such an in-depth, holistic study may encompass the study of individuals or groups. However, multiple data collection methods can generate the potential to collect large amounts of data requiring careful management and analysis systems to prevent the researcher becoming lost in the data.
Case study researchers need to deal with complex data and avoid any temptation to oversimplify or exaggerate the study (Merriam, 2009).

A case is located within a distinctive context of significant interest and is bound by time (defined in the next section). Therefore, a case study is an exploration of a clearly defined “bounded system” (Sharp, 2009). The case has uniqueness based on its sequence of activities and scope of characteristics (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Experiential accounts from the case provide insight into this uniqueness. Researchers do not study a case to understand other cases, as the primary focus is to understand the chosen case, although readers may draw their own conclusions and generalisations from the study. A case study enables the researcher to resolve ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, while considering how the context may influence the phenomenon. Using a variety of data-collecting tools (Swanborn, 2010), the case study researcher is invited to explore the phenomenon in great depth and promote data credibility or ‘truth value’ through converging the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Stake (1995) categorises case studies into three types: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. In an intrinsic case study, the case itself is of interest and what can be learnt from this particular case is the focus (Schram, 2006; Stake, 1995). The case is something special we want to know more about (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study can assist in the understanding of or insight into something beyond the case (Schram, 2006), for example, examining a person with diabetes to understand more about diabetes not the person. The collective case study is essentially an instrumental case study extended over many cases to develop a theory of a particular occurrence.

This single intrinsic case study (with embedded cases) examines an issue (critical reflection within sport cooperative education) while paying attention to the physical, social and cultural contexts of each case. According to Baxter and Jack (2008), this approach is powerful, as it enables the data to be analysed from within the cases separately, between each case and across all cases. Data analysis of this kind provides greater richness to the case while adding to the complexity of overall understanding.

### 4.4 The BSR case study

This section describes the process of selecting the case to be studied, and then provides an overview of each of the data collection methods, including documents, questionnaires and interviews. Participant recruitment for each data collection method is reviewed and ethical
issues addressed, before a detailed description of the participants is offered. In conclusion, each of the four phases of data collection is outlined.

4.4.1 Case selection

The choice of this particular intrinsic case was a form of purposive sampling; each student in this cohort was eligible to participate through meeting completion requirements of the papers, and therefore being capable of providing information relevant to analytically advancing the topic being studied. Furthermore, each student had participated in the same cooperative education programme, albeit within differing organisations and with various industry and academic support. This particular cohort of students was accessible at the time, and the researcher was able to utilise suitable recruitment strategies to enlist participants into the study (Gratton & Jones, 2010). This case study had clear and well-defined boundaries in terms of participants, location, organisation, time and context (Schram, 2006; Stake, 1995). The case was selected to maximise what could be learnt from looking into this particular context. The participants were BSR students who had recently completed their yearlong cooperative education papers at AUT, located in Auckland, New Zealand. Details of the recruitment strategies and participants are presented later in this chapter.

4.4.2 Data collection methods

The primary data for this qualitative case study were collected through documents (course materials and student reflective journals), a qualitative questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The combination of these data collection strategies aligns with case study methodology and is important for providing trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn from the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A brief overview and justification of each data collection method follows.

4.4.2.1 Documents

Written documents, including cooperative education administrative and teaching documents, student templates and written reports were a valuable source of information that were used to clarify, support, confirm and augment claims made from other data sources such as journals, interviews and questionnaires. The student reflective journals formed the framework for creating the research narratives (to be discussed later in this chapter). Gratton and Jones (2010) argued that unobtrusive data collection such as documents of this nature do not require the researcher to interact with the participant, hence removing the likelihood of any possible
influence over the responses or behaviour of the participant. Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2013) added to the discussion around participant-generated textual data, arguing that these forms of data collection are less common in qualitative research than interactive methods such as interviews and focus groups. Although these documents are a reliable source of what happened or was expected, they are limited in that they provide less evidence to aid in the understanding of why some things may happen. With these limitations taken into account, the reflective journals provided key insights into students’ enactment and utilisation of critical reflection within this educational programme.

### 4.4.2.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are commonly used as data collection tools in qualitative research designs. They usually consist of demographic-related questions and a number of closed or open-ended questions on a particular topic (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Gratton & Jones, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend the use of questionnaires for research topics interested in experiences, understandings and perceptions, and practice-type areas. Questionnaires administered to a group, such as a class or conference gathering, is a relatively quick and convenient way to collect potentially sizeable volumes of data. Approaching a specifically gathered group is particularly useful when the individuals who make up the group would ordinarily be difficult to locate. Further, this approach adds to preserving anonymity, as an administrator is able to collect anonymously completed surveys through the use of a ‘collection box’.

In this study, a questionnaire (see Appendix K) was chosen as a method to collect data from the student group, who were together at one time, making it easy for them to participate in the research. A questionnaire may enable data to be gathered from students who feel uncomfortable about participating in other data collection methods, such as an interview. The questionnaire data helped to inform and guide questions to be used in a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire also included a small number of closed (demographic) questions used for developing a descriptive profile of the participants within the group. The placing of the easy-to-answer demographic questions at the beginning of the questionnaire was to encourage the students to begin completing the questions and instil some confidence in them to continue. There were several short-sentence completions and longer open-ended questions designed to focus on specific issues or themes. The questions provided participants with the
flexibility to respond using their own words to explain their perceptions and understanding of the topic under investigation rather than choosing from a range of predetermined answers.

Timing of the delivery of the questionnaire was important in reducing non-response bias. Because the questionnaire was administered near the end of a classroom session, the students were provided with adequate time to read the questions and complete them. Factors that motivate people to respond or not respond to a questionnaire cannot be certain, nor can we gauge how honest they are with their answering. Therefore, administering the questionnaire at a convenient time for the students, and keeping it succinct and clear may assist with gathering more effective data.

4.4.2.3 Interviews

Interviews are inherently flexible and may be considered a ‘professional conversation’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Gillham, 2005). They are the most common form of data collection in sport subdisciplines such as psychology (Gratton & Jones, 2010), social and health sciences (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and education (Raven, 2014). Collecting qualitative data through an interview process is mostly associated with exploring a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants, revealed through their personalised use of language and explanation of concepts. The goal is for the interviewer to engage in conversations with the participants in such a way as to elicit details about their experiences and perceptions on a topic area. Depending on the purpose of the research and methodological approach to addressing the research questions, there are a number of ways of formatting an interview, including structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, narrative interviews and focus groups, each varying in flexibility and style of data collection. This study adopted a semi-structured interview approach (see Appendix L), as it provided flexibility for both the researcher and the participant.

An important factor to remain cognisant of during the interviews is the potential for interviewees to perceive levels of authority or power and how this perception may impact on the responses offered by the participants. In the case of this research, the participants were recent BSR graduates who were well aware of my involvement within the cooperative education programme. All of the participants knew me as a lecturer who conducted cooperative education workshops and understood my interest in the cooperative education programme. This was possibly an advantage in terms of recruitment, as they knew I understood the process they had been through and there was an element of trust. All
participants were fully briefed by the interviewer prior to the commencement of their interview to ensure they were comfortable with the process.

4.4.3 Participant recruitment and ethical considerations

Recruitment of participants occurred after ethical approval was gained from the AUT ethics committee (AUTEC), and then from the Deakin University human research ethics committee (DUHREC). There were several ethical issues surrounding recruitment that were considered and addressed as part of this research, particularly as my role in the cooperative education programme situated me as an insider researcher. The following description of the recruitment process highlights ethical issues that were important to consider prior to, during and after recruitment. These ethical issues included informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, potential for coercion and social and cultural sensitivity. Within the following section, each ethical issue will be discussed with reference to strategies employed for addressing them during the recruitment and implementation of the study.

An announcement made through AUTonline, one week prior to the physical recruitment, invited potential research participants to access and read the participant information sheet related to this study. The participant group were selected using a form of purposive sampling (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Sharp, 2009), as discussed previously, as this cohort of students had recently completed all assessments towards their cooperative education papers. Other student cohorts within the university would not fit the recruitment requirements for this case study. The timing of participant recruitment was especially important to ensure there was no longer any capacity for me to have any impact on student results or for the students to feel there might be some direct advantage for them to volunteer to participate. Therefore, any potential suggestion of student coercion to participate for better grades was eliminated.

As this study involved students whom I may have encountered in workshops, and since I am an academic supervisor, there was further potential for coercion of students to participate in the study, particularly if I was to personally administer research information and data collection documents to the students. Therefore, an administrator who had not been directly involved in any teaching of the cooperative papers was found and briefed on the research topic, in order to invite students to participate in the study. Potential for coercion was minimised through restricted access of the researcher to the students at the outset of the study when participants were likely to be most vulnerable and possibly feeling the greatest pressure to participate.
At the completion of the students’ final cooperative education class, which all graduating students were expected to attend, the administrator outlined the concept of the research to be undertaken. It was reiterated to the students that there was no obligation for them to volunteer to participate in this study and there was no penalty for withdrawing from the study at any time. Upon withdrawal, the participant’s data would be removed and not used in the study (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Another important ethical consideration with qualitative research is the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. The participants were also informed as to who would have access to data once they were collected (Gratton & Jones, 2010) and how their identity would be protected through all data collected being made anonymous.

The research documentation was handed out to the students along with an invitation to ask questions regarding any aspect of the study in an attempt to demystify the process and engender confidence to participate. The documentation included an information sheet (see Appendix E), a questionnaire (see Appendix K), a journal access consent form (see Appendix G) and a form for expression of interest to participate in an interview (see Appendix I). Informed consent is a pivotal principle in all research involving human participants (Humphrey, 2013), as participation must be voluntary and based on a thorough understanding by volunteers of what their involvement entails (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Those who gave informed consent did so having understood the goals of the study and what their input might be; therefore, they came to an informed decision on whether or not to participate. Completion of the questionnaires was taken as the granting of consent to participate in this part of the study.

At the time of administering the research documents, the students were given the option to complete the questionnaire immediately or to take it away to complete off campus and return to the administrator at a later date. The majority of students who chose to complete the questionnaire did so immediately while they were present in the room, some left the documents unattended and others opted to take the documents away to complete at a later time. These latter questionnaires, however, were never returned to the administrator, suggesting this was another means for the students to politely opt out of the study. From the group of 92 students, who were all eligible to participate in the research because they had completed all assessments for their cooperative education papers, 60 students completed the questionnaire.

While the students were completing the questionnaire, 38 students also completed consent forms giving the researcher permission to have their reflective journals downloaded from
Blackboard for de-identification in preparation for data analysis. In addition, 11 students completed the expression of interest form indicating their willingness to participate in an interview. They provided contact details for interview arrangements to be made at a later date that was convenient for the participant and the interviewer. These participants placed one or both of these completed research documents (journal consent and interview expression of interest) in an envelope, sealed it and placed it in a collection box in the room. This process was to ensure these forms remained separated from the questionnaire data and were not able to be cross-referenced, thus protecting the questionnaire respondents’ identities.

As all students were eligible for an interview, each of the 11 students who had completed an expression of interest form, were sent an email thanking them for their interest in the study. Included in this email was an outline of the interview process and a request (with a response-by date) for them to nominate a date and time suitable for an interview. At this point, some students chose not to reply to this follow-up email, resulting in their name and details being removed from the contact list. This step enabled participants to withdraw themselves knowing there was no pressure or consequences for their actions. On a ‘first come, first served’ basis (a form of convenience sampling), seven interviews were conducted. At the beginning of each interview, the participant was offered an opportunity to discuss the study before completing an interview consent form and a journal alignment consent form (see Appendices F and H). Each interview participant, with the understanding that they had the right to withdraw from the study, completed the journal alignment consent form.

Throughout the entire research process, I sought to uphold my obligation as researcher to the Treaty of Waitangi, in particular, that I must incorporate the three principles of the treaty: participation, protection and partnership. Throughout the recruitment and implementation of this study, in all communication and engagement with participants, I endeavoured to be respectful of the values, practices and beliefs of every individual. My understanding of this practice was enhanced during the AUT ethical approval application process, where consultation with the faculty equity representative occurred to discuss any potential social and cultural issues that might have an impact on the participants in this study.

4.4.4 Participant description

This section provides descriptive details of the participants as a means to highlight characteristics of the cohort of BSR students represented within this intrinsic case study. A
brief overview of the BSR cooperative education programme was offered in Chapter 1, and a full description of this case related to critical reflection was presented in Chapter 2.

4.4.4.1 Questionnaire participants

The questionnaires administered provided demographic information about this particular cohort of students. From the 2012 BSR students completing cooperative education, 60 out of 92 completed the questionnaire, giving a 65% response rate. Table 4.1 highlights the gender and age of this cohort of BSR students. The gender balance across the entire group had a slight female skew (55% female), with the majority of students falling into the under-22 age bracket (68%), suggesting many of these students came to university straight from secondary school. This characteristic of the group may also have some bearing on the nature of life experiences they are able to bring to the cooperative education programme. The gender split related to age was interesting: in the under-22 age bracket, 61% were female, and in the 22–30 age bracket, 67% were male. This might suggest more males took time out before entering their degree of choice. The over-30 age bracket made up 6% across the entire group, with most being female. Based on a relatively good questionnaire response, it appears the BSR degree is relatively evenly represented by both genders, suggesting this type of degree may appeal to both male and female prospective enrollees equally.

Table 4.1 Student demographics – Age and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (n = 60)</th>
<th>Under 22 years old</th>
<th>22 to 30 years old</th>
<th>Over 30 years old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 27)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 33)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 illustrates the ethnic diversity of the BSR students across both genders. The ethnic distribution of this cohort represented by both genders is NZ European (n = 53), NZ Māori (n = 8), Pacific Island (n = 4), South African (n = 3) and Indian (n = 3). The percentage (20%) of Māori and Pacifica students enrolled in the BSR degree is an interesting point, however it was not a factor that was isolated for exploration at this time within this study.
Table 4.2 Student demographics – Ethnicity and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (n = 60)</th>
<th>European NZ</th>
<th>Māori</th>
<th>European + Māori</th>
<th>Pacific Island (PI)</th>
<th>European + PI</th>
<th>South African</th>
<th>Indian</th>
<th>PI + Fijian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 27)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 33)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.4.2 Interview participants

Seven students participated in a semi-structured interview that took place a short time after graduation. Those who were interviewed had undertaken their placements in a range of different sport and recreation organisations (see Table 4.3). Although a small number of interviews took place, there was a broad representation of gender, age, organisations and academic scope. Each interviewed student was allocated a student number and a pseudonym for identity protection, as well as for any other identifiable features such as organisation names, supervisors and co-workers.

Table 4.3 Interview participants’ organisation type and general activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code and pseudonym</th>
<th>Placement organisation type</th>
<th>Major activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1: Dana</td>
<td>School – Outdoor education</td>
<td>Outdoor instructor and assistant teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2: Maia</td>
<td>Community-focused not-for-profit recreational centre</td>
<td>Assisting with coaching and event management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3: Fergus</td>
<td>Research centre followed by community-focused not-for-profit recreational centre</td>
<td>Database searching and management Facility management and gym instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 4: Andrew</td>
<td>National elite sports team</td>
<td>Assisting strength and conditioning coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 5: Lydia</td>
<td>Not-for-profit</td>
<td>Social media development and event management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 6: Darren</td>
<td>School – primary</td>
<td>Assisting in health and physical activity Classroom assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 7: Phillip</td>
<td>Coach education</td>
<td>Assisting coach education and development initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1 locates and provides perspective of the types of organisations where the interview participants undertook their placements within an overall BSR placement organisation industry profile. The figure highlights the diversity of placement types where BSR students are likely to
be placed within the sport and recreation sector. The school-based placements appear to be
grounded on the nature of school activities and their requirements. Students on placement
at a school may be located within different departments or areas within the school, such as the
health and physical education department. This will be dependent upon whether or not the
student aims to become a teacher. Larger secondary schools may locate a student within the
sports department, which is a non-teaching department involved in managing and coordinating
sport teams and sports events across the school. Some schools have an outdoor education
department requiring students who have more specialist training and knowledge. In some
situations, a student may be shared between two departments within the school. Student
access to some organisations for placements, such as national sporting organisations (such
as Netball NZ) and regional sporting organisations (such as North Harbour Hockey) are highly
competitive, often requiring the student to undergo some sort of selection process or
preplacement interview.

Figure 4.1 BSR student numbers placed within various sectors of the sport and recreation industry. 
Source: Auckland University of Technology (2014).

Legend: NSO – national sporting organisation, RSO – regional sporting organisation, RST – regional sports trust,
Pro team – professional sports team

4.5 Data collection phases

Data collection occurred across four phases. Phase One required sourcing all documentation
made available to students for the purposes of supporting and developing critical reflection.
Phase Two consisted of the administration of a qualitative questionnaire to cooperative
education students. Concepts from the questionnaire responses were utilised to inform Phase
Three, a semi-structured interview with volunteers from Phase Two. Lastly, Phase Four involved downloading and filing of electronic reflective journals.

*Table 4.4 An overview of the four phases of data collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of academic year 2012–2013</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
<th>Mar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One – Documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical approval process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing and storage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Two – Questionnaires</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and piloting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration to students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data entry into Excel spreadsheet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Three – Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Template design testing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants interviewed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview transcription</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase Four – Journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journals accessed and de-identified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal and interview alignment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.1 Phase One

4.5.1.1 Programme documents

The ethical approval process for this study was protracted, as it required approval from both AUT (my employer and source of participants) and Deakin University (my PhD programme provider). All programme documents distributed to students during workshops or made available through electronic avenues throughout the semester were collected in both hard and soft copy, making for ease of storage and access within a filing system. Hard copies were held in a file box while electronic copies were kept in an electronic folder. These documents included student paper/unit guides, student preparation notes and handouts, workshop PowerPoint slides, assessment templates and guidelines. These documents provided statements about intended learning opportunities, and students’ experiences and expectations, in particular, guidance and strategies for critical reflection. Preliminary thematic
analysis of these documents assisted with development of data collection tools utilised in Phases Two and Three of data collection.

4.5.2 Phase Two

4.5.2.1 Questionnaire

The qualitative questionnaire (see Appendix K) was designed to gauge students’ views of critical reflection within their recently completed cooperative education programme. The questionnaire requested ‘background information’ such as gender, age and ethnicity; answers to open-ended questions; completion of sentence prompts (e.g., I always look forward to..., I am surprised that..., I prefer...); and an opportunity to produce a short narrative about what they thought about critical reflection. Categorical and yes/no questions were not used, as they would provide little value to the development of the students’ perceptions that was being sought. The questions were arranged so the easier and less threatening questions were asked first, before moving onto the more complex ones.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to explore the following:

- The students’ understanding of critical reflection. Is there variation of the students’ understanding and if so why?
- The students’ understanding of the purpose, practice and value of critical reflection in the co-op papers. Where do the students see critical reflection sitting within the co-op papers?
- Students’ attitudes or feelings about critical reflection.
- What the students recognised as opportunities for critical reflection and how these opportunities were identified.
- Where the students critically reflect – at placement, home, university or elsewhere?
- How the students went about critically reflecting.
- Whether some students were better able to reflect or were more engaged in critical reflection than others.
- The factors that constrained and enabled the students to critically reflect

The questionnaire was a start point intended to scope the broad issues of the research in order to formulate and confirm interview themes. Prior to administering the questionnaire, it
was important to ensure the questionnaire was appropriately designed to avoid errors in the
design. Initially, my doctoral supervisors reviewed the questionnaire; it was then piloted with
two BSR graduates, who gave feedback on the question clarity, logic and sequencing. In
addition, the graduates were able to indicate whether the timing suggested to complete the
questionnaire was achievable. Finally, an academic colleague provided feedback on the
questions, logic of the line of questioning and overall questionnaire structure. All suggestions
were considered and minor amendments were made prior to administering the questionnaire
to the research participants. The purpose of the questionnaire was not for quantification of
students’ ideas and thoughts; rather, its purpose was to explore the views, opinions, attitudes,
preferences, behaviours and perspectives of the students.

A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was created to manage and store all questionnaire data. Each
completed questionnaire was allocated a reference letter to indicate which campus the student
was based at (A = Akoranga, M = Manukau) and a particular code number was given to each
respondent. Responses to each question were typed verbatim into the spreadsheet.
Composing the spreadsheet and reading through the spreadsheet assisted with familiarity with
its content and allowed checking of the accuracy of each entry. The background information
collected from each completed questionnaire was used to produce simple descriptive statistics
on this particular sample group of BSR students.

The questionnaire Excel file was imported into NVivo 10 software and initial coding began to
gain an impression of the common themes apparent throughout the question responses.
Coding early in the research process provided a sense of the situation being explored. In
particular, areas were identified within the students’ understandings and experiences that
could be further examined through an interview or journal analysis.

4.5.3 Phase Three

4.5.3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants as soon as possible after the
completion of their cooperative education papers and graduation so their cooperative
education experiences would still be fresh in their minds. Interview guides were developed
from preliminary analysis of the questionnaire data, providing enough flexibility to explore new
ideas as they presented themselves. The interviews encouraged participants to express their
views on the following:
• Understanding of critical reflection
• Practice, purpose and value of critical reflection within sport cooperative education
• How to critically reflect
• Factors that hinder and help their practice of critical reflection

4.5.3.2 Interview process

The interviews were conducted in a number of different locations to suit the preferences and availability of the participants. The most preferred location for the interviews was a quiet, safe, non-threatening meeting-type room located on the university campus. This was possibly due to participants feeling connected to the university and it being a convenient location for them. One participant chose a Skype connection, as by this time she was living in another town remote to the university, with travel and time being an issue. Another arranged her interview in a coffee shop in a shopping mall, as it was close to where she was located at the time. Finally, by default, one was on a picnic table at a beach close to the participant’s home. The beach location arose through the coffee shop meeting place becoming unsuitable because of noise levels that were interfering with the conversation and the voice recordings.

Each interview began with the participant being welcomed, a brief explanation of the interview process along with an opportunity for the interviewee to ask questions and signing of consent forms. Before the interview began, as all interview participants had volunteered their journals for analysis during Phase Two of data collection, they were asked for permission to align their reflective journals with their interview transcripts. They all agreed to this request by completing consent forms for interview and journal alignment. Before the completion of each interview, participants were invited to add any concluding comments they felt might be helpful or interesting. On completion, they were thanked for their time and thoughtful contribution.

The interviews ranged from 26 to 54 minutes, and each was audio recorded on two devices (an Apple iPhone and a Sony voice recorder) to ensure at least one viable recording was taken, in the event of one recording device failing. Immediately following an interview, the recording was downloaded using iTunes for storage on a security-coded computer. All voice recordings, along with the interview question template and a confidentiality agreement, were emailed to a transcriber residing outside the city who did not know any of the participants. The voice recordings were transcribed verbatim and then returned for checking by the researcher and the participants. At the completion of the transcription process, all the transcribers’ copies
of audio files were destroyed. The interview transcripts were sent to the participants for member checking. This process provided the interviewees with an opportunity to clarify content, remove any sensitive information or make any other modifications they might have deemed necessary. Each checked document was labelled according to the sequence of the interviews, that is, Interview 1 and so forth. Pseudonyms were applied to all names of people and organisations within the documents.

Member checking provided the participant with an opportunity to provide feedback on the contents of the document and offer clarification or suggestions. One participant responded in agreement with the document, while all remaining participants chose not to respond, as was outlined in the request if they were in agreement with the document contents. It was not feasible for members to check the final analysis of this study because of the significant time delay from data collection to data analysis and write-up. Gratton and Jones (2010) recommend the use of peer review in these situations, whereby colleagues in the same field of research or fellow researchers inspect the analysis for inconsistencies, bias and errors in interpretation. My doctoral supervisory panel adopted this role of expert peer reviewers by providing feedback, support and critique throughout all phases of the data analysis.

4.5.4 Phase Four

4.5.4.1 Student reflective journals

An administrator was granted access to the reflective journal files within the Blackboard university administrative system. Reflective journals of students who provided consent were copied exactly as they appeared in Blackboard AUTonline, and then pasted directly into a Microsoft Word document before being handed over to the researcher for familiarisation and analysis. Each document had all extraneous material removed along with de-identification to preserve anonymity of the student and the student’s academic supervisor (who may have provided feedback comments). Each journal document was allocated a numerical reference. Reflective journals of the interviewees were re-sourced and aligned with interview transcript data. A numbered electronic folder for each interview participant was created to contain his or her interview transcript and corresponding reflective journal word document. Multiple readings of interview transcripts and journal entries occurred to establish an overview of the data content.
4.6 Data analysis and representation

A thematic analytical approach was used in this study to establish an understanding of the nuances of each of the primary datasets and to present a discussion of how the research narratives (formed from the primary data) might be interpreted. This approach focused predominantly on Braun and Clarke’s (2013) pattern-based framework to assist with addressing the research questions. Most forms of qualitative methods use some form of thematic coding, suggesting thematic analysis is a ‘flexible foundational method’. This analytical method is a systematic approach used to assist with identifying, analysing and reporting themes across datasets while not being bound to a specific theory, or epistemological or ontological framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013).

4.6.1 Organisation and familiarisation

Braun and Clark (2013) described collected qualitative data as “naturalistic”, in that, there are no pre-existing codes or categories; therefore, raw datasets often reflect the messiness of real life. Large quantities of data were collected in this study via several data collection methods; hence, a systematic management and storage system was necessary (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Datasets had to be easily accessible for entry into data analysis support systems such as Microsoft Excel and NVivo 10. In this study, datasets comprised student questionnaire responses, interview transcripts and yearlong reflective journals, as well as course-related documents. Familiarisation of the data occurred at several points, including at the beginning during collection, when they were visually scanned; as the data were entered into a data management system; and during data coding practices. Immersion in the data through reading and re-reading provided opportunities for noticing features of interest. Familiarisation is an active, analytical, critical process of thinking about what the data might mean.

4.6.2 Coding

Coding is a systematic data reduction process of selecting aspects of the data that relate to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013; Gratton & Jones, 2010; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2010). Coding is an analytical choice made by the researcher, in which decisions are made about which data to include, which patterns summarise chunks of code and what stories are evolving. Codes are labels the researcher attaches to words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs in the data that have meaning for the topic being explored (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight three important points about codes: they can be at different levels of analysis, from descriptive to inferential; they occur at
different times in the research process with some utilised early on and others following on; and finally, they are ‘astringent’, as they pull together material for analysis. Coding is not an exclusive process, as one piece of data can be coded several ways (Braun & Clarke, 2013) or differently under different circumstances or through another’s eyes.

Journal and interview data from the seven interview participants were imported into NVivo 10. Although NVivo 10 had been a useful way to gain an understanding of the questionnaire data, there were several limitations when working with the journal data; in particular, the questions being asked of the data did not lend themselves so readily to this approach. These datasets contained nuances, chronology and continuity that were getting lost during coding. Although these powerful systems are seductive in the promise of data management and analysis, much time and support are necessary to become fully competent with their operation. The computer-assisted approach seemed ‘mechanistic’, overshadowing the role of being able to use creativity, intuition and insight, especially when the particularities of the context were well known to me. Therefore, most of the interview and journal coding was carried out by me, using manual methods with soft and hard copy documents by highlighting key excerpts and creating mind maps for thematic development.

Coding of the journal data began with the seven interview participants. When the journal data were aligned with the interview data, it became very apparent that these participants had very distinct workplace experiences and differing ways of engaging in critical reflection. At this point, I decided to focus the study primarily on these datasets, as they were rich, had depth and were unique, with detailed and complex accounts of participants’ experiences and practices. These data reached below the surface, allowing for deeper understanding of the topic of interest.

### 4.6.3 Narrative representations of data

In this study, students’ reflective journal and post-placement interview data are represented in the form of research narratives. Miles and Huberman (1994) identify data reduction (coding), data display (representation) and conclusion drawing and verification (interpretation) as three concurrent activities in qualitative data analysis. Data representation assembles data in such a way that it allows conclusions to be drawn and possibly action to be taken. Typically, qualitative researchers show their data through extended text using specific quotes to draw the reader to a particular idea by presenting findings that are generally arranged thematically. Miles and Huberman (1994) are strong advocates of using other forms to represent large
datasets, particularly visual formats, to give a good overall impression of what the data entails. Data familiarisation and coding of datasets in this study raised the question of representation, particularly in light of the highly contextualised, experiential nature of the research topic.

By representing the data as research narratives, the following characteristics are intended to be made visible to the reader: they capture actions that tell a story and convey developing knowledge of those involved; they are socially and contextually embedded situations so readers may come to know relevant background; and they develop identity within and through the narrative (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002). To my knowledge, no studies in the field of cooperative education, specifically the area of sport and recreation, have presented journal and interview data in such a way as to illustrate students’ experiences in a truly holistic manner. Keeping the student ‘voice’ at the forefront, the research narratives were constructed as a form of data representation. As this data representation was a slight deviation from the original research proposal ethical issues were considered and an ethics amendment was submitted and approved by both AUTEC and DUHREC (see Appendices B and D).

Case study methodology provides a flexible framework in order to examine a phenomenon from multiple perspectives; equally, there is openness as to how the data can be presented. The nature of the students’ cooperative education experiences and the type of questions being asked of the data lent themselves to being presented using a narrative style approach. That is, experiential-based accounts of workplace experiences and reflective practices were constructed from journal entries and interviews. A narrative style can be described as a person-centred approach and forms of narrative are increasingly being used in educational (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and social research settings (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). This narrative style of data presentation aligns well with the cooperative education philosophy of student-centred learning. Goodfellow (1998) has referred to narrative as “the construction and presentation of meaning in a written form which allows events, human actions and experiential accounts to be interpreted and configured into an integrated whole” (p. 175). Smith (as quoted in Braun & Clarke, 2013) argued that the strengths of a narrative approach include “the ability to reveal the temporal, emotional and contextual quality of lives, to illuminate experience, and to understand a person as both an individual agent and as someone who is socio-culturally fashioned” (p. 198). The process of narrative construction is situated within and reflects the context of practice while acknowledging the contribution of each participant. Within my case study, the purpose of presenting each narrative was to go beyond describing what happened to explore how meaning was made from experiences and
to enable the reader to witness and acknowledge the uniqueness of student placements and reflective practices. Narrative creation success relies heavily on inside knowledge of its creator (Goodfellow, 1998) and the transparent representation of both experiences and reality from which it originates (Andrews et al., 2008). These narratives are embedded cases focusing on a number of students within the case study.

4.6.4 Narrative construction

There is no recognised method in the construction of a research narrative (Andrews et al., 2008; Smith, as cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013; Goodfellow, 1998). Many narratives take a story-like form; however, this structure is highly variable yet useful, as it provides a scaffold that is both supportive and flexible (Goodfellow, 1998). With no schema to assist with this writing process, I took on the role of narrativist or narrative constructor, using the initial stories told during interviews and within reflective journals. I had no idea how complex and demanding the task of reconstructing a story from a collection of smaller stories would be. At all times, I have remained mindful of my responsibility to stay true to the data, providing enough detail and interest for the reader while maintaining anonymity, staying aligned with my research questions and creating unique, readable narratives. Goodfellow (1998) explains, “the researcher crafts the narration as s/he captures the complexity, specificity and interconnectedness of key concepts in the field text data and presents the outcome within a research text” (p. 176). It was important to base the construction of each narrative around the ‘undistorted voice’ of the participant, hence the use of numerous direct quotes primarily sourced from the journal data supported by relevant interview data. This ensured that authenticity of the narrative was maintained. The nomenclatures used to depict the primary data sources within the narratives are interview 1 (Int1) and journal 1 (J1).

Commonly, narrative construction begins with the interview data (Andrews et al., 2008; Goodfellow, 1998) as the base for the structure. Following this approach, the foundation of my narrative construction was the interview with the inclusion of some relevant material from the journals. The interviews contained many interesting recollections; however, they were messy because of their conversational nature and the interspersion of questions, making reconstruction into a narrative challenging. The interview data were retrospective reflections on the practice of critical reflection that took place over the duration of their placement. In contrast, each journal entry was determined by a chosen moment in time that was thought about more deeply as it was translated into a written form. Taking these points into consideration, narrative construction was a complex process requiring multiple factors to be
accounted for, such as temporality, social interaction, environment, experiences and emotions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Direct quotes, primarily sourced from the student reflective journals, were used to develop the narratives to illustrate the chronology of the workplace experiences and highlight characteristics of the workplace and the student. Interwoven throughout the journal data were extracts from the interview data related to aspects of the students’ understandings and practice of critical reflection. Together, these two data sources were used to form the basis of each narrative. Six research narratives were constructed with feedback on their content, structure and authenticity from my primary supervisor. One dataset (journal and interview) was not reconstructed into a narrative, as the transcriber had difficulty producing a reliable transcript from the audio recording. This difficulty stemmed from the interviewee speaking rapidly, in a disjointed fashion, resulting in some audio sections being barely audible for transcribing. This transcript was deemed unreliable and was not included for narrative reconstruction.

The completed narratives are my interpretation of the students’ interpretations of their recent workplace experiences, expressed through their reflective journals. The retelling of the story in itself may result in the story adapting in some way to an altered view or understanding. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) argued that, “when done properly, one does not feel lost in minutia but always has a sense of the whole. Unfortunately, this presents a dilemma in the writing because one needs to get down to concrete experiential detail. How to adjudicate between the whole and the detail at each moment of the writing is a difficult task for the writer of the narrative” (p. 7). At times, this part of the process was overwhelming, as I felt I needed to portray reality through the narrative, particularly as my ontological view considers multiple realities. Transferability was enhanced within this study by providing ‘thick description’ of the participants and context within the narratives. This descriptive adequacy allows readers to come to understand the narratives and draw their own conclusions.

4.7 Thematic interpretation of the research narratives

The reconstructed research narratives are presented in this thesis as the findings of this study. They were thematically analysed within, between and across each to enable interpretation of the data, in order to address the research questions. Thematic coding at two stages, early (raw data) and later (narrative data) in the research process is consistent with qualitative research practices. Stake (2010) described interpretation as “an act of composition” where the
researcher “takes descriptions and makes them more complex, drawing upon a few conceptual relationships” (p. 55). Andrews et al. (2008) argued that giving meaning to narratives is difficult and potentially controversial, as they are personal interpretations made by the researcher. However, this concern is alleviated in this study, as case study research methodology recognises and accepts subjectivity as one of its core assumptions (Hyett et al., 2014; Stake, 1995, 2010). The quest for an inclusive interpretive frame in research produces much argument and concern, particularly as many researchers do not expect the emergence of a single interpretation (Andrews et al., 2008). The interpretive approach I adopted was to initially describe the narratives thematically using a ‘bottom up’ way (what is in the data) of theme identification. For reasons related to concepts around experiential learning and reflective thinking, Dewey's education theories were used to provide possible explanations of the narrative themes (‘top down’ or data are used to explore theoretical concepts) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Reading the narratives and the relevant literature in an iterative reflective manner helped guide the establishment of core themes that form my interpretation.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified a Deweyan theoretical underpinning to this research, provided a thorough description of the case study undertaken and detailed the data collection strategies adopted as a means to address the research questions. The researcher has identified as being an ‘insider’; therefore, it was important to acknowledge this as a characteristic of this research. Accordingly, this factor was taken into consideration during the development and implementation of the research process. The ethical implications of being an insider researcher, particularly in relation to participant recruitment, were described and addressed within this chapter. A cohort of BSR post-placement cooperative education students were invited to participate in this research, resulting in the collection of data as questionnaires, reflective journals, and interviews. In addition, cooperative education course documents were sourced to inform the contextualisation of critical reflection in BSR cooperative education (see Chapter 2). With the intention of maintaining the student ‘voice’ in this research, the data are represented, in the following chapter, in the form of six research narratives.
Chapter 5: Narratives of experiences and critical reflection

This chapter provides a rich overview of the research participants, their placement context and their practice of critical reflection presented in the form of research narratives. The research narratives were developed through a process of reviewing the students’ critical reflection journal entries and post-placement (conversational style) interview transcript data. The purpose of this chapter is to present ‘thick’ descriptions of each participant’s experiences, as typically occurs within case study research (Merriam, 2009). In the creation of the narratives, every effort has been made to ensure the identity of each participant and workplace is concealed or removed, and pseudonyms have been applied to all names to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. The narratives chronologically follow a yearlong work placement and are presented below.

5.1 Dana’s story – Learning the ‘ropes’ in the outdoors

Dana’s academic studies had focused on an outdoor education major enabling her to be an outdoor instructor; however, her aspirations were to become a secondary school teacher. Through her outdoor education connections, Dana pursued and established her “dream” cooperative education placement: a secondary school with a specialist outdoor education programme for all students. Dana felt this placement would provide her with insights into teaching practice, as well as allow her to advance her outdoor instruction skills. However, there was a complicated aspect to this arrangement: her placement would be located at a permanent camp site remote to the urban school and the university. Within the cooperative education programme, long-distance placement arrangements of this nature are exceptional and not commonly requested by students because of the difficulties that logistics can impose on them. Consequently, prior to her placement being granted approval, she met with the cooperative education paper leader to ascertain the suitability, feasibility and logistics of completing her placement from this distance. All parties agreed this was a worthwhile opportunity for Dana. Based upon this conversation and the support of the paper leader, Dana decided to delay commencing her placement, in order to complete her remaining non-cooperative education papers that were not readily accessible from a distance.

Dana’s placement commenced with cooperative education being the sole focus of her final year at university. During her post-placement interview, she exclaimed, “It was my last year
and I really wanted to give it my all” (Int1). Dana’s role was that of assistant outdoor instructor and house tutor; along with teachers and outdoor instructors, she lived on the camp site, attached to a group of students for supervision and mentorship purposes. This compulsory camp catered for young women from an urban girls’ school. For one month during their secondary schooling, every girl attended this camp, where they learnt about environmental issues while also developing personal attributes, in particular, leadership through a purposefully designed Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) programme. Small groups of girls were sent consecutively throughout the school year to attend this camp.

Within her first journal entry, Dana considered herself a “very determined” person who would “work hard to achieve my goals” (J1). She freely volunteered information about her history as a challenged learner and how important goal setting and role models were to her for motivation, guidance, support and inspiration. Dana lamented that she found it difficult to maintain good work-life balance; however, motivated by the desire to succeed, she indicated that for this placement, she had a “set timetable that clearly identifies between work time and play time” (J1). She found that the first structured journal entry encouraged her to think about herself as a learner and how she could improve her learning. Following the completion of her placement, we engaged in a conversation in which Dana commented:

I think at the beginning I was making it easy for myself and being a bit lazy and that first actual reflection, I enjoyed writing that first reflection because it really showed how I knew I learnt and how my attitude can be sometimes and it was a goal from the beginning to change that attitude and become a more effective learner and a harder worker. (Int1)

Dana described her first house tramp (hiking usually in rugged terrain) as “an overnight tramp in the first week, that every girl goes on in house groups, led by their house tutors” (J1). Her role on this tramp was as assistant house tutor who would “assist and observe instruction and take opportunities to lead or teach, when appropriate” (J1). Dana explained the purpose of this tramp was to provide the girls with:

opportunities to lead the group [who] were taught many bush craft skills such as; navigation, group management, how to pack, cross rivers safely, make fires, cook on a Trangia [small outdoor cooking appliance], set up a tent, choose a site, build a bivouac, and plant identification. Another big focus was social education, how the girls relate to each other and to friends at school. (J1)

Despite this being her first tramp, Dana commented that she “was feeling pretty relaxed when we set out…as I was mainly observing and getting to know the girls. I am getting familiar with
the property and the way things are run; therefore, I was feeling quite comfortable” (J1). It appeared this time was used to familiarise herself with her workplace environment and culture. This provided Dana with the opportunity to observe approaches to ‘instruction’ and get acquainted with the staff members. Dana was eager to learn more about different approaches to outdoor instruction; meanwhile, she was also apprehensive about being accepted (or fitting in) and having the opportunity to prove herself. She wrote:

I was interested to see how Gillian ran her house tramp because she is a teacher and I was interested in seeing if her teaching style was different to that of an outdoor instructor. I was most anxious about working with her, as I did not know her as well as some of the other instructors and was not sure how much opportunity I would get to lead. (J1)

Throughout the day, Dana observed and noted the practices of someone who was not trained as an outdoor instructor. Dana attempted to make sense of these observations based on her past experiences instructing in the outdoors, with the intention of improving her future practice:

On the first day I did notice a difference in teaching styles but have yet to place what the difference is; I can only describe it as ‘more teacher like’. It seemed the day was set out much like a lesson and certain lessons were learnt along the way. To me, this felt less flexible and spontaneous; coming from an outdoor background, I am used to setting up some specific learning points but often just stopping along the way when I see something interesting that the group could learn about or talk about and being flexible in the way I teach things. I am not saying Gillian was not flexible; I believe it is because she has done the same trip many times over the last four years and therefore knows where she can teach certain things. I did enjoy seeing Gillian working in the outdoors, as I had only seen her in meetings and classes. I really enjoyed the way she taught the girls how to take a bearing on a compass, as it gave every girl a chance to try something and then teach it after they had all had a demonstration from Gillian. I will keep that way of teaching in mind when I next run a navigation lesson. (J1)

While on this group tramp, two groups of students unexpectedly converged on the walking track at the base of a hill. Dana expressed her intrigue in this unforeseen event, as planning centred on these groups working independently from each other. Although she was keen to examine the experience more deeply with her colleague, Dana was cautious not to appear judgemental or impertinent. Within her journal writing, Dana deliberated about the potential implications of such a conversation with a mentor:

Overall, that moment of conflict and confusion was very interesting for me, as I expected one of the instructors to step back, but instead we had two groups of girls bumper to bumper up the hill. Because I found this such an interesting series of events, I asked Gillian how she felt about what happened, and she too found it really interesting and had never seen anything like it in her years of teaching. I then
talked to her about what we could do if it happened again. I found the conversation slightly awkward, as I was interested in what she was thinking yet did not want to step on any toes. I feel now it would be interesting to talk to the instructor of the other group to hear her thoughts about the situation to better understand how the situation ended the way it did. (J1)

Dana’s writing of this account also demonstrated a level of reflexivity, highlighted by her willingness to ask questions and examine the situation from multiple viewpoints in order to establish an improved understanding. Interestingly, Dana’s deliberations did not appear to problematise or question the power dynamics that may have contributed to her apprehension in discussing this with her mentor. Rather, Dana’s reflection focused on an alternative activity she could employ if she were faced with similar circumstances in the future. She suggested, “I would have stopped my group and played an icebreaker game or look[ed] at the map to explain and understand the map to show what kind of terrain we would be on” (J1). Her written reflection of this event was largely technical in its orientation, as Dana reflected on her observations of practice as a means of understanding and improving her own practice. Her summary statement highlighted this focus: “I learnt things that were good ways of teaching, and through reflecting on the experience I have learnt ways of dealing with a problem. I find this a clear lesson on how we learn from mistakes” (J1).

Dana’s reflection on her first tramp reveals much about her preoccupation and prioritising of technical learning in the outdoors, and in particular, strategies to engage learners and manage groups that appeared to ‘work’ in this setting. It is interesting to note her reference to Gibbs’s (1988) reflective framework to guide her with her early reflection. This framework was introduced and explained in a cooperative education workshop, with supporting material in relation to the steps, and the workshop PowerPoint slides made available online. Despite the easy accessibility of this information, Dana appeared to construct her writing in ways that only addressed some of the steps in Gibbs’s framework. She appeared to give up or was unsure what to do next to complete the framework. During Dana’s interview, she explained her understanding of critical reflection as:

It is taking what you’ve learnt in an experience and why you think you learnt it. It’s really analysing each step what went well, what didn’t and what you can change and maybe pulling in people, experience or opinion or maybe some research to help you create strategies towards applying it next time you try it. Mine were always looking towards the future so that goal setting... (Int1)

During a planning and preparation day, a situation arose where a girl was caught breaking camp rules. Dana was in a position of authority (although not acknowledged) and felt
conflicted between using information obtained in confidence concerning a rule violation and the potential consequences of reporting the rule breaker/s. There were several moral and ethical issues for her to consider, including loyalty, honesty and integrity. How could she deal with this position of authority in a constructive way? She made a decision to discuss this situation with the camp directors, who she felt resolved the issue in a sensitive and positive way. As she wrote this lengthy journal entry to reflect on this experience, she diverged somewhat from her previously structured writing style. She seemed to write as she thought to make sense of the day’s event:

Earlier in the day, one of the girls was caught with her cell phone (all cell phones, electronics, lollies and other food were supposed to be handed in to staff on the first day of camp). The girl who got caught was upset and ended up talking to me with another girl from her house. She was disappointed in herself, but the other girl happened to mention that she knows there are other girls at camp that have phones and lots of girls who have lolly/food stashes. I asked the girls to get a bag and label it...and ask the girls in their house to hand in phones. This gave them the choice of handing something in or the risk of being caught with it. I left and talked to the directors about what I had just found out, and in the end, an urgent meeting was called with the girls. The girls were asked as a group if anyone had anything to confess. The girl who originally got caught with her phone told the girls her story. The girls were then asked again if anyone had anything to confess; after a long silence, it was decided by the directors for every girl in the circle to say, “I have handed in everything I should have, and I am proud of my behaviour”, from which five girls could say this. Sixteen girls came forward and admitted to having lollies or chocolate, and one girl confessed to having her phone but handed it in to me that day. After the meeting, the girls were sent back to their houses and handed in all their food and phones. Finally, I completed night check and the girls went to bed. (J1)

Dana went to great lengths to write a detailed description of the day’s events. While focusing all her attention on problem identification and problem-solving aspects of the day, she missed an opportunity to write about why such items were banned, and how this situation arose and why, and to explain why she had doubts about the positive outcome:

I found it really interesting to learn different ways of dealing with a group problem such as this. I was feeling most anxious for the one girl who told me she knew about the other girls because I knew that if the other girls found out she spoke about it she could have a hard time fitting in with the group for the rest of camp and even when they get back to school. Thankfully, her name was not brought up and there is only one girl who knows she spoke to me and she seems to be a good friend of hers. I had the time to talk to [camp directors] about the situation and they told me why they ran it the way they did, in order to get the girls to challenge themselves in front of a group and take ownership for their mistakes so that they can move on and make a new start at camp. I liked that about the way they dealt with it; however, I have some doubts about whether all the girls had the courage to
be honest in the large group. In the long run, I guess it was their own decision and challenge to not come forward and they have not learnt anything from the experience. Overall, I learnt a new way of dealing with an issue in a large group in a way that empowers people and provides a learning experience. In the future, if I happen to be the one told about the issue, then I would tell the student straight away that I appreciate the information and I am going to have to take it to the directors to deal with and I will make sure your name is not mentioned in the dealing of the issue. (J1)

As evident within this lengthy descriptive early journal entry, and as discussed in her interview, Dana initially had difficulties with her journal writing, particularly in terms of selecting a meaningful experience to critically reflect upon. In addition, the process of writing the reflection required further thought. Dana elucidated:

Knowing what to write, like how to structure it and also what were the important things to write down, like finding the one moment in, say, for me, tramping, and that instructing experience, what part I needed to look at. At first, it was very descriptive; I just wrote down all the things that happened in the tramp that just created this massive writing with no analytical side to it. (Int1)

The next intake of girls saw Dana departing on the house tramp with a different instructor. The goals Dana set for this event were “to observe [another instructor’s] navigational teaching and see what other resources she had, I volunteered to teach the bivouac building and add valuable teaching moments when they presented themselves” (J1). Her expectations were to contribute meaningfully to this tramp, so she took the initiative to volunteer her services. At the conclusion of the day, Dana actively sought feedback on her performances in the field. Very conscious of developing herself as a capable outdoor leader, Dana considered feedback an important tool to help her improve and accomplish specific outdoor competencies. She wrote:

Throughout the trip, I offered additional information on plants and navigation to assist... After the trip, I asked for some feedback...she said I have good interaction skills with the girls and have good/interesting knowledge to add value to the experience. She also said that if I want good, clear feedback I need to select something I want to run for next tramp and then she will watch me do it and give me feedback on that. This provides a great opportunity...both [supervisors] want to assist me with feedback and help to tick off my competencies... If I am successful in the teaching of these areas, then I will gain confidence, competence, and tick off the rest of my bush competencies on this trip. (J1)

Dana was pleased with the mentor feedback she received and felt positive about advancing her technical skills. The industry feedback she obtained was consistently technical or competency orientated, providing her with no insight into the softer skills of being an outdoor educator, such as warmth, empathy, patience and resilience. Given the consistent substance
of her industry feedback, it was not surprising that Dana also viewed her reflections in a similar technical manner.

Midway through Cooperative Education 1, Dana submitted her progress report within her journal, where she critically reflected upon her progress in terms of her learning outcomes from her learning contract. Writing this assessment provoked a closer examination of her success or failure with completing her learning goals and encouraged the development of personal responsibility for her learning. In addition, Dana realised she had missed workplace opportunities to fulfil her learning goals and should enhance her practice of critical reflection. She stated in her interview:

I think it was about the time we did that assessment that was the CR [critical reflection] assessment in Co-op [Cooperative Education] 1. That's where I really realised how much writing that pointed out all the learning outcomes I was missing, I hadn't really focused on and really cleared things up for me where I was at and what I needed to change for the rest of [co-op]. So I think that would have been the big turning point.

She acknowledged:

That was where it became obvious to me it was really important and from there I really looked at strategies for achieving all of my learning outcomes and those strategies were something I actually thought about as I went on…that was a definite point of change and point of where my attitude changed and wanted to do better and try harder to understand [critical reflection]. (Int1)

Further, her journal entry highlighted her intention to focus her journal writing on strategies for achieving her learning outcomes. From this point onwards, many of her journal entries identified and reflected on experiences orientated around development directly targeting her learning outcomes, for example:

This progress report has encouraged new strategies to achieving my learning outcomes as well as reminding me of the importance of referring back to them. In order to focus on these areas, I intend to write down these strategies and ensure I act on my intentions. This will aid me in the overall success of my learning outcomes. (J1)

Until now, Dana had actively sought feedback on her performance from her supervisors and co-workers. However, feedback on her journal writing – such as this example: “It would be good if you could think a bit more about why some things work and others do not” – was left unattended, as her primary motivation for her journal writing was to fulfil the assessment requirements. She stated it was “just something we had to do”, then went on to say, “when I realised the importance, it motivated me…to actually put some effort into my writing... So
that’s when I actually really looked at the feedback…whereas in the beginning it was just write down the things that I have to and submit it” (Int1).

It is interesting to note the growth in Dana’s reflections about the potential learning opportunities a cooperative education placement could offer, particularly given it was ‘different’ from her familiar, traditional classroom-based learning. Reflecting back on the role of cooperative education, Dana remembered she had initially thought, “co-op was such a big thing” (Int1), as these consecutive papers were worth double credits (compared with other papers previously taken at university) and traversed an entire academic year. The higher weighting allocated to cooperative education influenced the way Dana conceptualised the critical reflection component of these papers. She commented, “the percentage on the reflection was low so I kind of put it as something of less importance” (Int1). However, as time went on and she continued to write in her journal, “it actually became clear that [critical reflection] was a major part and pathway to the rest of it. Without critically reflecting, it would have affected my learning outcomes and my entire experience with improving as an outdoor instructor” (Int1).

Dana’s next excursion to a ‘pa site’ (a traditional fortified Māori village, usually located on a hill for defence purposes) proved to be very exciting for her, as she saw this primarily as an opportunity to improve her instructional skills. During an explanation of the Māori history of the area, Dana “noticed that most of the girls were not very engaged in the stories, nor did they show much interest or respect for the place. This is a big deal to me, as I really enjoy the Māori culture and respect the heritage” (J1). Later, she discussed her observations of the girls’ disengagement with colleagues and brainstormed ideas to modify the way in which the cultural aspects of this trip could be led. Dana’s subsequent journal entry outlined the positive reception of this modification and highlighted her delight at being made responsible for planning this activity for the next intake. Collegial support and encouragement, wrote Dana, “meant that I was open with ideas and not afraid to get shut down. Their engagement really helped me to wildly come up with ideas and suggestions, which really gave me the sense that I can do something truly beneficial for the camp” (J1). In addition, she identified that her “Māori background from kapa haka [Māori singing and dancing] and Māori games has created this passion for Māori education, which is why I was so excited to get involved in improving the trip” (J1). Her involvement in Māori culture in her own schooling had generated an ongoing interest in Māori cultural education and therefore motivated her desire to improve this experience for the girls. Although she recognised a problem with the girls’ engagement in this
experience, and drew on her past experiences and resources to reconceptualise this activity, she missed an opportunity within her reflections to examine the actions and behaviours of the initial group of girls (and the reasons that underpin these responses), which could inform her subsequent teaching.

As the semester progressed, Dana was given increasingly more responsibility. Opportunities to practise as an instructor soon led to situations where she was the ‘person in charge’, given she now had experienced these outdoor activities several times. She explained, “This meant that I planned the trip before we left and decided what the group would be doing, where they were going, and everything in between” (J1). Although many of her journal entries were still focused on identifying instances that contributed to her development of outdoor competencies (and ultimately achievement of her learning goals), Dana acknowledged the potential these experiences offered to broaden the scope of learning:

After this trip, I feel like I have achieved those learning outcomes by comparing my feelings from this trip to early reflections and through staff feedback. I feel confident that I can teach all the important areas of house tramp and I look forward to running another one. I know that there is still much more to be learnt and I look forward to observing more instructor teaching styles, new activities, and coming up with creative teaching methods. Therefore, although I feel I have achieved my learning outcomes, I know that I should keep focusing on them to build greater understanding and experience in order to strive for excellence in my teaching. (J1)

Dana noticed how her mentors encouraged her with ongoing feedback about her performance and offered suggestions for improving her practice. This feedback was intensely technical and largely orientated around issues of student safety, which are paramount in an outdoor learning environment. Perhaps Dana was unaware of feedback offered at a more personal level or maybe she chose not to write about this in her journal. She wrote about supportive mentors:

Jack was really supportive as a teacher. He taught me different ways of helping the students and where I should place myself in the group in riskier situations. He also helped me to identify the students that will need more help and pinpoint the moments when support is needed. When it came to cooking on Trangias at the camp site on the first night, I supervised while Nicky picked up on anything I missed and gave me some feedback on the areas that are easily missable when it comes to Trangia safety. (J1)

Dana’s increased responsibility, positive feedback and familiarity in this workplace setting (as a result of the intensive nature of the placement) provided opportunities for her to move beyond a survival instinct to just ‘get through’ the sessions. Her reflections suggested she was becoming more observant of student responses during particular activities. Dana commented
that she “found it very interesting when the students were oblivious of what was around them after briefing them… Even when I asked the girls if they noticed anything interesting or out of the ordinary, they did not have any idea about what they had seen” (J1). This issue was discussed in a staff debriefing that led Dana to conclude:

What I learnt is that some student groups are less observant than others, and as an instructor, I need to make a judgement call on how much the group needs to be briefed on/given hints before an activity. From the judgement call, I can structure the briefing session to suit learning styles and adjust challenges as necessary. (J1)

In her interview, we discussed the evidence of reflection within the workplace. She explained:

In our organisation reflection is a huge, huge part of it; after every outdoor trip we have reflection on it. We talk about what went well – that could be just from what route we took or we didn’t take, tents we took and just did things like that. And we had this whole sheet about processes to improve on and processes to keep that worked well. So those oral reflections and those conversations were very critical… I think that’s something that goes right across the outdoor industry, especially because there’s so much emphasis on safety and risk analysis. (Int1)

Interestingly, her journal entries never focused on the value of these staff debriefs or how she could extend her understanding of reflection within the outdoors. She intimated that these debriefs were more technical in nature and were largely used for the documentation of issues arising during the trip and for analysis of how these might be better managed in the future. Further, she described the role these debriefs play in identifying opportunities to enhance the girls’ experiences in the outdoors.

Dana’s final journal entry for Semester 1 highlighted her growth in confidence to perform competently and in her ability to communicate with the girls. This next entry illustrated a degree of personal awareness. It also indicated the challenge Dana faced with articulating a change she experienced and how it may have come about. She wrote:

Confidence is a hard thing to measure but is an easy thing to feel. I have not reflected much on the subject, yet I have felt a shift in my confidence when instructing. I used to find a group of 24 girls or even the smaller groups of eight girls quite intimidating when I started out. I was worried about how I would look in front of them if I said something wrong, or how I would deal with them if they were disinterested in what I was teaching. In the simplest words, this feeling faded away very quickly. The more I instructed and the more I learnt, the more I felt like I could teach and talk to these girls about anything. I believe the personal skills and the connection I have with my students has been one of my strengths and has built my confidence dramatically. (J1)
Dana described the start of Cooperative Education 2 as “undeniably the largest form of responsibility I have had on placement and possibly ever” (J1). Her role was “planning, managing and running of the [XYZ] Camp, a three-day, activity-packed junior camp” (J1). Although she was to apply the practical skills she had gained in Cooperative Education 1, she identified the importance of flexibility to cater to the needs of each group:

Another key factor was flexibility. I had to be flexible with my plans if they were not running well and also flexible to the needs of the students and staff. I achieved this by observing my group while running activities to see how they are responding to the activity. With young kids I had to be careful to not make activities too complex and soon realised the things they liked most were very basic. For each group, I read their attitudes to the activity and extended it or moved on to the next activity depending on what I had seen. (J1)

Dana’s ability to observe the students’ ability, and modify her practices accordingly, appeared to grow as a result of increased responsibility and confidence. A key marker of this was evident in her journal where she discussed her observations of one particular group of girls and the subsequent interventions she introduced:

The first day I did identify the different level of physicality between the girls in the group while also identifying their physical level compared to other groups. Overall, the physical level of this particular group was quite low excluding one or two girls. Due to this, and the combined mental state of students leaving a day early, we adjusted the trip to be easy walking while increasing the teamwork and support aspects of the trip. After observing the group dynamics and identifying a lack of team cohesiveness, we structured the day to demand teamwork skills in order to succeed. By starting with a few team-building activities to encourage communication, support, and the different strengths and weaknesses in the group, we were able to get the students into the right frame of mind for the day. (J1)

Although Dana’s reflections were still focused on her learning outcomes (and the experiences that support the achievement of her learning goals), it was interesting to observe Dana’s decision to change the mechanics about how she recorded her reflections. Dana introduced some structured headings, such as “What happened”, “What was decided”, “Why this was decided”, “What I learnt”, “How this helps” and “On my next outdoor trip”. These short self-questions gave her confidence to think and write. She explained in her interview that by using this approach, she felt able to move beyond describing her experience:

I finally figured out I could just write in paragraphs answering the what I did and the what I tried to keep really short, so that’s what I saw as the description, and then the why – I really reflected on that so, what happened, what didn’t work and why I think it didn’t work, how can I change that and yeah what can I do in future and that kind of thing. So as soon as I split my writing up into paragraphs and subtitles, it
just structured my writing in a way that I could follow it without getting lost in the description. (Int1)

During her time at university, Dana had consistently received feedback on her limited ability to demonstrate analysis within her writing. It was a challenge for her to enact this feedback and find boundaries for her writing:

I kept getting the feedback in most of my assignments [that it] needs more analysis and that’s something that I did struggle with because even when I was writing and I like why to this and why to that? Like everything and eventually I would run out of how I can answer something. Obviously, there is always something more you can analyse, but getting around that in the beginning is quite hard, to keep questioning yourself and so figuring out how much you need to write, cause the more you answer, the more you’re writing. (Int1)

As Dana’s placement neared completion, she reflected on a specific learning outcome: ‘to improve critical reflection skills’. Within her journal entry, she explained, “Critical reflecting is important in order to really identify what you are learning, how you learn best, and also helps with future planning” (J1). Many of her journal entries featured examples of experiences, where she described what she was learning and how her learning could be applied and altered for future practice. Feedback, compulsory journaling and a focus on improving critical reflection meant Dana experimented to develop a style of journal writing she was comfortable with. However, she seemed uncertain whether she was permitted to utilise personally constructed subheadings. Her evolving maturity and personal resources drove her to reflect in her own way. Dana began to form an internal dialogue to assist with examining her thoughts. She explained:

I believe I am making progress with my critical reflections. My academic supervisor has identified my improvements through online feedback. I believe identifying critical reflection as a learning outcome has provided some focus to the task. In Co-op 1, I saw critical reflections as just something that needed to be done in order to pass, whereas now I understand the importance behind reflecting and the learning that comes from it. I believe framing each reflection around a learning outcome has really helped my critical reflecting by having a clear direction. Another thing that is going well is the use of subheadings. I am unsure whether they are suppose[d] to be in reflection; however, I feel they help outline my reflection and keep them on track rather than waffling on with description. This has helped me to ensure all the important questions are answered in each reflection. (J1)

Inherent in her final journal entries, and reiterated in her interview, Dana acknowledged the importance of an analytical approach to critical reflection, yet failed to identify specific strategies to achieve this. Despite her resolve that a greater degree of analysis was important
in critical reflection, Dana lacked the resources to enact this in a way that allowed her to make connections between critical reflection and her own learning.

I am trying hard to limit the description for my reflections and I aim to keep working towards that. Reading over the feedback comments will help me identify progress and the areas I am missing. Finally, in order to improve in my critical reflections, I need to keep asking the ‘WHY?’ questions, if I am able to answer the ‘why’ in each area of my reflection, then I will know that my reflection is complete. (J1)

5.2 Maia’s story – A ‘balancing act’

Maia’s cooperative education placement was based at one of 48 nationwide centres operating within a large not-for-profit national recreation organisation (NRO) that offered recreation programmes to the local community. These programmes range from grassroots gymnastics to activities for older adults, and everything in between. Maia was involved in a range of activities within the organisation, including gymnastic instruction, event planning, leadership courses for college students and volunteer work on school holiday programmes. She had chosen the standard (no major) sport and recreation pathway within her degree, while also completing leadership papers that proved useful within this placement. Predominantly, she was involved in the delivery of an after-school gymnastics programme for primary school aged children (5 – 11 years) that occurred three afternoons a week for the duration of the school term. Each week, the children attending these sessions participated in gymnastic activities related to a particular theme. Within the sessions, a reward system based on a progress card was utilised to motivate the children to attend and participate. Each day, the children who attained certain goals were presented with certificates and badges. The children appeared to look forward to these rewarding moments, moving Maia to think, “kids thrive on acknowledgment” (J2).

Maia perceived that her lack of gymnastics knowledge might stymie her ability to significantly engage in workplace learning. This was not to be the case. A thoughtful conversation at the start of placement with her industry supervisor, who was also a BSR graduate, provided some reassurance and encouragement. Maia recounted the advice he offered within her first journal entry:

Coming from a background with no gymnastics experience – I won’t lie – I found this quite a daunting task to take on! However, with a brief chat with Richard, he made me realise that I didn’t have to be an expert in this area and that I would enjoy myself the more I got involved. So, I went in on my first day without fear or nervousness and got stuck in. I must say, things went really well and I was looking forward to my next session. (J2)
Maia began her placement with no skills in gymnastics training and delivery, yet her organisation embraced her wholeheartedly, providing her with induction opportunities to develop new workplace-specific skills. As she stated in her first journal entry, “the gymnastics coordinator has taken me under her wing, and briefs me on all the different movements and tasks on Mondays as I walk around with her and her group” (J2).

In addition to the learning required to teach gymnastic drills and skills to children, Maia had to engage with a new set of vocabulary to describe related body movements. Recognising herself as a novice, Maia strategically set about managing her time to allow for discussions and demonstrations with another colleague (gymnastics coordinator) prior to implementing her own session with the support of a gym partner. This practice appeared to mitigate some of the tensions that learning in a relatively unfamiliar context (with unfamiliar jargon) can invoke.

Many after-school sessions had two instructors to assist the children with floor exercises and correct use of the gymnastic equipment, as well as provide physical and moral support for each other. Within her journal entry, Maia discussed ‘planning’ as a key strategy for continued improvement:

At this point, I am still finding the terms difficult to comprehend, so I have set a meeting time with Rachel so she can discuss and describe gym terms and movements with me in order for me to start teaching/assisting groups with my new gym partner… This has been very beneficial to me and I’m sure it will help me to improve my leadership role as I start getting more teaching responsibility. This is one area of weakness I would like to improve. (J2)

The workplace culture appeared very supportive of a newcomer such as Maia. She was initiated into the after-school gymnastics programme through a ‘buddy system’, whereby she was able to directly observe an activity, ask questions and implement approaches to gymnastics instruction herself, and was provided with feedback on her performance. During these sessions, Maia’s goals focused on providing opportunities for the children to have fun while using correct and safe techniques:

I have enjoyed my experience at [organisation] so far, with a lot of positive feedback, and I will keep enjoying watching my progress improve. I always have the children’s best interest at heart and will make sure I do my best to help in any way I can. (J2)

Much of Maia’s gymnastics instruction revolved around a group of children participating in a series of floor or apparatus-based activities. In this early phase of her placement, she discovered most groups possessed a ‘difficult child’, and no matter which strategies she
attempted, nothing seemed to work to produce more compliant behaviour. Maia wondered if she was at fault, but her co-worker had the same problem and did not have a ready solution either. The next day, the gymnastics coordinator (whom Maia had been shadowing) was able to offer insights into his behaviour. Maia reflected on the potential asking more questions (from multiple sources) has on improved understandings of a particular situation. Maia considered this was particularly important, as she would instruct these same children for many weeks:

Most of the children are okay about having help if they cannot do something, but this one kid, Tony, was causing a bit of trouble and refusing to participate. Both Noel and I kept trying to encourage him and praise him for what he was doing and how well he was trying; however, we failed to succeed, as he sulked and stopped participating altogether. I thought that I had caused this by asking him to keep his legs together whilst attempting his bridge, but found out that Noel was having the same problem. We concluded that maybe he was just having a bad day and left it at that. The following day…Rachel approached me about this issue and explained to me that he does not like failing at something, and that this could have played a part in his attitude. She has proposed a plan that includes swapping him and his twin brother next week to see if his attitude changes.

In future, thinking about the bigger picture and asking someone for advice about a situation like this would be beneficial for me, as they could give me a solution or information about a child that would clarify the problem and create a resolution for the future. (J2)

Many of the activities within Maia’s gymnastics sessions were repetitive; in spite of this, she was able to identify subtle differences and recognise these differences as opportunities to learn. As she wrote in her journal, “I feel that every week, I am learning something different, as each day is similar but not the same, providing new problems and solutions for me to handle. Every child is different and my experience and knowledge continues to expand” (J2).

Maia engaged in a chatty, positive writing style within her journal, similar to that of writing a short story for someone other than herself to read, probably her academic supervisor. She appeared to invite her supervisor to read her thoughts. Her journal entries were generally lengthy and chronological, and judging by the number of typing errors, she primarily used a ‘stream of consciousness’ approach to her writing, given that she appeared to write the story as it came to her. This was particularly evident in the journal entry below, where she reflected upon being unexpectedly offered an opportunity to instruct an unfamiliar after-school gymnastics group. Couched within this offer was positive feedback on her instruction style, so, feeling good about herself, Maia accepted. Despite her positive overtures, Maia’s reflection hinted at a perceived lack of self-confidence. Although this entry concluded with an
acknowledgment of her progress, in terms of self-confidence and leadership, Maia missed an opportunity to explore more deeply factors contributing to this (including the girls’ positive response to her group management):

Well, it was funny, you know. I had a great day at university today, which was very enjoyable, productive and put me in great spirit. Then I turned up at [placement] and Rachel welcomes me with a smile and a “Hi”, then says, “One of our staff members is away today as she is sick, so I would like you to take over her 4.30 group”. Then she adds, “I know you can do it. I would rather have you than Megan, as you have more of a directive style, even though she’s been here longer... Are you up for it???” Of course, my response was, “Yeah sure, I would love to!”, but as you can imagine, with my lack of confidence in leading groups I am unfamiliar with, I was quite shocked. However, I took it in my stride and introduced myself to my new group.

It was amazing. Within minutes, I was so comfortable and relaxed that I realised I had just achieved one of the aspects of leadership that I was struggling with. I had an exceptional session with the group of six girls, who accepted me, listened to me and even had a laugh with me.

I was really proud of the way I handled the group today, giving them clear instructions; making sure they understood what they had to do, also my overall attitude, performance and ability to lead... Today, however, I felt that it was my time to shine and prove to myself that I can do it so that is what I did. (J2)

Opportunities to improve self-confidence and leadership skills were not only isolated to gymnastics sessions. Maia’s attendance at a meeting between several representatives from different branches of the organisation uncovered the complexity of managing a series of events for young people in the community. She explained the event was:

...about pulling youth between the ages of 13 and 18 together and providing them with a safe, fun and socialising environment. It provides them with weekly activities and workshops to help them develop individually, develop as a team and achieve personal goals/dreams; it also encourages them to get involved in their local community. (J2)

As an outsider to this group, Maia reported that she “felt very welcome and accepted straight away”, something she consistently felt within the organisation. During the discussions related to this event, she felt it “opened my eyes as I realised how much work and organisation goes into an event of this size. As we went through, I got to see how each branch works, as they are so different” (J2). This workplace experience provided an opportunity for Maia to appreciate the many activities her organisation was involved in and the diversity of its branches. Although she felt accepted, she was not ready to contribute towards the discussions and was content to initially observe. As she explained in her journal entry:
I didn't say anything at the meeting; I just sat and listened. If I don't feel comfortable about speaking, or putting ideas forward (this happens at university as well), then I tend to keep quiet. I did feel though, that this was the right thing to do, as it gave me a chance to get to see how everyone interacted and put ideas forward. Next time, I will get more involved so I feel part of the team when camp starts. (J2)

In the previous entry, Maia described her reasons for her passive observation of the meeting as inherently linked with self-confidence. In contrast, a subsequent journal entry about a whole-group circuit gymnastics session held prior to the school holidays revealed much about her improved confidence working with children in this setting. Maia was placed at one station, where she observed all the children and did some benchmarking. She wrote, “I enjoyed this way [large circuit] because I got to meet every kid that I do not have anything to do with. It gave me a chance to see how my group was doing compared to other children, and see the different talents from each kid” (J2). At the conclusion of the session, the gymnastics coordinator commended Maia on her ability to manage the numbers of children going through the circuit equipment. As Maia reflected on this positive feedback, she attempted to make sense of her success. Interestingly, she was dismissive of the value of her experiences with children in another setting:

She then told me that I had done a really great job of keeping the tramp queue down, which surprised me (apparently it gets a lot worse), and that she had never had a volunteer that had been able to do what I did. This was lovely to hear; however, I did not understand why, as it was so easy. This though, could be due to the fact that I work at an after-school myself and have been surrounded by kids for a few years now. But that is beside the point I guess; I am just really glad that I am proving to be a capable volunteer. I feel that I am improving in a lot of areas, and that my confidence is increasing. (J2)

At this point, Maia's academic supervisor encouraged her to use conversations with co-workers to examine her workplace practice more closely. The feedback given was:

Is there a possibility that, after the school holidays, you'll be able to chat with Rachel and others about “managing kids” so that you might discover what appears to come easily to you – understanding the need to keep children focused on tasks – and how that process is translated into developing programmes/routines? (J2)

It is likely that Maia's understandings of critical reflection influenced how she engaged in the process. In her interview, she explained, “basically you just critically reflect – say what went well, what didn’t go well, how could I change things, just asking those sorts of questions and relating it to what I'd done” (Int2). Her approach to critical reflection was to evaluate her performance, as she found reflecting on things she could improve was “so much easier”. A
positive experience was difficult to reflect upon because she was unsure of what to write about. Accordingly, Maia wondered, “How can I improve this?” This outcome may be indicative of Maia’s struggle with the term analysis, as she stated, “I never really understood the word analysis. So it actually took me a while to change from the description to get into that breaking down structure” (Int2). She explained why she thought analysis was difficult:

Cause I had to think about it in more depth and understand what I was trying to achieve. Describing was basically, I described the situation but breaking down for me was harder to start with until I understood don’t describe what I’ve just done; you need to think about it in more depth and why did this happen? And that probably took me half of the semester, and it was my academic supervisor that just said, you know, you’ve just got to keep breaking down, keep breaking down and don’t describe, so it was quite challenging for me. (Int2)

Further learning opportunities arose as Maia was assigned to a “four-day leadership course with a group of eighteen 16- to 18-year-olds from local high schools... My job there was to observe the way Richard and Olive delivered and facilitated each session, and give assistance when needed” (J2). Similarly to an earlier experience, she was content to observe initially until she felt confident to participate. She wrote:

This was an interesting aspect to watch, as I am one of these people who just love to be part of this sort of thing: solving problems in a group, sharing ideas and having fun doing it. I stood back and listened to everyone putting forward ideas and trying to solve the challenge they had been given. (J2)

Maia felt this experience, although mostly observational, was a “really good learning curve”, yet she focused her journal entry on describing her observations and her occasional involvement. She failed to explain how or why this experience contributed to her learning. The feedback she received from her academic supervisor attempted to guide her reflection and asked her to “rewrite the ending of this piece” (J2). Maia was provided with questions to direct her thinking. These prompt questions included “How do you lead by example in the gymnastics class or camp?” and “Are there other comparisons you can draw upon from this placement to help you determine if you have grown your leadership skills?” (J2). Upon rewriting this reflection, Maia was motivated to include some theory for comparison of her gymnastics instruction techniques with those of the leadership course. Based on this guidance, Maia wrote:

Everything I learnt in this course by observing or facilitating was going to be useful for my next mission... I used the democratic style, where we sat down and freely discussed the different ideas. I facilitated the conversation and where it was headed to make sure all stayed on topic. This leadership style was different from other
situations where it would be task orientated. This is where giving more of a directive style would be more appropriate.

Gymnastics requires me to interact with the children while doing the different tasks on the equipment. A directive style is best used to make sure everyone knows how to use the equipment correctly to avoid injury and to improve their skills. I find this style works and is quite effective, especially for those children who do not listen properly, as it shows them who are in authority. It is important for me, though, to realise that they are just kids and they are not perfect at that age. I have a thing for perfection and do not like things that do not look quite right. I also need to accept that no one is the same, so while one child can do something really well, another may find it difficult and cannot execute the move smoothly or correctly. While I am in this position of leadership, I am always learning new techniques of how to communicate with the many different personalities and how each child learns and how to get my instructions across to each individual. (J2)

Her academic supervisor commented further on this reflection to encourage her to think more deeply: “Is leadership necessarily about power and authority? What does the literature say about that – especially the education literature?” (J2).

At the point of writing her progress report, Maia remained intent on describing experiences that contributed to the success of her learning outcomes by drawing her conclusions largely from earlier reflections. However, with reference to learning outcome two (to increase my confidence in the delivery of teaching sessions), Maia began to analyse more deeply her interactions with an unruly character within a group. She wondered how this person perceived her – young, female, small in stature, no authority – and then lapsed back to describing her responses. She wrote:

I have questioned my ability to assert authority over new groups of clients due to my young appearance and small stature, and this was evident at the camp. I was teaching a group of 13–18 year olds when a physically large boy became disruptive and destabilised my control of the group. It became evident to me that looks and size are not as important as self-confidence and knowledge, which are qualities of successful leadership. A change of attitude, tone of voice, posture, wording and delivery of instructions is needed when dealing with groups of different age, gender and background, and I have recognised and implemented these things in my teaching roles. More importantly, it taught me that I have the total support of my team and the camp policies are there to help me. This incident was invaluable for increasing my confidence. (J2)

As Cooperative Education 1 drew to completion, her recent progress report writing prompted Maia to revisit an old problem from earlier in the semester. One child in her group had a medical disorder that made many gymnastic activities difficult for her to achieve alone. This impacted significantly on Maia, and reference to this in her journal indicated that Maia believed
modification to make the activity more appropriate for the child would impact both the learning of the child and herself. Maia reported a change in the child's attitude but omitted to explore more deeply what led to this. She explained in her journal:

Due to having critically reflected on our performance and providing strategies for improvement for our last assignment, it made me think hard about how I might go about making things easier for both Beth and I when it comes to having to physically help her complete the tasks given in gymnastics. Because she has difficulty physically undertaking most of the tasks given... Up to this date, I have been assisting her in every activity she has done. However, this has required me to hold her weight as she attempts to climb along a pole upside down, or something similar. This gets very difficult for me, as she is not a lightweight child. So, today I decided to adapt the tasks to suit her needs and capabilities without putting myself out both physically and mentally, by struggling to hold her and get her to do the tasks correctly.

Making this decision made a huge difference to the way I worked and to her attitude towards doing more ‘difficult’ activities. (J2)

Maia’s last journal entry for Cooperative Education 1 highlighted the experiences in which she gained the most traction in terms of achieving her learning outcomes. Prior to writing this entry, her academic supervisor suggested reflecting on “what you have discovered about yourself 12 weeks later”. Despite the promise this approach offered, Maia’s response to this question was underwhelming. She commented, “I have realised that there are many things to learn about becoming a great leader. The activities they provide the group and the information given and portrayed has given me so much to gain and yet I know I still have so much more to learn” (J2). Nevertheless, it was clear throughout her journal entries that Maia considered herself highly motivated to learn organisational practices, a great team member and was prepared to work hard. The offer of paid employment towards the end of this placement was a highly affirmative experience for Maia. She wrote:

Rachel has offered me a paid position in gymnastics as she said she couldn't afford to lose me. I was so amazed and blown away by this that I did not know what to say. This has shown to me that I am good at what I do and that I am helpful and growing in my ability to achieve a great outcome. I have also gained my confidence in teaching and delivering sessions. (J2)

At the commencement of Cooperative Education 2, Maia reported that she was “helping facilitate the leadership courses with colleagues as opposed to assisting and observing their style” (J2). Maia reported receiving extensive feedback from her industry supervisor during the two-day course. In her journal entry that attempted to make sense of this feedback, Maia reflected upon her supervisor’s suggestion to modify her conversation style with the
participants. It is interesting to note the silence here, as Maia did not write about why this suggestion unsettled her, what she thought about the feedback or, perhaps most importantly, what implications a different approach to communicating with participants might have. She appeared to accept without question his suggestions and acquiesced to make some changes, particularly as she perceived she would have “more responsibility” next time. It seemed gaining her industry supervisor’s approval was important to her, as she wrote:

Richard gave me feedback on everything that was both positive and negative. He explained each aspect and gave me ways to improve. An example of this was the drawing activity… The aim of this task is to make everyone aware of how important communication is. Richard told me that I was being a bit too clinical and intellectual with my words and how I explain things to get my message across, so he suggested I become more relaxed and try to relate to the younger generation’s language. To this, I will use words like ‘Alrighty’ instead of ‘Alright’, with a different more fun tone of voice. This just lightens the atmosphere and makes it more relaxed. I am fairly nervous about trying this, as I am not quite sure if I will pull it off to Richard’s satisfaction, but I will give it a go and I am open to any feedback from Richard and will continue to try new things until I get it right. (J2)

With a semester of gymnastics instruction successfully completed, Maia proudly accepted the role of “gymnastics instructor”, meaning she largely assumed all responsibility for her sessions. Frequently, Maia’s journal entries revolved around reflecting on her attempts to manage difficult or inattentive children. While she found this challenging, it motivated her to develop a repertoire of strategies to encourage positive responses by the children, as discussed in her journal:

The children can also be quite disruptive and not listen to instructions. This gets a bit frustrating, but I try my best to keep them engaged. Sometimes they are more interested in watching the more experienced girls, so I had to keep bringing their attention back to what they need to be doing. To do this, I ask whoever is not watching to explain back to me what I have just said. This is a good way to make them think and realise that they need to be listening to my instructions. (J2)

In Maia’s interview, I was particularly interested in her perceptions of critical reflection, and it was noteworthy that she thought journal writing was time consuming; however, she “found [it] quite beneficial so I always made the most of my time to sit down and think about what I had done” (Int2). Maia mentioned that the practice of critical reflection within a journal format had several benefits, including a record of her accomplishments, recognition of progression, deepened understandings of experiences, encouragement of reflective thinking and support for future similar activities. She explained:
I saw it as rewarding. And I saw it as an opportunity to go back and see where I’ve come from. So if you don’t write things down on paper you sort of think about them. You might remember them for five days and then it’s sort of gone. But having that ongoing [record that] you can reflect back, look back at what you’re doing and see where you’ve come from. At the end of it, I saw quite a challenge and a change in myself in my ability to become more confident and so that at the end…this is a really good idea – definitely pleased that I did it and took the time.

I had to make myself think and come up with the resolutions myself, which actually makes it a lot more easier in the future because you’ve widened your scope to do things. This is what happens probably halfway through and I realised that it’s really working and so I continuously improved my performance from that. (Int2)

In addition, Maia reported that reflective writing became easier with time. Initially, she felt this practice was unfamiliar; however, it became a weekly routine that developed depth to her thinking. She explained:

Cause I knew what I was supposed to do and I thought about everything in a more deeper way, and sort of thought outside the box is what I was thinking in, I sort of developed more of an open thought process and that allowed me to go into more depth and analyse what I was doing and made it a lot easier. (Int2)

Maia concluded by stating, “It enabled me to see what I have been through and what I’ve done and what I’ve achieved”. She reiterated how rewarding it was to make visible what she had achieved, as it appeared tangible in its written form. Yet, she seldom considered her achievements from a critical perspective; nor did she examine her interactions from the perspective of others. A curious disconnect emerges between her impression of her development of critical reflection and the reality displayed within her writing. Perhaps this illustrates the complexity of translating her deeper thoughts into written words.

In considering the complexities between experience and what becomes taken up in conscious reflective writing, a number of Maia’s journal entries speak of ‘near misses’ in her gymnastics sessions. Despite the obvious prevalence of these entries, it was interesting to note the way in which Maia described the incident when a child actually fell from the equipment. The collegial support Maia received over the incident provided her with vindication for her response. Consequently, she did not proceed to explore the incident from other perspectives:

Michael raced up and over the first ladder without turning around at the top and slipped off the rung, landing awkwardly between two rungs of the horizontal ladder. I saw the whole thing and made sure he was okay. I then asked him to explain to me the mistake he made and what he needs to do in future. He told me everything correctly, which showed me he knew exactly what he was and was not doing. I took this opportunity to regroup on the floor… Noel backed me up 100% and we got the
message across. This was a wake-up call for Michael, as he could have really hurt himself, so he has now changed his attitude and is doing everything correctly and taking his time. This is setting a great example for the other members in the group. I felt that I went about this in the right way and used a vital example to emphasise the seriousness of listening to instructions. Having backup from Noel enforced this even more. (J2)

Earlier in her placement, Maia had reflected on learning how to facilitate a leadership course, and the next time it was offered she had a leading role along with a co-worker. Unfortunately, Maia was less familiar with some of the programme, which led to her co-worker taking charge. This was not what she expected and left her feeling sidelined rather than being actively involved. Nevertheless, her observations heightened her awareness of a skill yet to be developed. Again, she offered little insight as to why her co-workers appeared proficient or how she might approach developing these skills:

I think I need to get more of an idea of what the assessment content is about and develop a discussion around the points. Jane and Richard are both very good at speaking and changing things on the spot, but I do not feel comfortable to do this yet. I have to learn to adapt the discussion depending on the group and other points that are raised in conversation. I hope to improve on this eventually. (J2)

Although this experience was not as Maia expected, she turned the focus of her reflection on the positive experiences of the young participants. She reported change and growth within the group, yet did not explain why this had happened or what it was about the facilitation process (or her role within this) that brought about the difference:

Watching the group transform from earlier that morning to problem-solving as a team later in the day was amazing. It made me feel great and realised why I was there: to help complete strangers meet and work together as a team and become leaders in their own right. It was amazing to see the variety of ideas stimulated by different members and then applied and succeeded. It confirmed to me that there are always so many different ways to go about achieving one thing and it may take one or many people to create that and make it happen. (J2)

Throughout her placement, Maia taught gymnastics to various age groups and thereby developed an awareness of the different learning requirements of individuals within each age group. Interestingly, Maia’s reflections were somewhat lacking in deeper analysis and were unquestioning of the criteria she employed to determine whether ‘success’ had been achieved or not:

Throughout the term, I have been continuously learning new teaching techniques that are suited for individual capabilities of the different children. The five-year-olds are still learning how to get their bodies to do what they want, and some struggle to
comprehend what I am asking them to do. For this, I give simple instructions, in conjunction with the movement term and demonstrations. With the older groups, I have managed to develop a technique by informing them of what is required of them in a circuit, and give them more responsibility of doing it on their own so they feel more independent. This has worked well and has reflected their respect towards me. This makes me feel really good. (J2)

Gymnastic troublemakers occupied much of Maia’s last journal entries and she chose this type of incident to discuss during her interview. Maia identified that she had reflected on this incident because “it affected me seriously and I was extremely embarrassed” and she was left wondering whether she was a “good instructor” (Int2). It appeared Maia’s journal entry had a somewhat therapeutic impact, given this exercise highlighted for her that some things were beyond her control. Maia also described how she adopted an authoritarian stance to promote better behaviour in her groups. She wrote:

During the mat session, I took two girls through their floor routine and a parent came up to me and told me that the rest of my group was out of control, and if they were not careful, one of them was going to get hurt. I walked over to my group, stopped them from what they were doing and told them to come and sit down. I had a firm talking to them and told them how embarrassed I was about their performance as an older group who has been given responsibility to move around the circuit sensibly, while I took two of them through their routine. I very simply explained to them how disappointed I was, how they should not take gymnastics like a joke; otherwise do not bother coming. As soon as I took the two girls back to the mat, I looked back and the rest of my group were acting sensibly. It was a major transformation within two minutes. (J2)

Maia reflected on another group who had earlier been in trouble, whose behaviour she managed through the use of firm words and the removal of privileges. Her journal entry highlighted her supervisor’s reiteration and support of her strategy for maintaining good behaviour. Maia accepted this outcome from the discussion and did not question or seek alternative strategies for maintaining control of the group:

I had a group that (previously) caused me trouble and I had to have words with them to set boundaries. I spoke to Rachel about the situation that occurred last week and she said I had done the right thing. I was pleased to hear this, as it confirmed to me that the way I dealt with it was both appropriate and professional. She suggested I revisit the conversation that we had last week with the group again and tell them that, because of their behaviour, their privileges were going to be taken off them today. I agreed with this, as it would reinstate to them that their behaviour was unacceptable and I was not going to allow it. (J2)

In an earlier journal entry, Maia discussed her leadership style. She identified with having a ‘transformational leadership style’, and in attempting to explain this, commented, “I think this is
because I do my best to motivate my followers and help them change their behaviour for the better” rather than “transactional leadership, which requires an exchange between the leader and followers with compliance and performance with rewards in return” (J2). Arguably, the leadership examples discussed within her journal entries appear to align with the latter style; nevertheless, she believes her practice is the former, as suggested in her writing below:

Because of their performance throughout the previous two circuits, I gave them the permission to have some fun on the condition that there was no pushing in, no shoving others and no silly behaviour. I know that I had made the right decision as they proved to me that they can listen and do things properly without being silly. (J2)

Throughout Maia’s placement, she reflected on many workplace experiences, occasionally extending beyond detailed description. Despite volumes of writing, there was little attempt to engage with alternative ways of journal writing, although she had freedom to experiment and supervisor encouragement was readily available. Some comments during Maia’s interview may explain her complacency, including “[reflection] is something you do naturally to find out and resolve any situation” and “My academic supervisor said I was really good at it”. These notions confirmed her current practice, which she left unchallenged. Interestingly, she went on to claim that critical reflection became clearer about halfway through her placement. She explained, “It became clear to me what I was supposed to do”, and “I had to make myself think and come up with resolutions myself” (Int2). Somewhat contradictorily to her earlier statements, she seemed to imply this was a difficult thing to do.

Despite her relatively lengthy descriptive reflections, Maia demonstrated an increased degree of reflexivity across the duration of her placement. She was adamant that her placement had been highly successful, particularly when she focused on her perceived personal growth and development:

However, throughout this past year, I have learnt so much and made a huge improvement in my own performance. I believe it shows in my ability to interact and communicate with the children and other people and I know it will help me throughout my future. (J2)

Irrespective of what Maia chose to write about within her journal, it was clear that her critical reflections were largely employed to highlight increased understandings of self and her progression against learning outcomes, and to identify improved practices for the future.

Co-op has led me on an amazing and rewarding journey, where I have learnt so much and developed many skills during my placement. I have also learnt a lot about myself and have a come a long way since the beginning of the year. Due to
this, I have been able to achieve things without hesitation, and have succeeded in fulfilling all the things I have set out to achieve, including uni, home and work related things. I will be able to build on my new knowledge, skills and personal development, as well as continuing to build on my old knowledge and skills throughout my next journey in life. (J2)

5.3 Fergus’s story – Playing the game

Fergus would probably be the epitome of the 20-something ‘Kiwi bloke’ or man. He is passionate about playing and watching rugby, his role models are the All Blacks and he loves a good laugh with his mates. Playing and coaching rugby have been a big part of his life, and as a result, have influenced his chosen career path. Outside of university, he had a casual bar job, where he was expected to engage in informal conversation to make patrons feel comfortable. Fergus indicated he enjoyed this workplace, as he wrote in his journal, “The environment I work in at the pub is a really social, fun and exciting one” (J3). However, his casual behaviour in this particular workplace would prove to create a sense of personal tension within his cooperative education experience, which will be explored herein.

During his interview, Fergus explained how prior to placement his experiences of practising reflection and its value were derived from rugby match debriefs with his coach and team. Additionally, we discussed how he had undertaken developing his approach to reflective writing. He commented, “I used my own style purely because I developed that through rugby”, which suggested he did not attempt to use a framework to structure his writing. He explained further:

I play rugby and you need to reflect weekly on what you do after a game... I knew how important it [critical reflection] was. I guess, towards the end of the year I knew even more how important it was. But initially, because I done that through my sport on a regular basis… (Int3)

Fergus implied he understood that reflection involved considerable effort to think about his past actions in order to advance his performance. Initially, he seemed reluctant to reflect on his workplace experiences even though he acknowledged it was an important process for his learning. He commented:

This is going to take a lot of work rather than it’s boring... I don’t like looking back on it, go forward but you obviously need to look back to go forward...my initial thought was maybe a little bit boring, but I knew the importance of it and how much it can help if you do it properly. (Int3)
Fergus’s comments suggest an espoused ‘correct’ way in which to critically reflect, yet his subsequent journal entries showed little evidence of engagement with the frameworks provided and explored in the workshop.

In his statement below, Fergus explained how his understanding of, and confidence with, reflection was based on how he utilised it within rugby and what it meant to him in this context. Throughout his sporting life, mentors and coaches had encouraged him to review his performances, ultimately with the aim of identifying areas for improvement so he could become a better player. Initially, Fergus considered his uncle’s advice as criticism (negative), rather than as constructive, as he explained:

I always go back to rugby, but when I started with rugby I had a lot of help from my uncle and still do, and he would say blah blah blah you need to do this, this and I would feel really like, like he’s criticising me and saying you’re bad... And then over time and time again he kept saying, look, this is not a bad thing; this is just going to help you make you a better player. (Int3)

Fergus explained in the interview how he struggled academically; he attributed this to earlier schooling, as he felt pressured to perform and behave in particular ways. He had residual negative feelings from his schooldays. He explained, “[I] learn[ed] from school. You know, for me anyway, you’re forced to do different things and if you find it really hard, which I did when I was younger, then it puts a bad connotation on it for you as you get older” (Int3). Fergus’s early days at university were a combination of success and failure. He intimated that he did not take his studies seriously, did not prioritise university and developed some bad study habits, which he cited as key reasons for his failure of two university papers in the first year. This ‘wake-up call’ motivated him to listen to advice from family and friends. He explained in his first journal entry:

I had a slow start getting into my studies at [university]. I enjoyed the student life a little too much, failed two papers and set up some bad habits around studying. After some guidance from my aunty and fellow peers, I feel I have shown some improvement in my studies and have set some good habits up which will help to get the best out of my time and studies. (J3)

I became aware of Fergus’s interest in sport psychology during his interview; he explained that his plans were for his placement to help propel him towards a future in this field. His Cooperative Education 1 organisation was a small, relatively new coach education centre whose primary goal was to foster dialogue and relationships between the community and professional coaches through the provision of workshops, seminars and resources. In
addition, an organisational priority was to advance research in the field of coach education that included Fergus’s area of interest, sports psychology. Initially, Fergus spent considerable time on placement sourcing research literature on specific coaching topics, which he enjoyed because of his interest in the area and belief that the research resonated with his own sporting experiences. Fergus began his journal writing using a self-questioning style to help structure his thinking and writing. He also extended his writing to rating his productivity based on hours expended, rather than more pertinent outputs such as number and quality of articles reviewed. Fergus began his reflective journal with rather a mechanistic approach (as evidenced below), yet it is interesting to note that this is the only time his journal entries adopted this structure:

**What co-op work I did this week?** Throughout this week… I researched different coaching styles, I had my weekly meeting with [industry supervisor], had a workshop on assessments coming up and started to read over the co-op paper booklet.

**Did I enjoy it? Reasons why or why not?** I did enjoy my week of co-op work. This was because I felt I started to learn about different coaching styles. This was interesting because I could relate to some of the styles that I learnt about because I have done a small amount of coaching myself and have been playing rugby under many different coaches for the past 14 years. This meant I could match different styles with different coaches.

**What was this week’s goal and did I achieve it?** My goal for Week 1 was to find and record information on different coaching styles. I feel that I did achieve my goal this week. I found a paper based on executive coaching styles and learnt a lot around implementing different intervention styles ranging from psychodynamic to systems-oriented styles.

**Out of 10, how productive was your co-op work this week?** I would rate myself as 7 out of 10. This was because I could have started the week better by doing more hours on Monday and Tuesday.

Fergus’s ‘report style’ approach to his reflective journal characterises many of his early journal entries. Although less structured in nature, Fergus appeared to continue with accounts of his weekly activities. For example, Fergus attended a one-day coaching conference hosted by his organisation, which provoked a journal entry in which he gave an account of the content and his learning from each presentation. This entry was interesting, as Fergus appeared to take notes during each presentation that he transposed into a journal entry. Subsequently, the writing produced was displayed as presentation notes in bullet point format with a short concluding summary of his learning. A summary example is “I feel that I learnt a lot from this lecture. The new and innovative ways of approaching problems, increasing performance and
Chapter 5: Research narratives

ideas around controlling anxiety before games really opened my mind and helped to develop ideas that I haven’t thought of before” (J3). He completed this journal entry by acknowledging how participating at the conference assisted with progress towards meeting some of his learning outcomes. It was interesting to note that his academic supervisor’s feedback endorsed his practice of monitoring learning outcomes within his journal.

During the university mid-semester break, Fergus’s industry supervisor was absent and not responding to email communication. This prompted Fergus to write about his concerns, in particular, that a lack of directed workplace activities would impact on his ability to accumulate his placement hours. The silence in this journal entry is the lack of any consideration of the ways in which he might be more resourceful and independently productive. Rather, Fergus’s reflection highlighted an over-reliance on his supervisor to provide guidance and to direct workplace activities. It is possible that, at this time, Fergus was too new to this workplace environment to be able to take some initiative and that he was lacking the confidence, experience or maturity required to identify specific workplace requirements. It would seem, from his journal writing, that Fergus required a high level of support at this stage:

Throughout the holiday, I have found myself not doing as much work as possible. This was due to not having enough information to research for my organisational analysis and to do any research for my co-op. I was trying to get in contact with my supervisor, but as it was the holidays, I’m guessing he was not checking his emails as often. I have had a meeting with him this week and have some work to do now, which I’m happy about! A little worried I may fall behind in my hours but am sure I’ll catch them up over the next few weeks. (J3)

Fergus’s journal entries stalled for a short time until his progress report was submitted. As Fergus reviewed his progress, he acknowledged he had not yet begun to work towards his first two professional learning outcomes. It was interesting to observe that the reasons Fergus gave for this were largely external in nature – the workplace organisation was in its infancy and activities related to his learning outcomes were not yet operational. At the time of completing the report, Fergus was hopeful of this situation being rectified once the centre was fully functional.

With his progress report completed, Fergus’s next journal entry focused on his concerns about completing his hours and the way in which he was spending his time in the workplace. He intimated that his primary role searching databases for specific literature had consumed most of his time and signalled his enthusiasm for potential new workplace activities. It was interesting to note that throughout the semester, Fergus had not made reference in his journal
to his co-workers or the organisational culture. A comment he made during his interview may 
shed light on this: “I was hardly working with anyone in the first one” (Int3). As this comment 
suggested, Fergus actually completed his placement hours in two workplace settings. In his 
final journal entry for Semester 1, Fergus did not disclose why his placement was terminated. 
Perhaps he did not feel comfortable including this experience in his journal, yet it is surprising 
that this last entry appeared somewhat optimistic:

I’m pretty happy with my report and my progress but I’m looking to gain more 
progress over the next five weeks. Am a little bit worried I might not make my 200 
hours, as I have only done research so far. However, as stated in my report I’m 
about to start doing some performance profiling for a rugby team, which I’m really 
looking forward to!! I’m enjoying my experience and the research I have been 
doing. (J3)

Unfortunately for Fergus, he became one of the few students each year who discover their 
placement organisation could not provide them with the necessary resources for it to be 
successful. Despite the promise of this placement to combine his interests in sport psychology 
and coach development, the organisation was still establishing itself and lacked the 
infrastructure required to support and mentor a placement student such as Fergus, making his 
placement untenable. Perhaps Fergus was not suited to this organisation, as the nature of the 
work required a certain level of sophistication and autonomy, one he was not yet ready for. He 
did not explore the situation, but simply wrote in his journal, “I currently am still looking for a 
new co-op for this semester as my last one didn’t work out. I was disappointed that it didn’t 
work out because I really thought I had a good opportunity to learn a lot about sport psych” 
(J3).

With the support of the paper leader, Fergus proceeded to make arrangements to secure a 
new placement organisation. This process proved to be more difficult than he anticipated, as 
there were a number of rejections and non-respondents. His brief journal entry below 
indicated the seriousness of his predicament, as he identified his motivation for promptly 
confirming a new placement. Within this reflection, Fergus acknowledged the value of a ‘good’ 
long-term placement, identified a strategy for future actions and recognised that his hopes of 
graduation were in jeopardy:

I’m still looking for a co-op for my second semester. I’m quite worried that I won’t be 
able to get one because I have tried about five or six places and they either have 
no opportunities or haven’t got back to me. I hope I can get one soon so that I can 
graduate this year. Next time I’m in a situation like this I think I should get prepared 
as early as possible and get a good organisation that I will be able to be placed with 
for a whole year. (J3)
Fergus’s academic supervisor offered ongoing guidance and support as he searched for a new organisation. His supervisor encouraged him to write in his journal to help him make sense of his experiences in preparation for his new placement. However, Fergus did not respond to the feedback by reflecting on his situation within his journal, possibly because he was more intent on finding a placement. To date much of his journaling could be described as ‘front of mind’, or the first thing he thought about and superficial. The feedback offered was:

A suggestion for a post would be to really examine what you will do differently when you begin your new co-op experience. It would be interesting for you to reflect on what you think would make a “good organisation” for you to undertake a co-op. Perhaps in a post you can share what advice would you give to new students about what to look for when selecting a co-op. (J3)

Fergus eventually secured a new placement with a large not-for-profit NRO, where he would shadow the stadium manager and assist in the gym. With his placement confirmed, he returned to his journal to note, “The process I went through in order to find this was very long but I learnt a lot” (J3). His largely descriptive journal was heavily orientated around outlining key learnings from this process. Fergus wrote:

Things I learned were: organise a co-op as early as possible, approach many different organisations and explain what you are doing. Come to meetings prepared with your CV, co-op requirements and in professional attire. These points are key in order to get involved in a good co-op experience and receive the best industry placement possible. (J3)

Fergus was introduced to the department where he was to work, and in his reflections, he indicated he was made to feel welcome. He appeared positive about his new placement and was comforted by knowing what was expected of him, implying that this was not the case with his first placement. What was evident from Fergus’s journal reflections was his increased attention on identifying workplace routines. Fergus appeared to respond positively to an increased sense of routine, particularly when daily tasks were allocated time within this structure. When he thought about skills he would like to develop while with this organisation, Fergus indicated a desire to improve interpersonal skills, and he used his reflective journal to explore strategies that might help him achieve this. His first journal entry with his new placement focused on the people he worked with:

I have started my co-op placement this week and really enjoyed my first day. I have started to learn how the stadium manager builds weekly draws for the indoor soccer league. I have also met everyone in my department and they are all very welcoming. I have already started to figure out that [organisation] run their day-to-day work through a good routine. This is something I was hoping for before I
accepted my placement with this organisation. I like routine because then I know what I’ll be doing each day and won’t be wasting any of my time. I have started on developing my interpersonal skills this week by talking with the staff within my department. I did this by chatting over lunch and when I started in the morning. (J3)

In contrast, during his interview Fergus explained how cooperative education enabled him to explore, take risks and try out new things, which came as somewhat of a surprise given few of his journal entries conveyed evidence of this. Perhaps the opportunity to begin again in this alternative workplace setting presented Fergus with the motivation to embrace the learning opportunities available. Further, the supportive culture provided through the cooperative placement model appeared to assist Fergus in learning to become work-ready:

And just really like developing you as a student from being a student to being a person in the big wide world, I guess. But in a kind of a protective setting so you’re not putting money on the line, not like an investment into it to a business or you’re not going for a job and if you don’t make it you’re out sort of thing. You’re kind of just, it’s like you’ve got training wheels on sort of thing... So in that sense you feel pretty protected and you can explore a lot more and take more risks and the fact you know you can try something you haven’t tried before. (Int3)

Several placement hours later, Fergus noted he was developing technical skills he was able to utilise within his work for the organisation. In his journal, Fergus commented on how little time he had allocated to developing his industry project plan, but advised that his personal learning outcomes flourished through regular participation and contribution to workplace activities. Interaction with clients (whether as an individual or in groups) featured regularly in Fergus’s reflections as he explored ways to establish initial patterns of communication. He commented:

I’ve currently completed over 20 hours of my placement and am really enjoying it. I’ve been learning a lot about draws and how to put scores online for [organisation]. I think I need to allocate more time to my project as I have only done a small amount of it. I feel that I’ve put some good work into one of my personal outcomes. I’ve been meeting and interacting with clients, I was a part of this week’s [older patrons] class, and helped out with a personal training session last week. I’m developing my conversation structure when meeting new people and gaining confidence introducing myself. (J3)

This short descriptive journal entry prompted his academic supervisor to encourage him to think more about specific parts of his experience, in order to develop more in-depth reflective writing: “As suggested by this feedback, you could perhaps reflect further on your comment that you are ‘developing your conversation structure’. What do you mean by this? Perhaps give some examples to indicate how this is developing” (J3).
Despite receiving this feedback, Fergus’s next journal entry continued to provide superficial, descriptive accounts of an event, rather than engaging in a more critical consideration of what he learnt from this encounter. Fergus was struck by another setback – his laptop was stolen from his parked car. In his short, rather panicked journal entry, he reiterated the importance of backing up assessments in multiple locations and securing valuables – a message all students receive throughout their time at university. By all accounts, it was a very costly mistake, yet he spent little time reflecting on it in his journal. He wrote:

I have learnt a very valuable lesson this week. NOT TO LEAVE YOUR LAPTOP IN THE CAR!!!! Unfortunately, my laptop was stolen this week and I have lost all my work! I now know always to take valuables with you and to DOUBLE SAVE ALL YOUR WORK! Luckily, I still have enough time to get all my work in. Got to work really hard now though! (J3)

As Fergus progressed with his placement, his reflections convey a spark of interest in an area in sport and exercise he had not previously considered: management of a sporting facility such as a stadium. His reflections suggest he was beginning to view the gym environment from a different perspective, albeit still from a mostly solipsistic sense. Fergus wrote, “I have never worked for a team like this; I have only been a customer of the gyms. I really like how relaxed the job is and how specific the everyday activities are” (J3). At this time, routine still appears to contribute significantly to his level of workplace enjoyment; however, Fergus did not engage in a discussion of this. His journal entries were mostly short catalogues of thoughts he chose to write up. Again, his academic supervisor helped by suggesting he think more about the concept of “teamwork”.

Probably because of his supervisor feedback, Fergus’s next journal entry revisited his understanding of teamwork, as he witnessed firsthand the value of working together at times when the work was mundane but necessary. Fergus discussed that teamwork enabled him to feel involved, productive and engaged through social interaction with his co-workers. In this slightly more detailed, thoughtful and focused journal entry, Fergus attempted to make sense of working together towards a common goal:

I had a good first day this week with cleaning, monitoring the car park, and finishing the procedures for the stadium processes. As you do with all organisations, you have to sometimes do the dirty or seemingly pointless jobs. Today was one of those days where I engaged in these sorts of jobs. What I have learnt from this experience is that you need to be a part of the team and sometimes do the jobs others do not want to do. As I talked about in my last post, I have never worked in a gym team environment. I feel working as a team is very important for the creation of team cohesion. Team cohesion provides a strong culture and is a key component
of a good work environment performance. I’m continually learning how important culture and team cohesion is by the experiences I’m having… An example of these experiences were today when we were working as a team in order to clean a large amount of plastic chairs that are required for the AGM tomorrow. With the helping hand of myself and two other staff members, we were able to clean and prepare these chairs for tomorrow. There were also some good social interaction and conversation. (J3)

Fergus was interested in the daily working of his workplace, such as, the ongoing relationship management and maintenance of sponsorship deals for sporting events run by the stadium. Fergus described his experience accompanying the stadium manager to a sponsorship meeting and reflected upon this as an insightful learning experience, particularly in terms of increasing his understanding of how and why financial links exist between these organisations. Fergus’s experiences of mentorship appeared to expand his awareness of the role each member played within a team. It also seemed that as the placement progressed, Fergus found more time for his journal writing, presumably for its role in making visible his achievements. While Fergus never reflected on feedback he may have received from his workplace colleagues, he indicated a notion of unspoken positive responses. He explained:

What made it better towards the end or made it easier…and more enjoyable was the fact that I could...see myself progressing and see...the reactions I was getting from the people I was working with were really positive and so I wanted to continue that. And I knew there were a couple of things I wanted to work on and needed to work on and I guess reflecting and finding out why it helped to continue that positive reactions from those people that I worked with. And also my progression within the industry. I feel a lot more mature and a lot more I guess professional and I feel like I can act more professionally in that sort of setting now than I did at the start of the year. And I felt that came from the reflection, so I guess making that progression for me has given me quite a good feeling and if I didn’t really reflect on the things I was doing wrong, then I wouldn’t be able to get to this stage. (Int3)

An example of the way in which Fergus’s learning became visible through his reflective writing is in his discussion of workplace culture. Through his writing about workplace behaviour, Fergus realised he may have pushed workplace boundaries or abused workplace privilege and culture. He wrote, “I need to limit the amount of social interaction I engage in whilst completing my hours. I figured out this week that I have been a little too relaxed with the staff and with one or two members” (J3). From this moment, he identified that he was “making more jokes than necessary and engaging in more friendly banter with one of the trainers than needed” (J3). He rationalised his present behaviour by the fact that it was required for his “work in the pub” (J3). However, he felt his placement organisation had much higher expectations of professionalism, which led him to believe “I need to change my approach
slightly in order to work effectively” (J3). Making this discovery made him feel good, as he knew he had avoided a potential problem and resolved to, while “remembering that I’m at a different workplace, limit the amount of time I talked to them and control the situation so that I stay work focused” (J3). When asked to recount an experience during his interview, Fergus chose this story about developing professionalism in the sport and recreation context, as it had a significant impact on him.

Over the course of his cooperative placements, there were small but noticeable changes in Fergus’s journal writing and engagement with critical reflection. His journal writing appeared less representative of a logbook or list of activities and began to focus on his own learning within these contexts. For example, midway through the final placement, Fergus discussed his increased confidence in his journal. He described that with the stadium manager away, he felt he had enough confidence “to do his jobs” (J3) on his placement days. Fergus did not reflect on what it meant to be given this responsibility, except to write that it “really helped to develop my public speaking confidence” (J3).

As Fergus completed his placement, his final journal entry summarised his progression with developing workplace-specific skills, particularly professionalism, which he directly attributed as a key contributor in securing a casual contract for continued work within the organisation. Through his placement experiences, and reflective writing about these experiences, Fergus contends he developed a stronger sense of professional identity primarily as a result of increased understandings of communication, work ethic and culture, as illustrated below:

Throughout this cooperative experience, I have learnt and developed many different skills. Some of these skills are professionalism, time management and my ability to construct processes within an organisation. I feel that these skills will help me with the jobs I apply for in the future.

My professionalism regarding my appearance and quality of work has increased whilst completing my hours at [organisation] and has given me the ability to go on a casual contract with this organisation.

My time management skills that I have developed have provided me with a lot of direction in my life. I was able to fit all my work, rehab and placement hours into this semester successfully. My ability to construct processes, such as creating timetables, fixtures and results tables to soccer tournaments, has really provided me with key administration skills that I can utilise in the future.

The two things I feel I need to work on the most is my ability to approach people whom I have never met and my vocabulary I use when in the working environment.
These two areas are key in providing an effective service for an organisation and came be the make or break of the success of a company, individual or group. (J3)

Fergus was in an exceptional situation of experiencing two placement organisations, which he could compare. He spoke of understanding his role, good mentoring, feeling included and achieving tasks within the workplace as factors that influenced his desire to reflect on his experiences with the distinct purpose of improving his work contribution. There seemed to be an unwritten expectation of dependability and accountability from his co-workers, who had accepted him into their place of work. He felt his reflections became a perpetual cycle driven by his efforts and the rewards of his efforts. He said:

Whereas in the second semester, the new organisation, I feel I understood what I was doing and my role that I played at the organisation I felt I fitted in much more. And that was the turning point where I was more inclined to reflect on things I was doing wrong because I was more accepted – not that I wasn’t accepted in the first one, but I was hardly working with anyone in the first one. But the second one I was working with a whole group of people that I had met when I went there. So I was more inclined to put more effort in and more effort meant I enjoyed it more because I got more out of it. (Int3)

Lastly, during the interview, we spoke of Fergus’s perception of the role of critical reflection within the cooperative education model. Fergus’s engagement in the written activity of critical reflection was minimalistic, yet he believed it was important. Through the act of writing, he had to think back on his experiences, select something to write about and think about it as he wrote. Possibly, he thought more about his experiences in situ than he may have without the requirement of journal writing. I challenged Fergus to consider whether his learning would have been further enhanced with a greater degree of critical reflection, and he responded:

I think the experiences would have been the same in that I would have – I feel I will still have learnt a lot of things. Because I think you reflect naturally anyway, but you’re kind of pinpointing it and expanding on it...if you took that away then it would take a lot of depth away from the experience. And it would make it like every other paper. Or every other school course you do back at school...it’s just go do something, and then write a report on it...in that there’s no real learning... It was more of this is about learning and developing, not about getting the best mark. (Int3)

5.4 Lydia’s story – Self-discovery and managing adversity

After 20 years in the workforce doing a variety of jobs, Lydia decided to attend university, thinking a degree might provide her with more employment options and financial security. Lydia’s reflections suggested she knew it would be challenging but she “wanted to make changes to better myself” and to be a “good example” for her children. With much hard work
and focus behind her, as she entered the final year of her degree, she wrote this comment in her first journal entry: “the wonderful part of this has been passing my papers with a B average and seeing light at the end of the tunnel”. She concluded this writing by adding, “This has been hard and feels like a never-ending sacrifice, which has taught me patience and determination” (J5).

Along with her maturity came a strong, emotional character, with a determined nature that would see her periodically speak her mind impulsively. During her interview, we discussed how critical reflection facilitated her greater understanding of herself. She admitted to learning much about her behaviour and practices, and experiencing many personal changes throughout her year on placement, as she highlighted:

I learnt that I’m opinionated with no backing of my opinions really. I’m very emotional. Sometimes I don’t look at things in an open view, so it causes the narrow-mindedness. Yeah, I learnt a lot actually... And I take things too personally... Yeah, I think I am a completely different person from it [critical reflection]. (Int5)

Lydia’s self-discovery began within her first days on placement, when she realised she would not be able to achieve her goals to satisfy her management major or her personal expectations with this organisation. She discussed her situation with her academic supervisor, “who was very helpful and supportive”, giving her “some contacts that she thought may be relevant to the direction I was heading” (J5). She was conscious of terminating this brief relationship appropriately; because of the small size of the sport and recreation industry, she wanted to maintain a good reputation. She implied her first placement choice was rushed to fulfil timelines for the placement approval process. She explained in her journal:

At this stage, the stress of disappointing Chris and possibly affecting my reputation for future opportunities in the sport industry was so consuming, I felt that I needed to speak with him first, as that would be the respectful thing to do. Chris understood and felt that he could not give me what I needed after all and was happy to let me move on.

Upon reflection of this awkward situation, I have learnt how very important it is to be clear about what you want to achieve with your experience, making sure that both parties are absolutely sure that these are achievable and the resources are available, for example, a desk, computer, phone and anything that is needed to have a great outcome for both parties. It is also crucial that nothing is rushed for the sake of getting it done on time. (J5)

With this lesson in mind, Lydia promptly arranged a meeting with Andrew (general manager) and her academic supervisor to discuss a placement opportunity with a not-for-profit
organisation. The purpose of her host organisation was to provide free recreational and active play opportunities to be delivered to children, youth and their families within open spaces in the local community. The workplace team consisted of the general manager (industry supervisor and similar in age to Lydia), his wife (part-time marketing) and his brother (development manager) and the balance mostly casuals or volunteers recruited from school communities and a local university. During this first meeting, Lydia was offered the opportunity to work with Alice in marketing and assist with organising free play activities. As she accepted this offer, she wrote of her delight and excitement at the prospect of becoming involved with this organisation.

In her early journal entries, Lydia described her initial experiences within the organisation. She explained how she went to the office the day after her placement was secured and introduced herself to two staff members while she waited for a team meeting to begin. Unfortunately, the meeting was cancelled, as “some of the staff could not make the meeting” (J5), so she went to university instead. Over the next two days, Lydia received text messages from her industry supervisor to inform her that her meeting with the marketing manager would need to be rescheduled for the following week, and her work starting with the development manager was postponed because of illness. Her industry supervisor suggested she instead “work from home reporting on the current website and Facebook and looking at where I could make changes to it. I spent three hours doing this and sent an email with my report attached” (J5). As a consequence of these early days, she began questioning herself, her placement and the industry to make sense of her situation. Concerns about completing her placement hours surfaced; however, she resolved to maintain her effort. She wrote in her journal:

I am beginning to wonder whether the sport and recreation industry is really organised or is it me wanting things to be more structured? I am an action person, where if I say I will do something I will do it immediately. I am feeling frustrated, as I do not think I will reach the required hours and all I want to do is ‘get stuck in’...

When reflecting on finding a co-op, it is easy to be misled by people and their passions for what they want to give but in reality cannot. I have had to learn to bite my tongue and again be patient; I am sure this will turn out well but it seems it is a long road to get there.

In conclusion, I know that I am being proactive to make things happen; in turn, I am learning to be patient and realise that not everyone is like me and to stay calm and focused. (J5)
Lydia reflected on attending a weekly team meeting where roles were delegated yet tasks were not assigned to her. She was “beginning to become more frustrated, as I was not really part of the team” (J5), particularly given the planning meetings she was waiting for had not happened. Lydia’s journal entry reflected rising anxiety – this was week two and she began to question whether her current feelings were the result of having seemingly high expectations or perhaps because she had misread previous communication. With meetings booked, she “felt relieved that things were moving forward” (J5). Later, as she left her meetings with tasks to complete, she “felt like things were starting to fall into place and that the hours were now starting to add up” (J5). However, at the completion of the week, she realised her planning had not gone accordingly and she would need to find a strategy to cope with the troughs and peaks of her involvement in managing community events as well as completing her university work. She reflected in her journal:

After reflecting on the week I can say that I now have so much work that it is actually overwhelming; it is exam time, I am trying to fit in my hours and do the work allocated and create my organisational analysis; I did try to be proactive so this would not happen, wanting these meetings two weeks ago; however; this is reality and at the end of the day I need to learn to manage this kind of stress for the future as it seems to be a running theme in the real world and I want to be successful. (J5)

Her academic supervisor attempted to prompt her to think more about how she could cope with the pressures she acknowledged in her journal: “Yes – heaps of pressure – or nothing very exciting going on – is the real world of sports events! When you next have some downtime, ponder what your strategy was for getting through this peak period.” (J5).

For Lydia, the harsh reality of university, placement and family life hit home, as she discussed in her journal entry below. As Lydia confessed, she had high expectations of herself and was also susceptible to stress. She attributed her previous successes to hard work, determination, great planning and organisation that many working parents know only too well. Lydia’s journal entry describing this situation appeared to be a sort of therapy – her initial writing was quite despondent, yet through this writing, Lydia was able to evaluate her circumstances and create a plan to work through all her undertakings. Her journal entry below shows insight as she attempted to make sense of her predicament:

This week has been the hardest week so far, namely because it’s been exam time and I have learned that I am half a mark short for passing my favourite paper…after working really hard at studying and feeling confident. This week has been about survival not management.
Work has been up in the air also with Andrew deciding to go...for a holiday and yet again everything stops and I had to pop in and out of the office to pick things up amongst the exams; Andrew sent me 12 emails asking me to do various tasks, which I have had to put on hold so I can do my exams, which is more important for the moment. I feel that I am doing so much that nothing is up to my usual standard.

I have spent the week screaming at the kids even on my son’s 10th birthday, having a meltdown about whether all these sacrifices are really worth the outcome and really feeling sorry for myself, which in hindsight is not getting me anywhere. So after spending a couple of days in bed and feeling sorry for myself, with “poor me”, I have decided that I need to pull my head in and find a way to make it work where I feel that I am giving the best I can and producing the quality I expect from myself.

So I went for a run to clear my head and got started on my to do list, which was long and detailed; I then prioritised each thing. Then I needed to sift through my 12 emails from Andrew to find out what he really needed from me, so I created a document from the emails so I could understand it better. Working out all my due dates for assignments for all my papers, which fantastically are all due at the same time.

When reflecting on this week, I realise that I let the pressure control me instead of controlling and managing my time, attitude and what I needed to achieve; I feel I can now understand where I was going wrong...

I now have created some working documents to structure myself better and I will try not to yell at the kids when the plan is not going how I had hoped it would.

Here’s to a better week ahead. (J5)

Feedback on this journal entry from her academic supervisor helped her feel supported and gave her something to consider for future action. Her academic supervisor wrote:

your comments suggest that you’ve found a means of controlling the pressures. When such pressures get to you (and you are not alone in this), it is usually indicative of learning how to listen to the inner voice when it tells you things are out of balance. Having a management plan is good, most of the time. BUT! Can I encourage you to reflect upon balancing the priorities in your life – between sustaining and supporting family life, work commitments and achieving personal goals – and especially consider what permissions you will give yourself if you can’t achieve all of them all of the time? (J5)

Until this point, Lydia’s journal entries followed no particular format, except she always presented each entry with a title and concluded with an overall reflection on her week. Her first attempt at utilising Gibbs’s model to frame her journal entries highlighted the difficulty she had interpreting the meaning of each of the subheadings. During her interview, she stated, “the one [Gibbs’s model] that we got from AUT was quite broad and easy to sort of head off on
different areas” (Int5). Instead of beginning her writing with a description of a single event or issue, she outlined her week, making it difficult to write within the following subheadings. She described a “very busy but productive” week, when she prepared an e-newsletter to be sent out to stakeholders, worked to update the website and Facebook, and participated in workplace activities. Any one of these tasks or a meaningful moment within one could have formed the basis of her journal entry. However, in reading through her entry, it appeared the essence of Lydia’s reflection was related to workplace culture and how she tried to contribute meaningfully through her workplace activities, only to find obstacles were in her way. Confessing earlier to being an “action person” with a desire to improve her workplace environment, she wrote:

I am always waiting on someone else to finish anything, for example, the e-newsletter…which is frustrating but I am beginning to understand that it is what it is and I know that I have done what I have needed to do; also, I have been trying to be proactive and just do things that I think would benefit the organisation. (J5)

Her industry supervisor “explained that he was really happy with all the work I had been doing, which was very rewarding to know that he was happy and in turn helped me know that I was on the right track” (J5). Reassurance from her industry supervisor put her at ease, made her feel valued and successful, and motivated her to continue developing her time management strategies and workplace skills. She explained:

I am lucky enough to have this opportunity to really develop my skills... I realise that I have a lot of pressure and many tasks to achieve; I like pressure and find that it really motivates me (normally). This week has been a week where I know that I have succeeded in finding balance and harmony and will endeavour to continue with this consistently... Changing my attitude was also a big factor with motivation and getting feedback from Andrew made it all worthwhile. (J5)

Lydia’s journal entries identified multiple issues that challenged her workplace participation. These issues included a poorly designed Facebook page with no in-house expertise, cancelled meetings, sidelining of her e-newsletter and missing or damaged equipment for games. Lydia continued to try to make sense of how things worked within this workplace. She acknowledged, “I have only recently started with [organisation]; I need to be patient”. However, she was confident “that if I keep working through these issues and create a management process, I can address each issue and rectify each one strategically” (J5). After she completed the organisational analysis assessment for her cooperative education paper, Lydia reflected on the value of this activity. She explained this activity was “very beneficial; it is apparent that as volunteers come and go continuously nothing is really being solved or
managed properly” (J5). Lydia’s reflections often suggested she found it difficult working within the current management system. After identifying the frustrations with a lack of workplace processes and procedures, Lydia thought she would develop a management strategy to improve things. She concluded this journal entry by writing, “once the procedures are set in place, the day-to-day business challenges should be avoidable; all staff can work as a team rather than individuals and communication will be better, providing a better service” (J5). She did not appear to consider whether the existing manager and other staff would welcome her problem-solving and enthusiasm, or whether it would be seen as a threat or as an overstatement of her role within the organisation.

As Lydia continued to create a new Facebook page for her organisation, she wrote about this experience in her journal in ways that largely appeared to draw on Gibbs’s framework. This time her journal entry was more defined and focused, as she clearly attempted to engage with the dimensions of the framework. Below is an abridged version of her journal entry:

Description of event:
This week has been interesting, with learning about social media and how to fix things. I have discovered YouTube has tutorials on anything…I could not figure out how to change the profile I created to a business page; this gave me a step-by-step process…it turned out I was better off setting it up the way I did as I could get more friends this way…however, I still had to rebuild it with all the pictures and details about the organisation.

Feelings and thoughts:
I felt proud of myself finding a way to make it right and still frustrated…which made it the third time I created a page about the organisation, but this gave me a chance to really know my stuff by this time. I am actually relieved it worked out well in the end.

Evaluation:
This was interesting; because I had set it up wrong in the first place I managed to obtain more ‘friends’ and I learnt so much more in the process in regard to the organisation, social media and YouTube; this has given me more confidence in using Facebook.

Analysis:
Hindsight is a wonderful thing! Unfortunately, there is no one in the organisation to help me with the social media and communications so it is taking a long time to learn as I go, which if this was a paid position, the organisation would not be getting a very good return on investment; however, this is not a paid position and the
opportunity to self-learn has been inspiring. I look forward to the day when I can easily and effectively achieve more for the organisation in a shorter time.

Conclusion and synthesis:

In conclusion, I believe that if you want to achieve new skills and develop further, there is no reason you can’t do this yourself by pooling your resources and problem-solving any situation that arises. This way it is evident that a learning outcome has been ultimately achieved and the next time this arises it will be a ‘quick fix’ or possibly it would not happen in the first place.

Action plan:

I have arranged a meeting with a relative who has comprehensive knowledge in web creation and development so I can create a new website for [organisation]...

(J5)

Eventually, Lydia’s determination and organisational skills led to other staff members calling upon her for assistance, which left her with less time for her role of developing social media communication platforms. As she discussed in her journal, on the positive side, she was learning a great deal. However, there was an underlying sense of tension building between Lydia and her industry supervisor, and she wrote about her “frustration” becoming a persistent emotion. For example, Lydia wrote:

Andrew wanted to get the flyers done; it was essential that this was done as soon as possible; I worked hard to have it done for him along with my other work; Andrew then said he would not be able to look at doing anything about that for a few weeks!! This is very disheartening and makes me less inclined to work hard for him; the same thing happened with the e-newsletter and he didn’t even end up sending it out. (J5)

Her understanding of this situation was “the person at the top has too many people to manage in a successful way” (J5). Her solution would be to employ “another manager to help with the day-to-day running of the organisation” (J5). Of course, this was beyond her remit, so she decided she would be “selfish”, focus on her learning contract and prioritise completing her degree. Her default position was to return to her learning contract and progress from there. She wrote that her action plan:

was to be less emotional about wanting to improve the management structure and marketing/comms. Do what I need to do in regard to the games, e-newsletter and Facebook. Hopefully this will take away some of the continuous frustration I feel and leave me to develop my learning outcomes. (J5)
At this point, her academic supervisor gave her some feedback to ponder: “And given the unchangeable facts of the organisation within which you are working, how would you revise your strategies to deliver your learning outcomes (if, indeed, you would change them)?” (J5). It was interesting to note that Lydia did not appear to address this comment in her subsequent journal entries, but may have in other ways.

Fuelled by a strong desire to solve her problems, Lydia took some basic Facebook and website tuition from an information technology student, as there were neither in-house experts to consult nor funding for training available. Within her journal entry entitled “Knowledge is a powerful thing”, she wrote positively about this experience: “This has been so rewarding, that the promotional tools are now set and I have the skills to ensure that the right links and information is correct for the public to see. I now feel that there is an element of professionalism to the organisation” (J5). With Facebook and the website development progressing and new skills to enable her to use the technology with ease, Lydia discussed feeling grateful that she had found a solution to these workplace problems. Lydia highlighted discussions with her academic supervisor and access to resources available through her university as powerful tools. Her willingness and keenness to get things done had motivated her to search more broadly for a solution. She wrote, “When evaluating the problem of my lack of knowledge, I now know that I do not have to rely on the organisation alone” (J5). However, her action plan appeared to signal a sense of further frustration yet to come: “Now to actually receive correct and updated information from the organisation so I can inform all stakeholder and participants of up and coming events, games and run competitions (monitoring them) and posting photos” (J5).

Lydia’s diligent attempts to improve her organisation’s website and social media profile began to reap rewards. She indicated receiving “great feedback” from stakeholders. Not only was she achieving a learning outcome she was passionate about and hoped to develop further, but she also thought the volunteer nature of this organisation would benefit through improved access to current event information. When reflecting on this in her journal, Lydia implied that there were problems with communication, morale and motivation in the organisation, but she did not examine this:

When evaluating how social media [Facebook] really impacts everyone in the organisation, it is now obvious that it helps with communication within [organisation], as the staff can post comments along with sponsors and also participants, which helps keep all parties involved, creating a sense of belonging.
This in itself solves some of the lack of communication between the staff in the organisation, in turn improving the morale and motivation. (J5)

Lydia found creating these electronic resources for online access extremely rewarding and appeared motivated through receiving stakeholder feedback, stakeholders creating links to her pages and increased registrations for the monthly newsletter. She noted that professional presentation was as important as being visible and having a presence on the web. She wrote:

I learnt that putting in the time to format it correctly and checking grammar and spelling is very important when promoting the organisation. Communication with the staff is just as important to promote the games sessions and run competitions... so the stakeholder had the right information to forward on or to come to the sessions. I believe that I have a long way to go before I feel confident that I could do this without proof reading from peers and the manager; however, I am on my way to becoming more informed and promoting this more professionally in the future. (J5)

Her journal entries overall signal, but do not specifically examine, workplace issues with communication and her desire for more formal workplace processes and procedures. As a consequence, she stated within her interview, “I wasn’t learning enough; I wasn’t getting enough guidance or help. I was just left to my own devices to create my own knowledge” (Int5). It is not clear what her expectations of learning in the workplace were, yet she learnt much, as she frequently stated in her journal. It appeared that she expected to experience a ‘workplace in action’ that was efficient, inclusive and structured, rather than one lacking cohesion and systems. In order to complete her work efficiently, she created an information management system to ensure she had all the necessary information to manage her online resources. She explained the role of reflection in helping her to solve her problem:

I was doing the communications and marketing, and I wasn’t getting that information that I needed to promote. And I was getting more and more frustrated; it wasn’t helping anything my frustration. So through the critical reflection I figured out how I could go about getting the information, putting a template together for the team and creating a sort of a time management system where I can receive the information. (Int5)

Lydia’s final journal entry for the semester was a lengthy reflection incorporating each of her learning outcomes. Three key points emerged from this reflection worthy of discussion. Firstly, she identified a gap between the rhetoric and reality of being on placement. Collectively, a learning contract had been negotiated and signed; however, rather than seizing this opportunity to explore the experiences to understand workplace practices, develop skills and learn about herself and teamwork, Lydia felt somehow she had been misled when resources
were restricted. Nevertheless, by default rather than through planning, ultimately this did appear to happen. She wrote:

There were no resources to meet my requirements; I could confidently say that I could resource my own help in the future. This has been a difficult process; however, it has taught me so much in regard to buying into the ‘sales pitch’, meaning even though people still sign contracts and commit to something does not mean it will be followed essentially. It has been explained to me that the sports industry is like this. I believe this means it's the same wherever you go in the sport industry, and it is such a tight industry that it would not be in the best interest to cause a problem. (J5)

Secondly, Lydia suggested that “communication is a key component with anything in life”. She reflected on a conversation with her industry supervisor during which he appeared to raise an issue regarding her ability to communicate with young people. Her journal entry intimated she understood the importance of good communication skills when working with young people but she was uncertain about the meaning of his comments. She wrote:

I feel I communicate well with both staff, young and older, participants at our sessions and parents. Andrew has informed me that I should also be aware that even though I communicate well with them, perhaps they did not feel the same way due to the age I am. I questioned what he actually meant by this comment; he suggested that as I have decided to pursue my career later in life that I would have to learn to cope with younger people being my boss. I explained that I was aware of this and did not have a problem with learning from youth with more qualifications and experience in this field. Andrew then explained that maybe the youth would have this problem and I would need to find a way to make them feel comfortable with this… I really wanted to understand what the problem was and what Andrew was trying hard to explain to me. (J5)

Lydia’s uncertainty remained unresolved at the conclusion of her placement. She explained:

And he felt like I couldn’t deal with young people whereas I love young people and I had good relationships with all of them so I’m not quite sure what his tangent was there. I did try and look at it in critical reflection as well but I just couldn’t see it, because I had a good relationship with them. (Int5)

Finally, she acknowledged within her journal that “critical reflection is much harder than you think”. She appeared to align critical reflection with having an objective perspective on events, which she equated with professional practice, though she did not explore this further:

It can be difficult to stand back and take your emotions out of a situation, look at what you could have done better and why this happened in the first place. When it’s broken down like this it seems easy. I’m not sure whether I am too descriptive and miss the learning part but I will endeavour to improve this skill, as it is something that reflects professionalism, in my opinion. (J5)
Lydia claimed that through critical reflection, she had been able to identify her strengths and weaknesses, learnt more about herself, was better prepared for placement in Semester 2 and recognised the need to improve her ability to critically reflect. Through her reflection, Lydia also problematised the role “emotions and passion” had for her in her workplace learning and indicated that these were areas she would like to develop strategies to address. Reflective journal writing seemed to help Lydia distance herself from the experience (and their emotive dimensions) and enabled her to break it down within her writing, which was something she was unable to do internally. She discovered time spent writing about the event became therapeutic rather than obstructive. She explained in her interview:

    Just in my mind I involve too much of my emotions and I feel angry all the time. The critical reflection template actually just takes that away a little bit. Because I can’t break it down in my mind as much as when I’m writing through the structure, because it’s always related around what people are doing to you opposed to what you’re doing to the situation to make it worse or better. (Int5)

Following her last journal entry, Lydia searched the Internet for information and guidelines on critical reflection. She said, “you needed to discover it for yourself…you (academia) provided the lectures and the information…you relate it so much to your own experience because everybody’s different…it’s just really important to have that structure…” (Int5).

As Lydia began Semester 2, she wrote about looking forward to working with someone to develop the organisation’s website. She employed a new format for her reflective writing to work through her disappointment, frustration and anger at being offered an opportunity that aligned with her learning outcomes, only to have it collapse because of lack of resources and poor communication. She took it personally, feeling she “was not good enough” (J5). The culmination of several disappointments appeared to erode Lydia’s ability to trust somebody on their word, yet this raised questions about whether there was another side to this story. Her new reflection format prompted her to identify an experience, think more openly about her experiences and seek alternatives. She appeared to struggle to work within the boundaries of the initial sections of this framework. Instinctively, she described the event in order to find her focus. The following journal entry has been truncated to provide an appreciation of how Lydia employed the new format:

    1. Focus on an experience or event

    Started to develop a new website…

    What was outstanding or meaningful, negative or positive?
There were many positives and negatives with this experience…

2. Describe the experience

Being told you have an opportunity to do something you’re really looking forward to and to share it with a young person with great ideas was very exciting. When you are not able to really get involved in reality was very upsetting…

3. Conduct an evaluation / critical analysis

Why did the event(s) occur in that particular way?

I believe that there were two main contributing factors with this situation…communication…no resources…

What factors contributed to the outcome?

Possibly time, lack of communication…no structure to the goal…no resources

Did you achieve your goals?

The goal has still not been achieved…new site is not live.

Did your goals change?

My goal changed, as did my attitude towards the task. I have left the process to the staff member to do…changed my goals back to the social media focus…

Did other people achieve the set goals?

The new site not finished…not gone live yet.

Were there any problems with resources?

…the hardest factor, no Internet at the office…

How did your actions influence the situation?

… I did try several ways to improve this. Through email, through direct discussions, through text messaging none seemed to work.

How did other people impact on the situation?

The staff member was not available…

How did the situation affect you?

I was very upset as I felt that I couldn’t have any input at all…
Could you have reacted differently?

Maybe I could have pushed harder to have more meetings…

If you had, what might have happened?

I don’t think it would have been very positive, as they would have felt I was pressuring them.

Why did you react in that way?

Complete disappointment, frustration and I felt I was not good enough.

How might this experience affect you in the future?

Lack of trust, I will keep a hard copy of any communications…

4. Seek out your key points and the issues of significance

The data you collected in step 3 allows you to identify the important aspects of your reflection on your learning

The key points are: Communication, resources, project planning and structure…

You may find that you have formed new attitudes or values.

I can see the value of planning and communication…

Did you learn anything about yourself that was unexpected?

I learnt to not get angry, as that does not achieve anything…

What changes do you expect to make in yourself or your work?

To be less friendly meaning don’t get involved with their lives and communicate clearly…

5. Identify solutions for similar events

Develop a new perspective by conceptualising the situation differently

This has taught me to become detached and more structured about my goals and what people promise sometimes is not delivered…

Communicate the results of your reflection clearly

Not to take things personally, ensure that there is a plan… (J5)
Using this new approach to writing her journal entries channelled her thought processes, provided deeper insight into why the situation arose (albeit in a structured way), helped her develop a critical analysis and see other viewpoints, and provided a basis for a potential solution for future action. This approach made it easier for her to analyse the situation; as she explained, “once you answered the little simple questions you could see a pattern and then you could see what you could do better. Analysis was difficult without the little questions I think” (Int5). Lydia reflected back on the process of critical reflection, commenting that, “I didn’t understand what you wanted really”, as she referred to the academic requirements of journal writing. Her comment implied that she believed a particular process should be followed to satisfy assessment criteria for grading the journals.

During the semester, Lydia’s organisation went through a restructure, resulting in the creation of two positions: an operations manager and a part-time marketing position. Lydia thought this would be positive for the organisation, as it comprised mostly volunteers and casual staff. She felt this change would provide structure and help develop a more supportive culture. Sadly, Lydia was not invited to attend a staff meeting with the new employees, where changes were discussed that would impact on her role of marketing the organisation’s profile through social media. She had consistently worked hard to contribute to the organisation, yet, as she wrote, “I was not recognised as part of the team, this included not being invited to the staff meetings and not being told about promotional activities, making doing my job very difficult and unpleasant to be a part of the organisation” (J5). In addition, these changes potentially made it difficult for her to complete her learning outcomes and her project. She wrote about how she felt when she tried to discuss the situation and the responses she received from her industry supervisor and co-workers:

I felt very undervalued and thought that I should speak to everyone about this, as I was very concerned I could not achieve my co-op outcomes otherwise. I spoke to Andrew and asked why I was not invited to the meeting and his response was "God, you're funny, Lydia", and he continued to walk away; he then came back with, it was John’s fault as he sent the invitation, he then came back again and said it was Bruce’s fault, as he didn’t put me on the list to contact me!! At this stage, I could feel the frustration build as nothing was being resolved and I didn’t know how to fix it. I started to cry, which is really not my style and made me feel like a 'weak woman'. Bruce felt terrible that he left me off the list and couldn’t apologise enough and John got my contact details so it would never happen again. I apologised for crying and understood it was an accident, but couldn’t understand why Andrew thought it was funny to upset me so much after I had put in so much work and effort for him and the organisation; he sent me a text saying – do u understand? As much as I was very embarrassed about the tears, it was a really good outcome, with both
Bruce and John giving me the information I needed and I could continue with my work in the future. (J5)

From this excerpt, it was obvious Lydia perceived her unexpected tears as a weakness. Lydia then drew upon her leadership paper to make meaning from this experience, and she utilised her critical reflection skills to think about a solution to her problem:

This is where I was very surprised; my crying obviously showed that I had feelings and cared about the organisation...this is a male-dominated organisation and me crying gave them power and showed my feminine side (possibly) on reflection from leadership lectures... Leadership has had a great impact on my life and I am trying to put some of the theories into practice to achieve my learning outcomes; I let go of my ego and it really worked well, especially in a male-dominated organisation... It has really helped me to understand that it is okay to be feminine and it is okay to care about the organisation, and to communicate clearly about how you feel and what can be done to improve it in the future... People are not intentionally trying to upset you and that it is okay to feel frustration but to be less aggressive in expressing personal dissatisfaction; that way a solution can be found that works for all parties. (J5)

An underlying tension with her industry supervisor had finally been exposed; however, she was unable to resolve this conflict. Earlier, Lydia mentioned she did not understand his attitude towards her, yet did not explicitly reflect on their working relationship within her journal entries. Maybe she did not want to jeopardise completing her degree or taint her reputation within the industry. During her interview, Lydia openly stated he disliked her:

Because I was so frustrated! I was just so absolutely frustrated...the guy that was running [organisation], just didn't like me one little bit so it didn't matter what I said or what I did, he would never help out with getting it sorted, but eventually he hired a supervisor so that was really good. (Int5)

As a consequence of Lydia's response to how she had been treated, the new operations manager provided her with a new channel to operate through. He recognised her potential to help him achieve organisational goals through teamwork and fostered a positive relationship with her. Until this point, Lydia felt there was no one within the organisation she could approach for guidance and support. She wrote:

It was a relief that John wanted to set up a meeting to get things done and involve me as part of the team and help me to increase [organisation's] brand awareness through social media... He explained that he could be the person to talk to Andrew about recommendations, as he understood that Andrew did not like me talking to him directly... John was relieved that I was so proactive and structured, as it helped him to achieve other responsibilities within the organisation... he could see that my intentions were to benefit the organisation, also I feel that he felt bad about how I
was treated on his arrival (not his fault)… It was a very positive experience to know that someone was on your side helping you achieve a better outcome.

Could you have reacted differently? Yes, I could have been angry and negative, and not thought through a better outcome and blamed everyone else for not achieving what I needed. If you had, what might have happened? No one would have helped me or supported me and this would have been disastrous for my co-op. (J5)

Lydia successfully completed her placement feeling more supported, respected, valued and understood, although disappointed it happened so late in her placement. However, she left knowing she had done her best to achieve her goals and had made a significant contribution to the organisation, but she would “not want to work in this sector” (J5). She wrote:

I presented my promotional document, which delighted the operations manager; he said that this would be a good thing to do for all areas of the organisation and I agreed it would create more structure and make staff more responsible for work duties. This is the week I felt proud and my hard work and frustration started to pay off. (J5)

Lydia had the tenacity to remain focused on her learning goals and continue with an organisation that did not appear to appreciate her desire to contribute. It was through reflecting on her experiences that Lydia learnt how to cope with adversity through developing resilience, stamina and resourcefulness. Lydia felt prepared for the future as she summed up her experience:

My overall experience has taught me so much about myself, how I react and why. The learning outcomes, project and work experience has been hard and extremely frustrating at times; I can now use the skills I have learnt to turn that into a rewarding and successful experience. What you put in is what you get out! This is the case with what I have achieved and I can’t thank AUT enough for providing this amazing experience; I will never forget how these skills have come to fruition and look forward to creating more learning outcomes and achieving these in the future. (J5)

Lydia concluded her interview by stating, “[Critical reflection] was like a saviour for me…it’s a wonderful tool and I will continue to use it in my future, yeah definitely, and I’m just relieved that I learnt about that at uni; it was great” (Int5).

5.5 Phillip’s story – Schooled in a different way

At the time of commencing his cooperative placement, Phillip experienced some significant life changes. Following recent lower limb surgery, Phillip was forced to contemplate how limited mobility, for at least six months, would impact on his previously physically active lifestyle.
Through his initial journal entries, I was introduced to Phillip’s concerns about how his new circumstances would impact, not only his university studies, but also life more broadly. Phillip wrote, “It places me in a position of uncertainty which I have not been in before and figuring out where to go from here has been on my mind” (J6). Rather than “hanging up the boots completely” (J6), Phillip thought he could draw on, and develop, his more latent talents. He explained in his first journal entry, “I do aim to grow and improve in other areas of my life that have possibly been neglected in the past. I see this as an opportunity to improve my non-physical skills (leadership, mentorship, reading/writing, studies, music and more)” (J6). Although he felt restricted in what he was capable of doing physically, Phillip remained positive about contributing in other ways, as he stated in his journal:

This will cause me to have different responsibilities and roles in many areas of my life, especially with coaching and playing sports. I feel I still have a lot to contribute despite losing a lot of mobility and that is positive. It may not be ideal, but I aim to make the most of this next six months with what I have. (J6)

To fulfil his double major requirements for health and physical education and coaching, Phillip was compelled to seek a placement within a school. He recognised this as an opportunity to explore his interest in primary school teaching as a potential future career, so through a personal contact, Phillip secured his placement with a primary school near his family home. This large (700 children) low-decile (Government ranking system used for school funding purposes) publicly funded co-educational primary school catered for children from Years 1 to 6 (five- to-ten-year-olds) from a range of ethnicities, including Asian, Pacifica, South African, Māori and NZ European (descending order of prevalence). Interestingly, as a young European male on placement in a predominantly female working environment with a rich ethnic blend of young children, Phillip did not critically reflect on his experience of the school’s cultural diversity or make-up in a meaningful way. This raised questions about what Phillip considered ‘normal’ and I wondered whether because he lived locally, he did not see these characteristics as unusual or interesting.

Phillip’s placement began during the summer months, so initially he was co-opted to assist at the pool, where an organisation external to the school delivered a government-funded swimming programme. Swimming was not an area of interest for Phillip; however, he considered there were advantages to being at the pool. As teachers and children from across the school came for tuition, he began forming relationships with them through engaging in dialogue, an experience that he reflected upon at the time as inherently positive. Phillip wrote:
My job was to assist with the programme delivery as well as use that platform to build relationships with the teachers and children coming through the pool area. I do not have a large background in swimming so at times I struggled staying interested in the work. However, being able to meet so many students and teachers in that short amount of time was very beneficial for the start of my placement. I am aiming to do work across a number of different year groups so I relished the opportunity to meet the teachers and talk about future plans for the year. Already I have received a considerable amount of interest from teachers who are hoping to work with me in PE [physical education] and sports activities and this is an encouraging sign. (J6)

Early in his placement, the physiotherapist from a centre for disabled students, based on the school site, approached Phillip for his assistance with a regional para-sports day to be held at the school. After a short briefing on his role during the event, she introduced him to the workings of the centre. This sparked an immediate interest in an area of education he had not encountered before. He wrote, “This has been the most interesting aspect of my placement so far. Whilst there, I was able to get instant practical experience working with students with disabilities” (J6). As a consequence of his observations and interactions at the centre, he decided to learn more about this area through incorporating it within his learning contract, although he did not examine the reasons for this in his writing. He wrote:

Because of this experience, I have become far more interested in the [centre] and the work that it does. This has been reflected in the learning outcomes of my contract, where I have put a goal of gaining experience in the centre and learning more about the relationship between sports, physical activity and children with disabilities. I am looking forward to seeing where this interest will take me this year. (J6)

In reading Phillip’s entry, I was drawn to the silence around the reasons that underpinned his apparent interest in this educational setting. I wondered if Phillip’s present physical condition elicited a higher degree of empathy for these children than might be the case if he was not experiencing limited mobility. Further, I questioned the role of the physiotherapist in inspiring this interest. That said, Phillip’s next few reflective journal entries continued to provide examples of this largely descriptive, rather than analytic, approach to critical reflection. For example, his next journal entry described his perceptions of the para-sport day. Phillip seemed genuinely intrigued by the inclusive, supportive culture and described that each of the 200 competing students from around the city were “buddied up” with a student from his school and another local intermediate for assistance throughout the day. He described within his journal how he was inspired by what he understood of the school’s role of fostering children’s social responsibility:
This initiative is something I have instantly warmed to and seeing the Year 6 and intermediate students support, encourage, assist and look after the disabled students around the school is something I have not experienced at such a level before. It is certainly proving to be beneficial for both the disabled students and every other student involved, who seem to have responded very well to the extra responsibility placed on them. It is certainly a strength of the school and the work they do for their disabled students is quite inspiring. (J6)

During the day, Phillip had an opportunity to meet and speak with the centre manager. She encouraged him to pursue his new interest through offering to help him achieve his goals and by sharing her views on aspects of the lives of disabled children. Phillip wrote about his excitement this broadened perspective evoked:

She learned about my goals for the year and is confident she can help with my learning. She is certainly interested in sharing with me about the relationship between physical activity, sports and a disabled student’s life. From what I gathered, she is sure the positive effects are highly understated. It is not purely a physical thing; there are many social and mental/emotional aspects that have been ignored to a degree. My interest in going more in depth in this area is much higher now than it was even a week ago. It excites me because I have no idea where this experience is going to put me in the future. I am just trying to stay open to new ideas and interests. (J6)

At the conclusion of this journal entry, Phillip requested guidance from his academic supervisor: “Am I being ‘critical’ enough?” and “Are there any areas that my reflections are lacking in?” His supervisor responded with a string of questions for Phillip to consider, but did not provide him with examples to illustrate how critical reflection might appear or tools to help him develop a more critical approach to his journal writing, as evidenced below:

My questions for critical reflection are, why? What benefits do they have and what messages are being sent because of the nature of the project? What are the children learning? What are disabled children learning? What about you? What are these social/ and mental/emotional benefits you suggest and why are they benefits? What steps did you make to get ball rolling and why did you chose that route? So think why is this working/not working?... What messages are being sent to me/students/ community? (J6)

During his interview, Phillip made the following comment about journal writing: “You pick it up along the way. I know there was a document that we were given but I didn’t really look at it” (Int6). As was evident from his journal entries, Phillip did not attempt to use a framework to structure his writing, and it appeared feedback he received from his supervisor was not fully understood, was ignored or was not structured in a way that was meaningful to him. Despite posing questions to his academic supervisor about the quality of his critical reflections to date,
Phillip maintained he was confident about how to critically reflect, as he stated, “I think it’s just how I normally operate... My upbringing, I guess. Yeah, the people that I spend time with. It's just always been a part of the way I operate” (Int6). When Phillip reflected on his academic supervisor’s feedback on his journal entries, he said, “I got a few comments but they were very simplistic... I didn’t feel like we had much conversation going on in terms of my journal... I didn’t press too much just because I couldn’t be bothered, but it would have probably been good to” (Int6). Phillip implied that further discussion to develop critical reflection might have extended him beyond his comfort zone of descriptive reflective writing towards needing to think more deeply about his experiences, which required more time and effort. However, after having written a reflection, he said:

I think the way I’m going to look at it the next time it happens will change and I think that really helps because if I hadn’t written anything down, I may have had passing thoughts or something like that but actually giving the situation time to really think about and you see it down on the computer screen and you’re like that’s really how I felt, the next time you go into that situation you’re reminded of all those things, which I think really helps. But it doesn’t really hit you until you’re hit with that situation again. (Int6)

The act of writing a reflection focused Phillip’s attention on how he felt and what he thought at the time, so in a similar future experience he might revisit these feelings again and possibly adjust his actions. However, primary motivators for Phillip to write were knowing his academic supervisor would regularly read his journal and that it would be assessed. At the same time, these factors appeared to delimit and sanction what Phillip chose to write about. He explained:

It holds you accountable to what you’ve actually been thinking...it’s really easy to just have a thought and say well that’s how I thought but actually seeing it on paper and knowing that someone else is going to be reading that helped me to keep accountable to what I was writing. I certainly did more of it and I did a better job of keeping it professional and consistent, but only really because it was required of me. And because someone else was going to be reading it. (Int6)

During the inter-zone school swimming competition, Phillip became disheartened, as his physical state began to interfere with his ability to perform. He wrote, “It is frustrating because I am there as someone who is meant to be capable of doing these sporting activities, but for now my body simply won’t allow it” (J6). From Phillip’s writing, it appeared that even though he felt physically exhausted, he would persevere with writing his reflections to reap the benefits of documenting his experiences for future assessments:

This whole experience has left me quite worn down and I am struggling to find the energy to do the reflecting and note taking at the end of the day. I will have to find a
way to get that stuff done because it will help me a lot down the track when completing some of my assignments. (J6)

A few weeks into placement, Phillip questioned himself within his journal without explaining what prompted these questions and why he would ask them of himself. It is possible he was exploring the primary school environment to visualise himself as a teacher. He wrote, “the biggest questions I have for myself are: When I become a teacher, what will my class look like? What pedagogy methods will I use and why? How will my class differ from others? How much am I willing to experiment?” (J6). In spite of his contemplations, Phillip did not engage with answering these questions within his journal.

Phillip’s reflection identified his lack of motivation in the workplace when he perceived there was no direct personal benefit. Similarly, Phillip had acknowledged he felt this way about assisting with the swimming programme; nevertheless, he understood he was expected to help wherever possible. He wrote this “selfish way of thinking” derived from “the main thought I am having is; what can I learn/get out of this experience?” (J6). His reflection considered the consequences of his behaviour and approaches to improve his attitude:

When I think like that, it is very easy for me to lose motivation because often I can’t find anything that I am getting out of some of the tasks I do. In situations like that I should ask myself “how can what I am doing benefit others?” because I am sure I will find some more positive answers out of that question. If what I am doing is benefiting others, then I will need to be content with that and give it my full attention and effort. (J6)

His conclusion stated, “It is easy for me to do the things I enjoy; it is difficult to do the other things, so showing discipline and going hard for the things I don’t really find interesting will help build character. I know that will set me up well for the future” (J6). Phillip did not elaborate on this statement. It is possible he was reflecting on what he considered the mundane aspects of his workplace activities, yet he did not explore this or consider alternative approaches to particular activities.

Phillip’s progress report brought to the forefront three interesting points related to his participation within this workplace. Firstly, learning outcome one focused on examining specific teaching practices that required Phillip to engage in a level of observation he may not have exercised without this goal. Although he was critical of his observations, he offered no justification. He wrote:

This outcome has forced me to look at other teachers’ physical education sessions more critically and I have had to be far more observant. So far, I have been able to
view and assist with many PE sessions run by regular teachers and overall I know there is a lot of room for improvement. (J6)

Another learning outcome focused on building workplace relationships. This encouraged him to use a proactive approach to gaining acceptance in the workplace community. He did not write in his journal about specific interactions he had with the teachers, but offered a global response that detailed his perceptions about how he was progressing in terms of this goal. He wrote:

Because of this goal, I have made far more of an effort to get to know the staff I am working with. In the staffroom or around school, I have stopped to talk with teachers and other staff and learned about them and their story at the school. I think this has contributed to a more fruitful experience overall, and also by doing this, I feel like the teachers have seen me as a part of their team, which is encouraging. (J6)

Finally, his learning outcome focused on improving critical reflection skills provided him with the motivation to ‘reflect on action’ and ‘reflect for action’. Phillip considered that this practice enabled him to develop new approaches to performing his workplace activities and revealed areas for ongoing improvement. He valued these adjustments enough to suggest he should engage in the routine practice of critical reflection. He wrote:

I have made an effort to use my reflections not just as a chance to think back, but to think forward and develop new ways of dealing with tasks and difficulties in my co-op experience. This has meant a lot for me because it has kept me from going stale or running out of enthusiasm, due to the fact that my reflections have given me a lot of new things to work on…but I want to get to state where I am doing it more consistently. Planning ahead for times to reflect has to become a part of routine moving forward. (J6)

As an example of the way Phillip used his reflections ‘for action’, he described a strategy he had implemented to assist with completing timely reflections. He wrote, “A strategy I came up with to help with this issue was to write down three key points/issues/thoughts at the end of each co-op day” (J6). This approach clearly illustrated the nature of his thoughts, for example: “Netball’s programme for Year 3s and 4s is in need of help; 75 per cent of the time kids were standing still waiting for a ball. Again, is it my place to say these things to the coaches who are paid to do this? How can I best help?” (J6). He used questions within his notes to assist his understanding of the situation and prompt consideration of a solution. It was interesting to observe that, despite identifying these areas, these questions were rarely addressed within the extension of his reflection (see below), although he discovered an opportunity to use his industry project to work through a plausible a solution to the issue. He wrote:
There is only one more week till the programme is completed and in my opinion the students I’ve seen have not learned all that much. Once the programme is finished, it would be a good time to introduce some game-based activities to see how differently the students respond and to see if they have more fun and learn more. I am confident that my project idea (a training and resource with teachers) is still a very good thing to do. The netball programme the kids just went through was very coach orientated, drill based, and a lot of time was spent standing still waiting for something to happen; when they did run they weren’t using balls. It seemed dry and boring. So, developing more games for teachers to use has taken on more importance to me and I will need to put more effort into completing my project to get this underway. (J6)

Within this journal entry, Phillip attempted to identify his boundaries and responsibilities within the workplace. As a newcomer to the school, Phillip had to negotiate his identity and sense of belonging within the school community, and therefore seemed unsure about using his initiative. He appeared to be cautious, which may have resulted in his tendency to work within the confines of his learning contract, and this perhaps signifies another silence within his reflective journal. Phillip’s new journal writing strategy ceased as he reverted to cataloguing experiences each week.

As a major assessment approached, Phillip found himself conflicted with having to prioritise university work (required to complete his degree) over workplace activities he felt obligated to accomplish. He utilised his reflection to justify prioritising the assessment under the guise that the project would ultimately benefit the school. Although he appeared to be aware that his time management might be causing the problem, he did little to explore this. He wrote:

It would be disappointing to think this may be a time where I have to sacrifice certain aspects of my experience to ensure requirements are met in terms of the co-op assignment expectations. I will need to manage these tasks better so that I do not let some parts of my experience lack in attention or effort. (J6)

Throughout his placement, Phillip’s learning was not limited to personal organisational dimensions, such as time management. Partway through the semester, Phillip was approached to coach a mixed team at the zone football competitions. Given his coaching background, Phillip was made responsible for the recently formed “B team”, and with relatively little preparation, they played eight games with more success than was expected. Reflecting on his coaching experience brought to Phillip’s attention a number of factors, including self-awareness, fair treatment of players and future implications. He explained:

The thing I struggled the most with during the day was substituting players. Everyone wanted to be on all the time and I did my best to rotate players fairly. I knew the day was about the kids getting a chance to have some fun and play some
soccer, so I made sure everyone got a lot of time on the field. However, choosing when to play particular kids was quite tough for me. As a competitive person, I wanted the team to play well and with certain combinations we could not do that. I think this is one reason why in the long run I want to coach adults, where I feel there would be more understanding between the players over game time; with young kids who are begging to get on the field all day I struggle to stay mentally focused... The day was a success overall and I was happy to take care of the team, but there were certainly some aspects of the day (organising kids to get to the right place, the substitutions) that reminded me that I do not want to coach that age group much more in the future. (J6)

Phillip’s critical reflection to date was mostly descriptive accounts of his experiences. Cooperative Education 2 provided Phillip with an opportunity to develop a new learning contract. Through writing his journal, he reflected on his earlier learning outcomes to assist with developing new ones. Within the review, Phillip highlighted the role critical reflection played with linking his experiences with his goals, yet he did not explain why this was important:

But I am also looking to create some more decisive personal learning outcomes. In Co-op 1, I think the personal outcomes I put down lacked an element of measurability. I hope to resolve this issue in Co-op 2. One of the ways I hope to resolve this is through my critical reflection. In Co-op 1, I reflected on all that was happening at my placement, but I feel I failed to spend much time linking my experiences to the original learning outcomes (not including the progress report). I will spend more time in my Co-op 2 reflections talking about my experience in relation to the goals. (J6)

As Semester 2 began, it was the implementation of his industry project that occupied much of Phillip’s attention. He noted in his journal that, despite his efforts to be prepared for his first project theory session, intended to guide teachers’ use of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU – a coaching approach that enhances the development of skills and techniques necessary for competitive sport) in their classrooms, he was disappointed by the low teacher attendance. A variety of reasons were given for non-attendance, so Phillip revised his advertising strategy. Phillip perceived that the session was valuable for those who were able to attend and was genuinely pleased (and perhaps relieved) to have received some positive feedback:

Thankfully the teachers that were there found the session to be very informative and helpful. We had a relaxed feel where open discussion was welcomed and I certainly felt that it was important to have this session. The teachers there enjoyed themselves and have told me that the information was very interesting and will be useful; they are also looking forward to the practical sessions; because of that, they
Phillip's reflection on his project's first practical session revealed that his new advertising strategy was successful, and based on the level of teacher participation and engaged discussion, it was likely to improve further. Phillip found the teachers were very good to work with; however, he noticed (as he expected) the older teachers were not well represented and he wondered how he might improve their attendance. Although Phillip identified this phenomenon, he did not explore their non-attendance to find ways to attract them to the sessions:

I am hoping that attendance will rise again after a positive training session with the teachers. At the moment it seems like the one group not getting on board is the older staff members, which I partly expected. I am not sure at the moment what more I can do to encourage the older teachers to come and check out what we are doing. I think some more communication with that specific group would be beneficial. (J6)

During Phillip's project practical sessions, he offered to assist teachers in their classrooms with applying the new strategy. Phillip's journal entry described how he felt when a teacher accepted his offer to assist in her classroom, how the strategy was utilised with the children and how they discussed the possibility of another session. Despite introducing a new activity to this classroom and his desire to become a teacher, it was interesting to note that Phillip's reflection barely explored his perception of changes to the classroom dynamics during this session:

I was able to assist a Year 6 teacher with some TGfU games that were taken out of the PE resource. This was a really positive experience and the kids seemed to really enjoy the games. We were responsible for half of the class each and focused (in terms of coaching) on the use of questioning and discussion with athletes. It was great to see a teacher trying the new TGfU concept in her class and we have discussed the possibility of more of these types of sessions. (J6)

Despite feeling as though he was making significant progress on his placement, Phillip’s home life became unsettled, with his brother and young family returning from overseas. In his journal, Phillip pondered the challenges of managing his commitments with home, part-time work and university. Aware of the end-of-semester pressures, Phillip used his journal to detail strategies to help him achieve his goals:

It has made it hard for me to fully focus on the work I have in front of me, but fortunately, I have completed the majority of my tasks that I had set for this time period. Moving into the more busy part of the semester, though, has meant I have
had to consider finding a new place to do my assignment work. Usually I would work from home, but with the increase in activity there, I think it would be wise for me to find a new place to get things done. This seems to be the only issue I have really had to wrestle with recently, which makes me wonder if I have forgotten something major. Time will tell. (J6)

At the end of the third school term, Phillip’s journal entry focused on his perceptions that there had been a change to the energy levels within the classrooms at school. Phillip detected lower energy levels than usual, prompting him to offer further support to the teachers. Phillip’s journal entry indicated how positive he felt when the teachers accepted his contributions. His positive feelings may have precipitated this journal entry, yet there was much left unexplored in this experience, such as signs of his acceptance within the workplace, the value of his contribution and the reality of the teachers’ motives:

I was very happy with how the end of the term went. I was able to contribute a lot to the class I work in with writing activities and the teacher happily used my ideas and appreciated the initiative. For me this was a really positive way to end the term, it was great to still be able to contribute and give fresh ideas when a lot of the staff and students were exhausted from a long term. (J6)

It was the school holidays for the next two weeks and Phillip would not be attending school during this time. It was interesting to observe Phillip returning to his journal to explore how he might prioritise his time during the break. Phillip contemplated how he would utilise this time effectively, especially knowing the next term would be academically intense, and identified this as an area of focus in his writing given his past behaviour regarding time management and self-discipline. He wrote:

The next two weeks will be dedicated to getting most of my project completed. I know that when I go back to school for term four I will not have the time to do the work needed, so the next two weeks have to be taken very seriously. I am not good at getting work done in advance, but I will need to be disciplined and change my ways for this project to be done and done well… I am hoping to finish a section per two days during the holidays so that the work does not pile up. (J6)

Again during the school break Phillip was drawn to his journal. He wrote, “It has been a difficult time to adjust to because of the temptation of free time. However, I am gaining momentum and starting to get a lot of the work done” (J6). His journal entry explored strategies for writing his report, and he decided to approach his report one section at a time. This approach provided Phillip with the impetus to begin writing; however, he identified his inability to remain focused, thereby giving himself permission to be flexible and move his writing from place to place. He described his thinking:
I have certainly gotten through a lot of work so far; however, when I started I decided that going section by section would not work for me as I found myself getting too bored being stuck on one section at a time. I have decided to chip away at different parts of the assignment to keep my mind fresh and interested. This has been good for me. My mind often is bouncing from one idea to the next, so allowing myself the freedom to work on whatever my mind is focusing on at the time is healthy for me; I feel it has helped get the most out of my time. (J6)

When the university academic year concluded, Phillip had completed his placement hours at the school. Interestingly, he had enjoyed his placement so much he agreed to maintain his regular days of attendance until the school year finished. The focus of Phillip's last journal entry described how he felt about his ability to complete his final cooperative assessments, with an emphasis on his final written report. Overall, Phillip frequently wrote about his academic performance, yet he seldom wrote about his classroom performance given he was a prospective teacher. He supported this approach with the following statement:

Definitely when I was implementing my project...during that whole process, cause mine was done over a number of weeks, I needed to be reflecting on what I was doing... I ran sessions with the teachers...it was really important that I improved those sessions...especially with thinking about getting attendance to those sessions, if I hadn't reflected on why certain things didn't happen, I might not have any teachers showing up, so I think it was really important for me during that process to do it even more so. (Int6)

From earlier sections of Phillip's journal entries, it appeared there was little advancement in his reflective writing throughout his placement. Given the richness of Phillip's learning environment, his writing suggests that he was not aware of this. Perhaps Phillip's engagement with critical reflection can be clarified by how he understood it and how to put it into practice, as he explained in his interview:

Not just writing down what had happened but really thinking why it happened. And then looking forward and thinking how can I improve on those things, which is usually how I wrote it...

I think something that I've always struggled with is university writing, because I really enjoy writing but often it's detailed and emotional, whereas with this I was required to be more academic and do everything properly the way that it is kind of asked of you in the paper outlines and that. And the biggest thing that I struggled with was making sure I was being academic, being professional in a way that I was reflecting as opposed to just talking how I would normally talk and view things. That was probably my biggest struggle. I'd often write things and go there's a bit too much emotion in there so try and clean it up a bit. (Int6)
5.6 Darren’s story – A coaching ‘drill’

Darren’s initial journal entries detailed his great passion for sports coaching. He had experience coaching school football teams, and his decision to enrol in a coaching major within the BSR degree was largely driven by a desire to improve his own coaching practice. During a prerequisite paper in the previous semester, Darren had completed his ‘Industry Experience and Research’ (IER) 30-hour placement with a coaching organisation. Following this successful experience and high academic grades achieved in a coaching paper, he was presented with the opportunity to continue with his cooperative education placement with this organisation. This was unexpected and certainly appeared to surprise him a little, as he had doubts about his own abilities. During a discussion about being approached with a placement offer, he said, “I was really, really, really lucky I got it, the only reason...was because I got an A on a random paper...and I wasn’t an A student then, but I just said okay” (Int7). His awareness that he was granted this opportunity because of good grades made him strive harder, as he said, “Being called an A student?...a huge improvement in my academic work after that experience because I realised how good this opportunity was and I learnt how to pull finger and really get down to business” (Int7). Interestingly, he felt he was not as capable as his coaching results suggested; however, he wanted to meet these expectations as he had made a commitment and did not want to be a disappointment. He commented, “Being treated like an A student...when really I was a B+ at most, it caused me to work harder” (Int7). Darren felt supported by the university; he said, “[I was] surrounded by the most encouraging people and people that really helped me out...made me want to help them and made me feel much more confident... I felt just like an elite student, I felt like a really good student” (Int7). Such positive affirmations motivated him to work harder to improve his overall performance.

With several branches across the region, his organisation offered coaches, from grassroots (schools) to elite (national), development programmes, mentorship, resources and networking opportunities. At the conclusion of his placement, Darren thought the coaching profession continually engaged in critical reflection for learning and to improve practice, as was highlighted within his industry project: “I was talking about what makes a good coach and everyone talked about they have to be a learner, they have to be able to keep improving and adapting, so coaching you can’t not be a learner” (Int7). This practice was reinforced by numerous conversations with his industry supervisor in which they would reflect together on Darren’s experiences, providing him with opportunities to develop and practice reflection. As he explained, his supervisor:
sat me down a lot and we had these chats so we talked about what happened, why did that happen and then what are you going to do different next time? So that’s the spine of critical reflection. And I love that and I found that really easy to understand; it wasn’t a challenge for me to understand what critical reflection was about. And it was easy and I saw the benefit of it, but I think the challenge was actually applying it, so it was all very good to say, I spoke to this person and didn’t realise it was a formal situation; in future I will make sure that I get to know the person first, maybe ask someone else what they’re like and then do that. But actually doing that in the future, there wasn’t anything to help me do that... But the thought process was there for sure. So it may subtly affect me the next time I’m in that kind of situation, but it’s not a definite thing. (Int7)

Darren’s placement began with a coach ‘training day’, when he provided assistance wherever possible. His journal entry explained how this event immediately triggered a realisation that coach education was where he envisaged his future; however, he identified that he would need to first become a coach mentor. This experience highlighted for Darren a career prospect, yet also foregrounded potential difficulties with providing constructive feedback to coaches, especially in areas of his own practice where he was inconsistent. He wrote:

This is exactly the kind of work I want to be involved in, as I would love to pursue a career in this area. I enjoy conversing with other coaches and giving them feedback to try and improve their coaching. However, when we gave feedback to a coach as an activity I found it difficult to critique their coaching, as I felt hypercritical pointing out things that I myself do as a coach. Upon reflection, I realised that even though it could be defined as hypercritical to point out negatives in others that I myself am guilty of, that feedback, if delivered appropriately, could help that coach regardless. In future, I think that it will be helpful to welcome feedback from others when I coach so that I can place myself in the same boat as those that I give feedback to. (J7)

Darren’s appreciation of the support he received from his supervisor was evident when he wrote about a planning meeting for a conference his organisation was hosting. Darren described his confusion due to his limited understanding of the conference and its preparation. He described his relief as his industry supervisor supported him during the meeting and followed up by giving him a task to expand his knowledge. Darren noted that this uncomfortable experience reminded him of the value of asking questions for clarification; however, he did not use this opportunity to examine the workplace culture:

At this stage of the game, I really had no idea what was happening, as I had only just read a little brochure about the conference so I was a tad lost in the meeting... Raymond, I think, realised this and helped me by involving me in the meeting and reassuring me that it was okay that I was absolutely clueless about what was happening; I was relieved that Raymond had my back. After the (slightly confusing) meeting... Raymond got me to help him with the bios of all the speakers who were
coming to the conference. This was a great task because it allowed me to get my head around what the conference was all about and it acquainted me with all of the speakers. Today I relearnt the importance of asking questions when I’m lost; thankfully today Raymond saw that I was lost without me needing to say anything, but in future if I am lost I will ask someone who knows instead of staying in the dark. (J7)

Darren’s journal entries began to explore his relationship with his supervisor and what might be expected of him. He described how he was allocated the task of developing the programme guide for this conference. Darren focused on the value he placed on being made responsible for his actions with the understanding that he could seek advice when required. His reflection suggested that his supervisor made him feel supported as a trusted team member. Interestingly, he devoted latter sections of his writing to developing technical competency rather than exploring the workplace culture. He wrote:

This task required me to edit work and input it into a booklet. I enjoyed this task because I felt like I had ownership over the task without Raymond looking over my shoulder. I am quickly learning that Raymond prefers to give me a task with the freedom to make my own decisions; obviously, he is still around if I need help but I don’t have to check all of my decisions with him. This approach will definitely help me with two of my personal learning outcomes – initiative and confidence in my decisions. Overall, I felt like I did a good job on this task as I completed it by the deadline and the work was of a good standard. However, I felt as if I spent too much time on little details that were probably going to be changed anyway. In future, I will try to focus simply on the task at hand and worry about making it look pretty later. (J7)

On the day of the conference, Darren arrived early to assist with delegate registration. In his journal, Darren wrote that his involvement in the creation of the programme gave him the confidence to give advice to delegates about their attendance options. Darren also used his journal to explain how the competitive team culture, often perpetuated through friendly banter and in-house teasing, motivated him to consolidate his role as a member of the team and inspired him to look for opportunities to demonstrate initiative. He explained:

because I had been working on the programme guide I was able to talk to people about the different workshop choices and help them decide what they wanted to do. There was another student from…another sector…some of the staff were joking about how we were in competition with each other; I don’t think they were serious but to be honest it did make me look for more jobs to do. The conference was a great place to practise initiative; I have learnt that sometimes you just need to take charge and make decisions so that things run smoothly. Not to say that I made any huge decisions, but I did find myself announcing to groups of people where they needed to be next and setting up rooms without being asked... Like I said, nothing too major, but it was really beneficial for me. (J7)
Darren reflected in his journal that the day had culminated in a very positive experience – he had confidently participated in a social conversation with the keynote speaker. He described how during this conversation it became apparent that both Darren and the keynote speaker shared a mutual interest in coaching and he gained some useful tips for his own coaching practice:

I ended the day with a couple of beers with the keynote speaker…which was awesome. He told me about all the people he had met and what his job involves day to day. He also helped me out with some problems I have been having with my football team and gave me some great advice on coaching different ethnicities together. Those couple of beers showed me the benefit of introducing myself to experienced coaches in the field, as it gave me some great knowledge and a very useful contact for the future. (J7)

Darren described how he collected handwritten evaluation forms from the delegates during the conference, and then spent the next day collating these responses into a spreadsheet. As he worked through this task, he commented, “[I] was not really enthused…because it was really repetitive and I didn’t see much value in the answers given” (J7). A co-worker introduced him to the online SurveyMonkey tool, which made his job easier; however, his comments on the quality of the responses suggested they were of little value to the organisation for future conference planning. Darren used his journal to detail strategies for managing conference evaluations in the future:

Most of the comments were really generic like “it was good” or “this was bad” without any information on why it was good or bad. In future, I think comment cards should be optional so that people who have something useful to say can give the feedback without anyone having to sift through a bunch of generic answers to find one useful piece of feedback. (J7)

In addition, Darren was asked to obtain conference feedback from the volunteers and staff members for a report. Within his journal, Darren compared collecting feedback from this group to his earlier attempts with the coach delegates. Darren indicated that the second group provided more substantive comments that could help improve the event, which seemed to improve his engagement in the task. Again, Darren wrote about an autonomous workplace culture that he enjoyed, yet he perceived that sometimes he was given meaningless activities to keep him occupied rather than allowing for a significant workplace contribution. He explained:

This was a better task than gathering coach feedback because the volunteers actually wrote paragraphs filled with useful feedback for the future. I enjoyed this task because I was given full control, which helps my initiative learning outcome.
hope that all of the work I have been doing with feedback is not in vain, and will actually be used for future use. I feel that some of the tasks I am given are simply just so I can get some experience rather than actually contributing to the work of the organisation. I can still see the benefit in such tasks but I hope that I won't be doing potentially pointless tasks for the rest of co-op. (J7)

Darren’s reflections at this time remain focused on his ability to contribute meaningfully to the workplace. During his IER placement, Darren had begun to compile a community ‘coaching guide’, which he now had the opportunity to complete. Darren explained he relished having the responsibility of a purposeful activity, particularly those that moved him towards fulfilling his learning goals and advancing his workplace skills. He wrote:

This has included going through the guide and critically analysing the content and layout. Additionally, it involves conversing with the design company. Again, this is a task that Raymond has given me complete control, leaving me to my own devices, which is really beneficial for my learning outcome. Currently, I am happy with the document and now I just need to meet with… and finalise any lingering issues. This task is definitely not pointless, as I mentioned earlier; I am happy that this work will be really useful…and will reach a large number of people. This task has taught me that clear communication is crucial when developing documents between two parties. (J7)

Darren’s journal entries focused predominantly on his work activities and workplace environment. He utilised a simple framework he had been introduced to during workshops to structure his entries. During his interview, Darren described the framework as “What happened, how did you feel, what would you do next time? So easy and then you just write that and then if you’re a good writer you can make it look like an essay, but really it’s just through bullet points” (Int7). Darren acknowledged he thought having a framework was a useful starting point. He continued to explain: “It’s easier to do if you really see the benefit and if you want to keep doing it” (Int7). He also believed critical reflection is “designed to improve your practice…because throughout the year we’re practising it so much and we had to do it” (Int7). In addition, Darren found reflective conversations with his industry supervisor assisted with his journal writing; he said, “I was just rewriting what I already thought about and said with [industry supervisor]” (Int7). At times, his academic supervisor attempted to guide him with comments in his journal:

You describe what happened and you also describe how it makes you feel – good. You need to critically reflect more – ask more questions of your entries – why did I feel that way? What could I do better? You do it to a certain extent but not enough. (J7)
Darren explained the value of fostering a good relationship with his academic supervisor, who encouraged him to write honestly and provided him with guidance on the journal assessment requirements:

I felt comfortable with [academic supervisor] who was reading it and so I felt just comfortable writing about my feelings and just writing very openly so that helped...so I got good at just being really honest and I worked out that's what the marker wanted. They wanted absolute honesty and just saying that's what I do. I just go through, pick an instance and then it just started flowing. (Int7)

Although Darren spoke of a structured approach to his reflective writing, he also indicated that he was fully aware of the liberty to experiment with his writing style. Nevertheless, Darren seemed to disregard this creative offer to fulfil the expectations of his academic supervisor. It is plausible that his creativity was stymied by these demands. In addition, Darren explained that he found it difficult to reflect on something unless it was purposeful:

I had the freedom to write; however, I wanted and I understood what [academic supervisor] was looking for...he was just looking for that thought process. He told me so many times...if I can see that thought process, if you manage to show me that you do that. So that was really easy. Like I said before, the hard part was reflecting on a day where I just went and did data entry into a database. I don't know, it's not really something I want to improve; it didn't really cross my mind, so I got really into critical reflection, but you can start critically reflecting everything...it is hard to reflect on the stuff that just really felt like it didn't even matter. (Int7)

At the completion of writing a journal entry, Darren alleged he had a better understanding of the situation and himself. Darren suggested his improved understanding occurred through what appears to be a therapeutic dimension to his writing, where he seemed to gain a greater sense of control over his emotions. He explained:

I felt better. I felt like it was more controlled. If it didn't go well now, I felt a bit better about it, and instead of just blind annoyance and anger at this situation if it didn't go well...it was more it was more controlled. So okay, this is what happened. It kind of just relaxes me a bit... I understood why that happened and I'm comfortable with that. (Int7)

Darren was invited to attend another meeting; this time it was between a number of sporting organisations to discuss coaching alignment and future plans. His supervisor gave him the task of note taking during the meeting in order to prepare a summary to present to his co-workers. Interestingly, when the presentation did not occur, Darren wrote about his feelings of disappointment and his perception of being given a meaningless task (a repeated
occurrence), yet he failed to explore beyond himself for a greater understanding of the circumstances. He wrote:

I was told that I would give an overview of my observations to some of the staff...after the meeting. However, I was not asked to do so and all of the notes I took were of no use. I felt that I had been given a ‘special job’ just to keep me occupied during the meeting; I was like a little kid who had been given a ball to play with while the grown-ups had their meeting. This being said, taking notes did make me focus on what was being said, which was beneficial, as I saw how meetings work between two organisations and I learned a lot about netball. Much of the meeting was focused on coach development, so it was good to see what the plans are for netball coaching. I was disappointed that my job wasn’t any use to anyone, but that is not to say the meeting was a waste of time. (J7)

Darren’s primary workplace activity was to complete the community ‘coaching guide’, and as it was in the final stages of development, a meeting with a design company was required. After several phone calls and emails of drafts, Darren felt everything was ready for this meeting. At the last minute, his industry supervisor was unable to attend the meeting, leaving Darren to manage it alone. This meeting provided an interesting learning experience for Darren to reflect upon in his journal, as he speculated how the meeting might have been if his supervisor had been present. Although his meeting was successful, he reviewed his performance to improve future practice:

It was a good experience to meet with an external organisation, to discuss something I had been responsible for, by myself. Otherwise, I would have likely been Raymond’s sidekick not really doing anything. I have learned from this experience that when dealing with external organisations, information must be clear and to the point, so to avoid becoming a nuisance. I felt that the meeting went well, as we both have a clear plan of what is happening next; however, upon reflection I may have been too serious and worried about the task at hand. The meeting could have been more enjoyable for both parties if I relaxed a bit more and wasn’t just about business. In future, I will try to read the situation a bit better so that I know whether the meeting is purely business or if I have the freedom to relax, let my guard down and connect with the other party, as this will help me build beneficial relationships for the future. (J7)

Darren put considerable time and effort into the completion of the coaching guide to ensure that it was to a high standard and well presented. Within his journal, Darren wrote about feeling excited and being pleased with himself for having completed the guide. He described how accomplishing this task had extended him in ways he had not expected:

The guide is very close to completion and this excites me because I have had a lot of input into the guide. This workday was spent mostly on fixing any lingering issues, photos being the main one. I was very pleased with this day's work, as I
was in the office by myself for much of the day and I got lots of productive work done. I even worked through my lunchbreak, which was very surprising to me at the end of the day. (J7)

The final stages of completing the guide were made to look easy by an expert and the document was ready for trialling and feedback. While Darren’s reflections indicated he was content with the end product, it also demonstrated a degree of apprehension that it was positively received:

I was amazed at how easy...made editing look on his Mac. Overall, I was very happy with the changes made to the guide and I feel that it’s ready to be printed and distributed out into the community. However, before we can do that, we are going to give the guide to one club as a piloting test. Hopefully, feedback is positive!! (J7)

Much of Darren’s time was devoted to completing the coaching guide, which raised concerns that he had neglected his other learning outcomes. He wrote, “There are plans in place for all three of my professional learning outcomes but they are all dependent on other people. Here, I need to take charge so that I am in control of my outcomes” (J7). Consequently, Darren began to manage his time and made arrangements for specific activities to occur. His forward planning was fruitful and a feedback coaching session, with one of his teams, proved “very beneficial for me and was exactly what I needed at this point in my coaching, as it has revealed some weaker points in my coaching practice that I need to work on” (J7). Darren had requested specific feedback on his coaching performance and he was pleased that he received mostly positive feedback from his supervisor. Darren critiqued an area for improvement:

However, it was mostly instructive and there was minimal feedback on technical and tactical skills. I agreed with Raymond here, as I was mainly focused on just running a smooth and enjoyable session, as the previous week was really bad in terms of enjoyment and energy levels. However, this is no excuse and I know that I am sometimes guilty of running sessions with no real learning depth; instead, I just make sure the activities look like they’re running well. (J7)

Darren described his conversation with his supervisor about what it meant for players to understand why they are engaged in particular activities and to identify “coachable moments” when the whole team might be involved in demonstrating and learning a technical skill. He explained that his supervisor:

…talked to me about the question ‘why?’ He stated that it is important that the athletes know why they are doing a particular activity or why they do a skill in a certain way. In the activities I used, I simply just told the players how the game
worked and they played accordingly. It would be more beneficial for the players if they knew why they are doing an activity so they know if they're achieving the outcomes. At one point, I told a player “remember why we're doing this activity!” when I hadn’t actually told them why. In future, I will create an environment where players are encouraged to ask why we are doing things a certain way. (J7)

During his interview, Darren explained that the role of analysis within critical reflection was focused on repeatedly asking yourself “why?” in order to gain greater depth to understanding your experiences. Darren felt his coaching major (as demonstrated above) and his university experiences had reinforced this practice:

Yeah, just how did I feel? Why did this happen? And maybe go in deeper, why do I feel this way? And you just keep asking yourself the why question and it just keeps taking you deeper and deeper and deeper. Cause that's what you get from a coaching major again, you ask a question in a lecture the answer back to you is gonna be why do you feel that? Or if you write an assignment, down the whole page, why? why, why? So university makes you think why. (Int7)

At the conclusion of Cooperative Education 1, Darren was conscious of learning outcomes that he had been unable to complete and considered strategies for resolving this issue in Cooperative Education 2 by giving “more attention to my learning outcomes” (J7). Darren’s last workplace activity for the semester was to present the feedback he had gathered from the conference to his co-workers. A concussion Darren sustained earlier in the week hindered his presentation planning and preparation. In spite of this, Darren utilised his journal to critique his performance and consider future presentations. He wrote:

I brought all of the common themes together and then made some recommendations for future conferences. My presentation was well received by the staff, as I spoke well, maintained eye contact and interacted with the audience well. I was rather nervous going into this presentation because a lot of what I said depended on what the staff said while I was speaking, as I allowed for lots of questions and comments. I have learned that it is of the utmost importance to understand your presentation material fully and to practise, practise, practise. I was pleased with how I did, but I would have been much less nervous if I had practised my material more. (J7)

Feedback from his academic supervisor on the above journal entry attempted to provide Darren with some encouragement to think more deeply: “Be your own biggest critic! Try and build on your critical reflection skills – ‘very beneficial’ – how specifically? What specifically could be better – if you force yourself to be specific, then you will be pushed towards being more critically reflective” (J7).
As Darren embarked on Semester 2, he wrote about feeling uncertain about developing his new learning contract. Darren explained that he struggled to write professional learning outcomes because of a lack of clear directives from his industry supervisor. He attempted to resolve this issue by meeting with his supervisor to “gain some more insight and discuss specific jobs” (J7). Interestingly, Darren suggested that developing personal learning outcomes was less challenging. As Darren focused on his personal development, he turned to his journal to examine the feedback he had received from his supervisors:

They felt that I was quite defensive when receiving feedback on my academic work or work on placement. Instead of simply taking the feedback, I would make excuses on why I did what I did, which made it seem that I didn’t want the feedback. Upon reflection, I agree fully with [supervisor] and I can see why it is important to take feedback, not make excuses or explanations and then walk away and reflect on the feedback. (J7)

One of Darren’s football teams reached the semi-finals, and he was reflecting on this game when he discovered his coaching philosophy was compromised. As Darren examined this experience in his journal, he became more aware of the impact his emotions and desires had on his coaching practice, whereby he temporarily lost sight of being an ‘athlete-centred’ coach.

It is interesting to note the silence, as Darren did not write about integrating his theory in practice; rather, he examined how to improve his practice. He wrote:

Unfortunately, we lost 2 to 1. Following the game, I was really disappointed about the result, but I realised that I am going against my coaching philosophy. Upon reflection, I can see that I am placing too much importance on the score line. This is problematic because the score is uncontrollable; the ref could make a bad call or the other team could be really, really good. My focus on the score line has caused me to base training sessions on upcoming games and how to beat teams rather than working on the player’s own ability. Today I have relarted the importance of focusing on improvement rather than results. If I kept my focus on improvement, I would have walked away from the game feeling like we won because the girls actually played really well. (J7)

As Darren reflected on his previous week, he lamented his poor decision-making and time management skills, as he knew this attitude would create problems further along in the semester. Although Darren had a history of high grades, his behaviour was similar to many students who are extrinsically motivated by fast-approaching deadlines rather than an inner drive to be successful through well-planned use of time. Darren acknowledged this issue, yet he did not examine why he might behave this way:

In the last week, I have been really disappointed with my performance regarding uni and placement. Because everything at uni isn’t due until much later down the track,
I have had a very relaxed attitude towards it all. Just recently, I spent an entire day doing nothing when I could have got at least five hours solid study done. This lazy attitude will surely land me in some tough times later in the semester, so I need to pick up my attitude and start working a lot harder and a lot more… (J7)

Similarly, Darren relinquished an opportunity to attend a workshop with an overseas speaker who was expected to attract participants representing sporting organisations from all over the region. Within his journal entry, Darren identified he had lost sight of the bigger picture and the potential benefits to be gained from being present and participating in the event. Darren offered further thoughts about his decision-making processes and his ability to prioritise his time:

Instead of coming to the workshop, I chose to stay home and do my own study…because I didn’t see the point in going to a workshop and then leaving after a couple hours (I had class at 12). In hindsight, I can see that this was a very stupid decision and I can’t believe I made this decision. From here, I have learned to prioritise my placement opportunities ahead of my own study or jobs at home. In the long run, this will be a beneficial decision for me. (J7)

Darren’s final journal entries focused exclusively on three interviews he conducted with three high-performance coaches as part of his industry project. Darren described the techniques he used during his first interview and the rapport he developed with the coach. Within his journal entry, Darren identified key features of his interview technique that he could improve, such as asking specific questions, maintaining focus and remaining unbiased. Although Darren identified areas for personal improvement, he did not examine how to plan for an interview or different approaches to interviewing:

I asked an open-ended question and my interviewee just went for it and gave me some really good data. I liked interviewing because I could ask questions relating to what the coach is saying instead of just reading off some planned questions; it was more like a discussion. It was hard, however, to think up good relevant questions on the spot. I just stopped the interview to sort myself out and that worked fine. Another challenge was staying completely unbiased and not giving any of my own opinion. I focused hard on keeping my face consistent throughout the interview so as not to show my opinion. This was really hard at some points because the coach started talking about stuff that really excited me. Also, because I put on my ‘poker face’, it was perceived by the coach that I wasn’t following what he was saying. In future interviews, it may be better to smile and nod, regardless of whether I agree or not. (J7)

From his reflection on the first interview, Darren applied his learnings to the next one, whereby he spent more time planning for the interview through developing a series of questions. Darren suggested that this interview generated more useful information that would assist him
with his project. While he listened to the interview recording, he discovered areas where he lacked knowledge that prevented him from pursuing a line of inquiry further. Darren identified the need to practise his new interview skills and explained how he would manage his next interview:

I was better prepared with some pre-planned questions and I asked questions that extracted deeper answers. However, as I listened to the interview, there were lots of points that I wish had more detail to them, but because during the interview I didn't fully understand what the participant was saying, it was hard to ask follow-up questions. It is clear that I need a lot more practice with interviewing and asking probing questions. A solution to this may be taking notes during the interview, writing down key words and getting the participant to later expand on these key words. (J7)

Darren reflected on his final interview, as it proved to be a nerve-racking experience because of a sequence of unplanned factors and some last-minute preparation. Darren described how he had not cleared his emails earlier that day, which included a message from the interviewee requesting to bring the interview forward. Darren equated his reaction to discovering this email to a ‘state of panic’, whereby he rushed to attend the interview. In his haste, Darren forgot a recording device, which he then sourced from his industry supervisor; however, his demeanour prompted his supervisor to offer him some advice. Darren narrated his supervisor’s words: “Relax, because if I went into the interview displaying this kind of bad body language, I would be eaten alive” (J7). Although Darren did not find these words particularly calming, he wrote, “[I] learnt that you have to be ready for anything to go wrong so that when it does go wrong, you are fully prepared and able to cope with any kind of stress” (J7). Darren utilised his journal entry to compare his interview experiences:

In the actual interview, I forgot to assure the participant of confidentiality and tell them how the interview was going to be used. The participant grumpily reminded me of my duties and that threw me off for the rest of the interview. In comparison to my first two, very comfortable, interviews, this one was tense, and to be honest, I just wanted it to end. I did, however, learn from my previous interviews and took notes on what the participant was saying. This was vital because if the participant thought I wasn’t listening or understanding what was going on, I wouldn’t have been surprised if they got up and left the interview. So overall, this was a great experience because I was put through my paces and really tested. I am just thankful that this interview was last because if it was first, I would have been frightened to do any more. (J7)

During his interview, Darren discussed his experiences of critical reflection, admitting, “It did surprise me how much I enjoyed it [critical reflection] and how much value it added to me”
He explained that critical reflection was important for becoming a professional, as it facilitated striving for self-improvement in order to cope with change. He explained:

It’s just professionally...you can’t stop getting better because as soon as you do that your environment changes and you stay the same...you have to be constantly changing and moving with the environment, and if you stop, the environment is going to keep going and you’re going to get left behind. So you always have to keep learning in the professional world, always have to keep developing and critical reflection, I think, is a great tool to do that. (Int7)

It was interesting to note that Darren felt that the expectation to engage with critical reflection during his placement provided him with an opportunity to advance his ability to think more deeply and to improve as a professional person. Darren explained that his experiences became more meaningful through critically reflecting on them; yet despite this, he identified that it was a challenge to achieve this meaning. Darren discussed that the potential outcome of a hypothetical placement without the requirement to critically reflect was that you:

would lose opportunity to learn how to think. And because it’s such a high order of thinking, critical reflection, you would miss out on that...you’re learning all this stuff in the industry and there’s so much learning going on, but if you don’t reflect on them and capture them and pinpoint them down like I said before – if you don’t grab them and grapple with them and talk about them, then it’s just past, it’s just like, oh, that happened and didn’t really think about it, whereas it could have been something that you learnt about and made you into a better person. (Int7)

5.7 Chapter summary

The representation of the data in the form of narratives offered an appreciation of the defining features of the participants, their workplaces and their experiences over the duration of their one-year cooperative education placement. The narratives were subjected to a collective thematic analysis that allowed the dataset to be analysed separately from within the narrative, between each narrative and across all narratives. This analysis formed the foundational basis of the following chapter, where several collective themes will be presented and discussed.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine students’ perceptions and practice of critical reflection as a learning strategy during their yearlong cooperative education placement within the sport and recreation industry. The preceding chapter presented data as descriptive case narratives created from students’ reflective journal entries and interview transcriptions. These reconstructed narratives provide powerful insights into students’ reflections about workplaces, cooperative education experiences and themselves as learners. Furthermore, these reflections provide insight into the particularities, tensions and learnings that students engaged with in a professional workplace over an extended period of time. Thematic analysis of the narratives revealed four intersecting themes, which were underpinned by several subthemes, presented schematically in Figure 6.1. These interacting and intersecting themes include learning environment, learning experiences, learning self and utility of critical reflection as a learning strategy. To this date, the cooperative education literature has been disproportionately orientated to examining student learning in an attempt to align the model with relevant learning theories or to create new learning theories. Therefore, relatively little focus has been directed to understanding the role of critical reflection in the ways students make sense of the tripartite learning process that lies at the heart of this model.

Figure 6.1 The four themes identified within the research narratives and their subthemes.

Guiding the process of this chapter are the three research questions underpinning this research. The first three sections of the discussion will focus on each of the first three pillars illustrated in Figure 6.1, as they were identified as key factors influencing students’ critical reflection in that they may either enable or constrain their perceptions and practices. The fourth section discusses how students utilised critical reflection within a sport and recreation
6.1 The learning environment

Each narrative presented in the previous chapter provided insights into students’ perceptions and interpretations of their learning situation, highlighting how they reacted to their respective workplace environments and the influence this had on the nature and content of their reflective writing. Dewey (1938) explains that “the environment is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had” (p. 44), thus arguing for recognition of the dynamic interaction between the people, place, culture and context. This approach to understanding practices of reflection gathers support from Boud’s (1999) suggestion for furthering our comprehension of the role context/environment plays in the enactment of reflection, including consideration of cultural, social and political factors. Examination of these research narratives revealed the workplace environment as one of several factors contributing to students’ practice of critical reflection, in particular, the enabling or constraining nature of the type of workplace and sociocultural factors.

6.1.1 Types of workplaces

The types of workplaces within the sport and recreation industry are extremely diverse in nature, purpose, management structure and geographical location, unlike workplaces that share commonalities such as many hospitals (organised around wards) and schools (classrooms). Across the sport and recreation industry, workplace environments are heterogeneous and nuanced. In summary, BSR students gain their workplace experiences across a myriad of organisational settings that are profusely diverse in their focus and function. The types of workplaces represented in this study extend to three broad areas: highly structured and regulated workplaces such as schools, businesslike models such as national recreational organisations and less formally structured workplaces such as community and volunteer-based organisations. Their point of unification exists only through their collective focus on activities related to sport, recreation and well-being. As a profession, the specific skills and attributes necessary to be developed to function within an organisation in this industry are wide and varied. The small collection of narratives represented in this thesis presents a range of different workplaces, and demonstrates how the type of organisation impacted on the students’ experiences and provided them with the impetus for practising critical reflection. Fundamental to the cooperative education model is the belief that the
effective use of critical reflection can provide students with valuable lenses for identifying and making sense of the expectations, practices and assumptions that are inherent within different (types of) workplaces.

6.1.1.1 Prior knowledge and experience

Students’ experiences and knowledge gained from previous placements, part-time employment opportunities and personal encounters usually helped facilitate the social and cognitive preparation associated with entering a ‘new’ workplace. Preconceived notions and prior experiences clearly influenced how students initially reflected on workplace practices and their readiness to learn and adapt in their workplace setting. It was evident through the narratives that their prior knowledge and experience within the type of workplace they entered as part of their cooperative education placement could either disrupt or support their initial engagements. Dana’s story is insightful here, as she had delayed starting her school-based placement because she had set her sights on a specific workplace that she believed would give her the best possible experience to propel her towards her career goal to be an outdoor education teacher in a secondary school setting. Her early reflections highlighted her perception that her university outdoor education programme had adequately prepared her for this vocation. Framed within a managerial or technocratic learning approach, her university programme privileged the development of technical skills and strategies for managing the learning environment and safety as critical features of effective pedagogy. It was particularly confirming for Dana that this teaching/learning orientation was also privileged within her workplace setting. While she did make mistakes, Dana was overwhelmingly reassured in her desire to embody, and present herself, as a professional suited to the specific workplace requirements of this highly organised and managed workplace. Her strong desire to fit into the workplace reinforced her construction of an effective outdoor educator. However, the very strong alignment of her preconceived notions about this role and her early experiences in this workplace tended to limit her capacity to critically reflect and question any of the assumptions that render this professional identity more problematic than is acknowledged. Although she expressed a desire to develop her critical reflection ability, she struggled to realise this. Dana’s experience highlights the way in which the critically reflective process can be diluted to a very practical or functional level through the dominance of particular (read unproblematic) orientations and assumptions of a workplace setting.
Conversely, Maia seemed to have little prior experience of the type of placement organisation she entered. Her workplace was less stringently managed than Dana’s and it focused on staff collaboration and providing a fun environment for the many and varied participants that entered the community centre. Within this dynamic context, there were many unplanned encounters and interactions within which challenges (and opportunities) arose. Supported by the confidence of those around her, Maia quickly recognised the vast learning opportunities that were provided to her and set about trying to develop new skills, expand her workplace experience and generally enhance the capabilities and attributes that were mostly highly valued within the workplace. In her early reflections, she expressed concerns about her ability to perform specific tasks because of a lack of familiarity with workplace activities, specifically gymnastics. Through her willingness to take on new tasks, she was able to use her reflective writing to make sense of, and build on, her early experiences and further develop her workplace skills and understandings. Unlike Dana, Maia was not constrained by a preconception of what she should know and do to operate effectively within this organisation, as she was able to maximise the experiences offered by her workplace. In addition, her workplace had the flexibility to make available new experiences and opportunities for her to learn and develop.

Somewhat similarly to Dana, Lydia had very definite expectations of how her workplace would operate and how the learning environment would tap into and advance her management knowledge. She was intent on being provided with, and having access to, opportunities that would enable her to put theory into practice. In practice, however, her preconceptions were misplaced, causing her considerable discontent. Her reflections portrayed a businesslike workplace bound by the pressing needs of commercial activity. She experienced it as intensely hierarchical and rigidly operational, unlike the supportive and engaging workplace she envisaged, and therefore not very conducive to having a student in its midst. Through her reflections, Lydia depicted this workplace as lacking the necessary internal structures that might enable her to participate in ways that could benefit both herself and the organisation. It was through her reflective writings that Lydia was able to make sense of the workplace, and while her experiences were overwhelmingly unsatisfactory, her learning was steep and meaningful.
6.1.1.2 Workplace discoveries

Along with a preconceived notion of what their workplace might be like, there was also an expectation that these placements would provide them with greater insights into their envisioned career choice, and consequently confirm their understandings and expectations. While for many this confirmation was an important part of their experiences, some discovered features within their new workplaces that were unexpected and previously unimagined. Through critical reflection, these unanticipated discoveries became opportunities to explore and develop deeper understandings of their workplace. Reflecting on these discoveries added new dimensions to the workplace experience, potentially altering their perceptions of future engagements.

For example, Phillip thought he had a clear understanding of what it meant to be a primary school teacher. However, his expectations were at odds with the reality. This became readily apparent through his reflections as he identified aspects of his workplace that were new and unexpected to him. This ignited his interest in a specialist teaching area originally concealed from his attention, hence adding another dimension and greater depth to his understanding of his workplace context. It was through critically reflecting on this discovery that he was able to articulate and appreciate how this unique workplace feature influenced the schools’ culture and how he might contribute to this area.

Similarly, Fergus’s second placement provided him with new insights into an area of the sport and recreation industry that he had not previously considered as a potential employment opportunity. As he worked alongside the manager of this large sporting and fitness facility, he became more familiar with daily and weekly workplace activities, and came to realise that he could imagine a future for himself in this type of workplace. This realisation provoked him to reflect on this discovery in his journal. His past experiences as a gym member had allowed him to understand this type of workplace setting from one orientation, whereas his reflection on his work-placement experience enabled him to view it from another perspective. During the latter, he began to form an opinion of this setting as a potential workplace that would suit his aptitudes and aspirations. Discovering new workplace or industry features may have unsettled prior understandings of a career choice such that reflection about the future was stimulated. It was through critical reflection that new and unexpected workplace features, occurrences or circumstances were explored and made sense of to develop a broader and deeper understanding of the workplace and the industry. The findings of this study support Dewey’s acknowledgement that the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder
and stimulate or inhibit the activities of an individual. The discoveries made by the students promoted, or stimulated, critical reflection.

### 6.1.2 Sociocultural influences

He aha te mea nui o te ao. What is the most important thing in the world?  
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.  
*Māori proverb*

Dewey's philosophy of learning through experience encompasses a broad sociocultural view of the educative process. He argued that “all human experience is ultimately social; that it involves contact and communication” (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). Sociocultural interactions within the workplace were strong drivers of reflection as a means to enhance understanding of how to engage and function with people (supervisors, co-workers and others) to achieve the collaborative purposes of the workplace and predetermined (university and self) learning outcomes (Cooper et al., 2010; Eames & Bell, 2005). Lave's (1991) ‘situated learning’ aligns with Dewey's focus on the importance of interaction through explicitly focusing on students' learning from, through and with others while participating in authentic, meaningful workplace activities. The diversity of organisations in the sport and recreation industry meant students had vastly differing accounts of ‘becoming part’ of their workplaces, providing insights into unwritten elements of their particular workplace social setting and its (sub)cultural values. Each workplace environment had its particular influence on the students' working disposition and how they went about practising reflection.

#### 6.1.2.1 Becoming part of the workplace

Students' reflections revealed variations in how they were able to integrate into their workplaces and how the social medium of the workplace embraced and inducted its newcomers. This variability reinforces arguments supporting the reciprocal nature of workplace learning and the importance of establishing meaningful relationships within these learning arrangements (Billett, 2002a, 2002b; Fleming, 2014). From Dewey's (1916/2007) examination of the social environment, it seems that what the students did, and what they were able to do, was dependent upon the expectations, demands, approvals and disapprovals of others within the workplace. Surprisingly, emerging from the narratives was the suggestion of little or no formal practice of student induction into the workplace. That said, with the exception of Lydia, each narrative expressed a general sense of inclusion, of feeling welcome and belonging to a workplace community and functioning as part of a team. Further to this,
there was clearly evidence of early workplace interactions that were influential in promoting confidence and assurance. Early participation within workplace activities, routine or otherwise, prompted reflection in which students examined their roles and how they might position themselves within their workplace.

As previously indicated, each student came to his or her placement with particular expectations. Their reflections suggested that workplaces equally had expectations of them, including having practical knowledge and skills, being willing to learn and being able to fit in. In most instances, as the students made themselves and their knowledge available through communication and action, their integration was propelled. Mostly, the processes of integration were determined by the nature of the work to be performed and the attitude and proficiency of the student. For example, on the surface Dana assimilated quite quickly into her risk-averse workplace. However, access to more challenging dimensions of the work of an outdoor instructor took some time to occur, as there was a perceived need for key competencies to be determined and demonstrated. In the meantime, she participated whenever she could to advance her competencies, as well as develop her capabilities in this workplace and demonstrate her expertise. Her reflections portrayed an inclusive culture that enabled her to steadily progress her role and status. In contrast, Lydia’s reflections presented a picture of her ongoing struggle to become integrated in her workplace, as she appeared to remain on the fringes of a culture with defined boundaries that she found extremely difficult to cross. Instead, she hovered around the edges of directly confronting her situation, choosing to interrogate her experiences through her reflections. She was unable to gain entry to the workplace culture until changes in personnel altered workplace dynamics. Her situation supports claims by Boud and Walker (1998) that “aspects of context change and can be changed, some more obviously than others” (p. 197).

Workplace cultures affect the way people interact with each other within social practices that can be highly contested, although it is clear through the narratives presented here that more unified workplace cultures enabled more meaningful interaction and a stronger sense of belonging. Most narratives capture the importance of positive interactions, such as encouragement, nurturing and support, that were expressed through dialogue and actions of workplace members, creating a sense of acceptance and inclusion. For example, Maia’s experiences of entering a workplace with limited knowledge of gymnastics demonstrated how overwhelming this context could have been for her. She worried that her lack of workplace-specific knowledge would be an impediment to performing well in this context and she would
be exposed for her limitations. However, her worries were quickly quashed as she was initiated into workplace practices through observing and shadowing experts and co-workers. Her colleagues provided her with opportunities to ask questions, learn routines, develop confidence to perform work activities and establish relationships with staff and clients. Maia’s example demonstrates how a workplace culture can offer opportunities to learn, but ultimately, the learner will determine how and what learning they construct from each situation through processes of reflection. Although there was evidence of workplace cultures shaping the initiation of the student into belonging and into workplace knowledge, these cultures were seldom scrutinised through reflection. This issue might suggest a barrier to this type of critical examination.

Working alongside supervisors and close co-workers enabled the establishment of relationships, providing entry points for expanding connections within the workplace. Student reflections indicated that the workplace culture was an important factor impacting on their thoughts and actions as they learnt to manage themselves within the workplace. Meaningful workplace relationships took time to develop and could be charted by the degree of interaction and level of responsibility passed to the student over time (Moore, 2013). For example, Maia was unexpectedly invited to instruct an after-school gymnastics session when a regular staff member was unwell. Maia’s willingness, enthusiasm, attitude and aptitude in filling this role clearly made an impression with the gymnastics supervisor. Although Maia was uncertain about her ability to teach gymnastics, she accepted her supervisor’s request and saw it as an opportunity to improve her teaching skills and confidence. Personal discoveries related to moments of clear progression frequently stimulated reflection or emerged from reflection. However, such reflections seldom interrogated relationships with supervisors and co-workers and the impact of workplace culture on enabling such situations. As a consequence, there was limited overt growth in terms of understanding and negotiating important social structures and issues within the workplace.

6.2 Learning experiences within a cooperative education arrangement

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are miseducative. (Dewey, 1938, p. 25)

Workplace experiences are mediated by social influences and interpreted by individual factors such as beliefs, values and needs. Inherently present within these experiences are insidious
negotiations of power. Power within this study is taken from a pragmatic viewpoint, where “power is something that makes something happen” or it drives us to make a difference to our surroundings (Allen, 2008, p. 1614). It is understood here as residing within relationships, having regulative effects on student understandings and practices. Within this context, power is seen as a fluid, two-directional interplay occurring between individuals within the workplace. The effects of such power can be seen in the self-regulatory way in which students resist taking control of their learning experiences in the belief that they are not yet capable of making decisions and determinations in the workplace. Within this context, increasing the agency of the student involved purposeful mediation from the workplace mentor, with in-built invitations for the student to take more control of the situation (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). These sorts of practices enabled the students to determine when to play a more active role in determining the focus of their learning and their reflections. This section examines two specific subthemes: negotiating professional tensions and (mis)educative learning, as representations of happenings that were influential in initiating and developing critical reflection. The research questions aimed at understanding how critical reflection is facilitated within BSR cooperative education and identification of enablers and barriers will come into focus here.

6.2.1 Negotiating professional tensions

Reflection involved students examining their experiences in a number of ways, with most choosing to concentrate on exploring their understanding of what they were doing and how this related to what they had intended to learn and how they could improve future action. Looking beyond actions to examining why they were operating in particular ways and the impact this might have on themselves and others was less often considered. The experiences that drove most critical reflection were provoked by having to make sense of professional demands, pedagogical interventions and the tensions associated with assuming a professional identity.

6.2.1.1 Professional demands and pedagogic interventions

The students’ reflective journal writing was frequently framed around examining the learning outcomes within their learning contracts. These learning outcomes were used as a reference point within their reflection for promoting self-monitoring of progress, initiation of activities, navigation of learning expectations, and motivation for advancement of specific areas of their learning. Reflecting on the learning contract was a useful tool for developing agency and empowering students to take control of their learning as proactive learners. By reflecting on
learning outcomes as they surfaced from within their experiences, students were able to assess their progress and determine strategies to increase the likelihood of each learning outcome being successful. However, there was no sense of the students questioning or examining their learning outcomes within the two learning contracts they had constructed over the course of their yearlong placement. As the students developed their learning outcomes, there was a tendency for them to be written in a way that privileged what they expected to learn from engaging in their workplace activities. For example, Dana’s learning outcomes were generally quite technical, as they reflected the nature of her outdoor education work activities and what she expected to learn, rather than encompassing broader dimensions of her workplace. Reflection that is based solely on examining learning outcomes as a means to their achievement may have a constraining effect on the extent of the examination, with it terminating at a possible solution rather than exploring wider issues.

For example, Darren’s learning contract specifically included a key objective focused on obtaining feedback and guidance on his coaching performance from his mentors. Despite this intention, the reality of obtaining this became increasingly difficult. He reflected on his lack of progress in achieving this learning outcome, one he was passionate about. He realised he was reliant on others within his organisation to make time to attend his coaching sessions, but this was not a priority for them. With this expectation documented within his signed learning contract, it provided him with some leverage when he emailed his supervisor to arrange an appointment for this goal to come to fruition. Reflecting on his learning outcomes provided the impetus for him to be proactive in initiating a request that resulted in a positive outcome, as he gained the feedback he required. As suggested by Billett (2004), workplaces inherently regulate individuals’ participation, usually based upon managerial hierarchy, in order to maximise productivity or timely execution of specific actions. Hence, students may be restricted and have little control over the activities they are able to perform within the workplace for many reasons, including but not limited to lack of experience, availability of suitable guidance and timing of events.

Although Darren reflected upon his learning outcomes to develop a strategy to achieve his goals, he missed an opportunity to explore his workplace situation more deeply. Critically reflecting on the progress of his learning outcomes highlighted gaps and provided opportunities to develop strategies for the successful completion of each one, thus encouraging him to be resourceful and creative in achieving his goals. However, critical reflection primarily focused upon learning contract outcomes alone may limit learning, rather
than opening the student’s awareness to other aspects of the workplace that may hold unforeseen challenging learning. Simply reviewing the learning contract does not promote deeper questioning about critical workplace issues, such as Who makes decisions? How are they made? What questions are not asked? Whose voice is privileged? Whose voice is silenced? What are the dominant influences? How are they justified? The overall orientation of focusing reflection on student learning issues meant the students’ interrogations were limited to enhancing personal progression through problem-solving. The narratives suggest that engagement with examining the wider implications of their workplace problem by reflecting on workplace ‘politics’ was either not considered or too challenging to consider.

Lydia was a noteworthy exception, as nearing the latter stages of her placement, she continued to use her written reflections to make sense of the tensions and barriers she experienced within her workplace. Earlier, she had begun to question decisions made by her industry supervisor, as they negatively impacted her ability to participate in the workplace to the extent she had expected. Nonetheless, she continued to actively participate to the best of her ability, using reflective thinking to help negotiate her increasingly troubled work placement. Her supervisor-student relationship became tenuous. While this development was interesting, it is unsurprising, as power issues can make supervision difficult (Cooper et al., 2010). It was possible Lydia was perceived to have challenged her supervisor’s authority through using her initiative to improve workplace communication, creating tension within their relationship that appeared to result in progressive withdrawal of support. Reflecting on this situation, she did not readily identify her role in escalating these tensions.

Further on in her placement, Lydia reflected on an extremely emotional experience, stimulating her to wonder if she had perceived a gender bias in her workplace. These thoughts were triggered when she was not invited to a meeting to brief two new male staff members and discuss promotional activities that would have a direct impact on the work she had been doing. This lack of inclusion left her feeling silenced, disempowered and undervalued. She approached her supervisor to discuss the situation, only to have her concerns dismissed. Consequently, she broke down and cried. Her critical reflection on this experience provided evidence of her use of reflection to make sense of the experience she had. For Lydia, her ‘naming’ of her lack of inclusion in the abovementioned meeting as a ‘gender bias’ helped her make sense of other similar experiences that had occurred during her time within the organisation. It was interesting to note that she initially thought her response to this series of events was a result of her personal weakness. However, through the reflective process, she
began to make sense of it and created a more holistic picture. Within her journal entry, she lamented, “I was very surprised; my crying obviously showed I had feelings and cared about the organisation…this is a male-dominated organisation…me crying gave them power”. Using theory from her leadership paper, she tried to reconcile her situation, by concluding, “it’s okay to be feminine…it’s okay to care…people are not intentionally trying to upset you…it is okay to feel frustration…but to be less aggressive in expressing personal dissatisfaction, that way a solution can be found that works for all parties”. Through her reflections, she came to realise her emotions and passion were not a weakness but rather strength of character that had enabled her to survive and succeed during her placement.

It was evident within the narratives that the reflective journal was initially a key driver for initiating critical reflection, as Dana, Phillip and Darren all agreed it was ‘something they had to do’. These graded reflective journals were useful, to a point, in promoting the quantity of reflective writing, as there was an expectation of one journal entry per week, although this did not necessarily translate into quality reflection. For example, Fergus’s reflections were generally brief and very descriptive in nature. Within the journal were embedded activities, such as a progress report, that directed students’ attention towards their learning outcomes within their learning contracts, prompting self-evaluation of progress and consideration of strategies for successful completion of learning outcomes. Although this activity was intended to encourage critical reflection, as discussed previously, a reflection focused on learning outcomes did not necessarily engage the students in the process of critiquing their experiences or the taken-for-granted assumptions of the workplace.

6.2.1.2 Developing a professional identity

The research narratives revealed the use of journal writing as a means to monitor personal progress as the students began to develop their professional identity. Their reflections considering professional practices were often constrained by perceptions of what a professional identity should look and act like. Within this context, the students’ experiences were reflected upon in the pursuit of developing capacities to enhance employability rather than actively critiquing their experiences of a workplace.

Experiences reflected upon may enhance the understanding of personal and professional values within the workplace, including the development of standards of practice, professionalism, moral or ethical issues and ideals. For example, Dana’s high-risk learning outdoor education environment repeatedly reinforced the importance of stringent safety
management within her workplace, shaping her understanding of a professional identity and what was important. She consistently used her reflective writing to evaluate her own management and safety practices as a means of measuring her progress as an outdoor education teacher.

The development of generic and discipline-specific skills relevant to their type of workplace featured prominently as a topic of reflection. While most focused on the skills they were learning, others occasionally directly referenced their experience alongside a particular theory. For example, Maia learnt most of her new technical gymnastics skills through observing others before applying her new knowledge within her own practice. A leadership paper she had taken at university directly assisted with her understanding of how to manage groups of children engaged in sport activities. As Maia reflected on workplace situations in which she was able to apply her academic knowledge into her workplace activities, she began to understand how her theoretical knowledge might be applied in practice, yet did little to explore this connection.

As mentioned previously, students’ reflections demonstrated advances in the types of workplace activities made available over the duration of their placement. Consequently, as their skills developed, the levels of supervision were adjusted accordingly. As students interacted with these two dimensions of the workplace – that is, activities and supervision – the nature of their experiences reflected change and progress to varying degrees. The variability of individual growth and change was dependent on the motivation of the student and opportunities made available in the workplace. Dana’s initial experiences were those of observing and assisting teachers or instructors during camp events. She was comfortable at this time, as she was learning about the culture and expectations of her new workplace. The experiences she selected to reflect upon at this time suggested that much of her focus was orientated around developing her understanding of accepted workplace protocols and evaluation of different ways of practising to improve her alignment with these. Her role progressed from outdoor instructing on camp events, such as tramping and river crossing, to the ‘person in charge’ of an event, who had full responsibility for the planning and execution of the camp event. Engaging in workplace activities provided her with experiences that enabled her to improve her instruction, gain confidence and progress towards being a professional in her field. Dana’s story provided a sense of progressing from a student learning to be competent to a fully-fledged professional, albeit one that does not question the dominant practices and the assumptions of the field. This insight possibly reinforces how students view
becoming a workplace professional as being contingent on being technically competent, in other words, ‘being able to do the job’.

In contrast, Fergus’s story was insightful, as he appeared to take the path of least resistance to gain the best possible personal outcome while positively contributing to workplace activities and reflecting on his experiences. At the start of his second placement, the experiences he reflected on comprised mainly workplace routines, as he equated this to productive use of his time. He began by shadowing the stadium manager, whereby he developed technical skills and became familiar with the workplace culture. Some of his workplace activities were mundane, such as cleaning large numbers of plastic chairs. From this experience, he reflected on the value of teamwork and social interaction to achieve a common goal. Overall, his limited engagement with his reflective journal made it difficult to determine how much he may have developed over the duration of his placement. Although he received regular written feedback on his journal entries, it provided him with limited utilisable assistance to improve reflection, suggesting that perhaps another form of guidance such as reflective conversations may have been more useful. In his last journal entry, he revealed how he identified self-improvement in the areas of professionalism, time management and workplace capabilities. As he revisited old journal entries, he became aware of his personal growth. At the completion of the placement, he was offered part-time employment, suggesting that he had developed professional qualities and skills that his organisation valued. Fergus’s apparent success despite his limited engagement with his reflective journal highlights how techniques for enhancing professional development need to be personalised and flexible, as the rate and depth of uptake of critical reflection was variable.

6.2.2  (Mis)Educative learning

Cooperative education preparation provides students with the opportunity to engage in a workplace to learn about becoming a professional in the sport and recreation industry. Student critical reflections on experiences suggest that at times there was a disconnection between what we, as tertiary educators, might expect students to learn and what they actually learn. While critical reflection is advocated as a vehicle for deep learning, it is also an important lens to enable students to identify aspects of their engagement that may not necessarily be deemed ‘good’ or ‘productive’ learning.
6.2.2.1 Rhetoric versus actual learning

Within their critical reflections many students identified access, albeit lack of, to appropriate workplace resources as influential in their learning experiences. Lydia’s story demonstrated how tensions developed when she was not provided with adequate space and the resources required for the nature of her intended work. She had negotiated within her learning contract a learning outcome to develop a new website and Facebook page for the organisation in order to improve communication with volunteers and event participants. It seemed, however, that the organisation was ‘unable’ to provide her with a computer, camera or an adequate Internet connection to allow her to undertake this work effectively. Through the process of reflective writing, she identified alternative strategies to enable her to advance this work. For example, she opted to use her home computer to develop the media sites and collaborated with a range of people in the workplace to access electronic photos to enhance the media sites she was developing.

Although Lydia felt strongly that the lack of support and resources impeded her ability to learn desirable workplace skills, her critical reflections demonstrated that she learnt a great deal about being resourceful and resilient in the workplace. Such self-efficacy skills would clearly be considered useful professional attributes to develop during work-placement experiences. However, while the depth of learning and development is clearly identifiable in her reflective writing, she seemed largely unable to recognise the development of such personal attributes. This disproportionate focus on skill development may come from students’ perceptions of how, and what it means, to be a sport and recreation professional and the heavily vocationalised focus they attribute to their workplace experience. The high value placed on specific workplace skills by student and workplace mentors is clearly related to their perceptions of what is important to enhance employability. Although future employability is one of the goals of cooperative education, its overemphasis may limit the perceived value of critical reflection within this context.

6.2.2.2 Codes of practice

Dana had the freedom to explore a dynamic outdoor learning environment and learnt a great deal through critically reflecting on her experiences. However, her learning was clearly constrained by her predetermined learning contract, strict workplace protocols and her perceived criteria around the performativity of professional competence. In her journal, she reflected on her capacity to conform to her workplace practice and priorities, focusing mostly
on her performance as her way of being a professional in this space. Across numerous
entries, Dana described how she strategically adopted the workplace codes associated with
effective teaching and learning from the mentors – the experts. This ensured that her
placement progressed smoothly with few tensions or issues. Because she was an aspiring
employee in the outdoor education field, this was clearly a desirable trajectory for her.
However, her uncritical acceptance of dominant professional understandings and practices
limited the growth and depth of her understanding and the opportunities to expand her
learning.

There were numerous occasions when the students could have critically reflected on how a
situation was managed, who got what out of it, and the consequences of the decisions that
were made. For example, when Dana caught some of the students with banned items in their
possession, she had no hesitation in enacting the discipline protocols of the camp. She did not
question the strength or the purpose of the rules or how her decision would impact on the
students’ experiences. Here, she missed a perfect opportunity to reflect on the moral and
ethical implications of the students’ behaviours (and her response to these), rather than
uncritically accepting blanket authority. Indeed, the student journals were littered with forms of
reflection that lacked any real examination of the moral and ethical dimensions of the
experiences they encountered. How students engage in understanding moral and ethical
considerations through critical reflection within cooperative education frameworks is an area
that warrants further investigation.

Although the students clearly learnt a great deal through the process of reflecting on their
experiences, not all reflection was constructive. Relying on experience alone for learning is
inherently flawed, as some individuals may have much experience but have learnt very little
(S. Thompson & Thompson, 2008). What we do with the experiences through extracting and
making sense of key learning moments is how we learn through experience. As Dewey (1938)
states, “how to utilise the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from
them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile” (p. 40). In
a cooperative education learning situation, the student determines whether an experience is
worthwhile, as key learning moments form the basis of their critical reflection. Dewey claims
experiences alone are not enough, but rather, it is the meaning perceived and constructed
from an experience that gives it value (Rodgers, 2002). The data highlight the ways in which
critical reflections can be constrained. Specifically, the research narratives outline the reliance
on physical resources to develop technical skills across various sport and recreation
workplace settings. Although potential learning situations that could encourage greater understandings on the social, moral and political dimensions of the workplace appear throughout the data, there was little evidence of this occurring for any of the student participants. Rather, there was an inherent silence that raises questions about the students' complicity in accepting the status quo of workplace codes of practice. My concern with this silence is the potential for some experiences to lead to miseducative learning (Dewey, 1910/1997).

6.3 The learning self

Cooperative education places the student or person at the centre of the learning experience; thus necessitating that students accept responsibility for the contract that is constructed between them, the university and the workplace. Properly orchestrated, student-centred learning has the capacity to connect with individual interests and strengths, therefore subverting the potential for yielding to negativity and ambivalence towards what is being learnt (Cooper et al., 2010). Of course, the ways students approach different learning contexts will be influenced by physical and social environmental situations they find themselves participating within, as highlighted in the earlier sections. Workplace-based learning is steeped in social processes (Dewey, 1938; Eames & Bell, 2005; Fleming & Eames, 2005), many of which the students may have limited control over (Boud et al., 1993; Cooper et al., 2010). Hence, what the students brought to the learning environment, and how they developed across the duration of their placement, varied according to many factors that were both personal and situational. This section will consider personal characteristics, including prior experiences, dispositions, motivation, attitudes and personal and professional attributes, as these factors influenced the students' perceptions and practice of critical reflection.

6.3.1 Prior experiences

6.3.1.1 Learning approaches and styles

How a person might approach learning is an inherent part of a person's history and past experiences (Biggs, 1988; Moon, 2004). The students' understandings of the learning process within a particular workplace context might influence how they approach their learning. Fergus's and Lydia's narratives reveal approaches to learning that were very different. Fergus was content to complete academic requirements to a 'pass standard', and therefore, he engaged in reflective journal writing only to describe his experiences without actively seeking to analyse them at any level. By his own admission, he preferred a workplace where he
received explicit directional instructions and predictable work activities. Although Fergus had good intentions around the learning opportunity that was presented to him, through the cooperative education programme, his lack of independent learning strategies meant he did not know how to maximise his learning in the workplace. Fergus's personal history and previous learning approaches were barriers to his engagement with critical reflection in a way that prevented him from developing deeper learning at this point in time.

In contrast to Fergus’s approach to learning, Lydia, fuelled by a strong desire to be successful, was provoked to develop a more independent approach to her learning within a challenging workplace situation. Her initial attempts at reflecting on her difficult experiences were mostly descriptive in nature. However, she was intent on understanding what was happening in her workplace and what it meant, so she took time to look below the surface of particular events to critically reflect on their consequences. Through this process, she began questioning her experiences and attempting to understand the complexity of her situation by seeking to utilise material from external sources (Moon, 2004). Using relevant theories from papers/units within her degree and engaging with various critical reflection frameworks, she enhanced her understanding of her workplace, in order to problem-solve and plan future action. Through a combination of her capacity to learn independently and the challenging workplace setting she found herself in, Lydia was able to engage in critical reflection in ways that were meaningful and purposeful.

These two extreme examples convey how individuals’ learning approaches can reflect their ability and willingness to adapt to different and changing situations. These considerable differences in learning approaches present a challenge for educators as we look to implement educational strategies such as critical reflection, to deepen the learning of students.

6.3.1.2 Receptivity to critical reflection

The students embarked on their cooperative education placement with insights from two brief introductory placements within a prerequisite paper/unit. Generally, work-integrated learning was a relatively new concept to them all; they had almost no experience in how critical reflection could be used to enhance their learning and development during this process. The narratives highlighted preconceived views and assumptions of critical reflection that were based on understandings from either formal or informal experiences with the reflective process prior to their cooperative education placement.
Students' prior understandings of reflection were developed through its utilisation within domains such as sporting contexts, academic disciplines, previous university papers/units, recreational activities and school curricula activities. Many students considered reflection to be a normal part of everyday life. Generally speaking, the students' preconceived notions of critical reflection and the value they placed on it influenced their initial engagement and reception with how it might be useful within cooperative education. It was evident that over the duration of their cooperative programme, only some students gained valuable insights into themselves, their organisations and the practices enshrined within them, through critical reflection. Although reflection is a natural tendency, most students clearly need direction to learn to critically reflect in a meaningful way (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Dewey, 1910/1997; Martin & Fleming, 2006).

Through his years of playing and coaching rugby, Fergus had developed strong preconceived ideas about the purpose and practice of reflection. He perceived reflection to be integral to improving his sporting performance. However, he understood critical reflection to be based on external criticism, and therefore, perceived it as a possible threat that exposed weaknesses. He acknowledged that it required considerable thought and effort to reflect ‘properly’, which possibly created added resistance to him wanting to practise reflection. He was disinclined to look back on experiences that had not gone well, as they served to amplify his inadequacies. Although his academic supervisor encouraged him to reflect as a means to better understand his performance, Fergus had trouble moving beyond his perception of the negative view reflection generated of himself and his performance.

More importantly, towards the end of his placement, Fergus was beginning to become more reflexive, and derived some pleasure from engaging in critical reflection. This came about as he was reading his old journal entries, which precipitated an increased awareness of his personal and professional growth. Within the workplace context, Fergus demonstrated advancement in his receptivity to critical reflection from where he was situated at the beginning of his placement. His preconceptions of critical reflection seemed to diminish, as he began to feel safe to ‘unpack’ his experiences. As Fergus became more positive about the outcomes of his reflections, he became more receptive of the potential value of critical reflection. Fergus’s experiences with engaging in reflection support Boud et als’ (1993) claims that learning from experience has the capacity to transform prior experiences and undo prior learning. However, the following example would suggest receptivity might not lead directly to critical reflection.
Phillip thought of reflection as a normal part of his daily life, as he would regularly look back at the day's events and think about them. Phillip arrived at his placement confident in his understanding of critical reflection and was openly receptive to engaging in it. He explained that his openness to reflection stemmed from his family environment and the people he associated with, as it was part of their culture to routinely reflect through engaging in conversations. Phillip implied that reflection was not something he could easily turn on and off, as it was always there. Consequently, he believed that reflection was inherent within his daily activities; he saw value in it and was prepared to engage with it during his work placement. However, although he claimed to embrace critical reflection, he displayed little development of his ability to reflect during his work placement. Based on his observation with nursing students who similarly felt they were reflective but in fact were not, Glaze (2002) reported that a perceived overfamiliarity with reflective practices could in fact limit the capacity to develop effective reflective abilities.

Some individuals, such as Fergus, who begin cooperative education with a much narrower view of critical reflection may require greater guidance and support to move out of their comfort zones to where they can understand and experience the value of reflection (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). It was interesting to note that although Fergus (a reluctant reflector) showed progress with his level of acceptance and the value he placed on critical reflection in this context, his journal entries remained relatively superficial and only a few notable changes were made to the depth of his entries. In a similar vein, Phillip (a willing reflector) valued reflection from the outset, although he too was unable, or disinclined, to advance the depth of his reflective thinking and journal writing. While both students had received academic supervisor guidance with their reflective writing, neither was able to enact the advice given. This point raises an issue encompassing academic supervisors' approaches to supporting the development of students' ability to critically reflect.

What may have set Fergus and Phillip apart from the likes of Lydia, who made demonstrable advances in the depth of her reflective writing, was that they did not take the initiative to explore ways of improving their own reflective practice. These accounts identify two factors that can affect critical reflection are; a low degree of readiness and receptivity to reflection and an unwillingness to explore and experiment with reflection. These factors suggest that it is important to use flexible strategies to enable transitional development of critical reflection; however, it remains unclear how to advance all students in the practice of critical reflection.
6.3.2 Intrapersonal

Learning through experiences in the workplace is different from content-driven academic or classroom-based learning, as learners are required to reflect on their experiences and conceptualise their own learning. Critical reflection can be an important tool here, but it relies on students being prepared to explore their experiences in order to understand aspects of the environment, the self and others. This study showed intrapersonal characteristics such as motivation and attitudes may positively or negatively influence students’ approach to independent learning and their engagement with critical reflection.

6.3.2.1 Motivation

Motivation is a complex topic and deliberation on it is beyond the scope of this research. In this research, motivation is considered from a sociological rather than a psychological viewpoint, taking an interactional view. An interactional view suggests that personal characteristics (internal) and the learning situation (external) are important motivators for achieving the best possible levels of personal performance and attitudes (Heaney, Oakley, & Rea, 2009). The chronological accounts presented through each narrative suggest that the factors that influenced critical reflection changed over the duration of the placement. The changes may be due to a number of reasons, including personal and professional development, level of involvement in workplace practices and improved self-awareness.

Most students undertake their cooperative education placement in the final year of their degree when the desire and the need to successfully complete are probably at their highest. Lydia acknowledged that “there is light at the end of the tunnel”, while Dana had similar sentiments, stating, “it was my last year and I really wanted to give it my all”. In addition to such sentiments, the narratives portray a strong sense of workplace learning being inherently valued and personally relevant, as students were able to set their own personal learning goals and focus on developing and enhancing competencies in preparation for future career aspirations. These two underlying factors may have subtle subconscious influences on student motivation and attitudes as they engage in critical reflection. The narratives are representative of learners on a continuum (Mezirow, 1991) – at one end, there are students who want to complete their degree without too much effort, while at the other end are students who work diligently to achieve high academic standards.

The narratives illustrated that in the early stages of placement, the students generally perceived critical reflection as being of little value to them. This perception is probably
attributable to several key factors, including preconceptions based on past experiences (as discussed earlier), limited knowledge and practice of critical reflection, and little recognition of the benefits of critical reflection (Burt & Morgan, 2014). Within the context of the BSR, there is also recognition that it was an imposed academic activity. Dana was an interesting example of this trajectory within her outdoor education placement. While at the beginning she viewed the university demand to undertake critical reflection through a journal as an imposition, over the duration of her placement her understanding of the practicalities and implications of critical reflection began to change. This resulted in greater personal motivation to enhance her practice of reflection. Through critically reflecting on her own practice and that of others, Dana discovered she could explore ways to improve her outdoor competencies and set goals to advance herself. As she became aware of what she had learnt through reflection, she was motivated to improve her ability to critically reflect.

Similarly, as her placement situation deteriorated, Lydia became highly motivated towards critical reflection as a vehicle through which to make sense of experiences, solve problems and contemplate ways to progress towards achieving her goals. Motivated by the outcomes of their reflections and personal goals, Dana and Lydia both experimented with new ways to improve their understanding through critical reflection. Irrespective of their degree of motivation and level of reflection, at the end of placement students overwhelmingly agreed that critical reflection was worthwhile and useful, as each had experienced some benefit from learning through reflection. Engaging with reflection over the duration of their placements generally helped to bring together pieces of their whole experience, making continuity of learning possible and making progress visible. Critical reflection enabled them to move from one experience to the next with a better understanding of how experiences and ideas were related and connected. In turn, they were able to recognise and understand how personal advancements came about during placement, where personal improvements could be made, and about formulating a plan for future action.

The process of attempting to successfully complete their learning outcomes motivated students to use critical reflection as a platform for self-assessment, as each had a desire to improve specific personal and professional practices. Critically evaluating one's personal performance requires courage and confidence (S. Thompson & Thompson, 2008). Some students, such as Fergus, found this very challenging. The selective nature of the disclosure means students may choose not to reflect on an event that potentially may position them in a bad light, or that they felt bad about. Importantly, all of the students portrayed a willingness to
be open and frank about their experiences, suggesting there was a degree of security within the journal writing process. This would indicate that as their experience progressed, the students developed trust in the support and guidance they received from the university and were willing to lay bare their inadequacies and mistakes.

As previously mentioned, maintaining a reflective journal was a compulsory assessment for these students. Phillip's initial engagement with critical reflection was clearly because he was compelled to write his journal, as it was an assessment requirement. He knew his academic supervisor would read it and want to give feedback. Having to commit his thoughts to paper generated a sense of accountability for his thoughts and actions at the time that he could not easily dismiss. The flow-on effect was that he put more effort into his reflective writing to ensure it was "professional and consistent". Phillip later acknowledged that thinking about his experiences and having to make some sense of them created a cycle of him wanting to continually improve practice. This account draws attention to the tension that is prompted around motivation to critically reflect being initiated and maintained by the necessity to fulfil academic requirements. Although most expressed their motivation to write thoughtfully, it is possible their reflections were instrumentally driven to meet academic requirements (Moon, 2006).

6.3.2.2 Attitudes

Workplace experiences and practising critical reflection presented challenges to the students that culminated in unique and individual responses. Some students showed initiative and determination, as they detoured or skilfully manoeuvred around obstacles, whereas others were content to journey quietly along the safest possible route, trying not to deviate along the way. The narratives provide exemplars of these extremes and those situated somewhere in between. Dewey (1916/2007) believed that fusion of intellect and emotions, along with an individual's attitude, may open or close the possibility of learning. He argued that connecting with our emotions and attitudes gives us the ability to advance personal and intellectual growth. He described a set of attitudes that are related to readiness to engage in reflection, and that, if present, may broaden one's scope of learning and awareness, and therefore enable one to rise to the challenges one encounters. The attitudes that influence readiness to reflect include: wholeheartedness, directness, open-mindedness and responsibility (Dewey, 1916/2007; Rodgers, 2002). Consequently, the ability to demonstrate some or many of these attitudes that value personal and intellectual growth may enable reflection.
Lydia’s narrative displayed the presence, advancement and a combination of each of these attitudes. Her *wholeheartedness* or level of enthusiasm for learning was clearly evident, as she was prepared for total immersion within her workplace. Her challenging workplace did not appear to dampen her enthusiasm; instead, the uncertainty led to determination, curiosity and interest that would inspire her to find ways to improve her circumstances through critical reflection. Her situation, although it was complicated, sparked mental integrity for her to remain purposeful and committed. Lydia recognised she might benefit from being more *open-minded* about her learning and life. Thinking this was one of her limitations, she actively sought new perspectives, tried new approaches and was prepared to make changes. She had *directness* related to confidence – not self-confidence, but more the confidence exhibited when one goes about doing something one knows well without feeling anxious about oneself. This may be attributed to her maturity and signified her ability to rise to the needs of the situation, and not to shy away or feel things were too hard to manage. The final attitude, *responsibility*, where one considers the implications of one’s thinking before going into action, became more prominent as she practised critical reflection and thought about how she would act next time.

Fergus, on the other hand, was enthusiastic about entering a workplace that complemented his passion for sport and began wholeheartedly. However, he quickly became demoralised when things were not as he expected. His interests became divided and confused, and he evaded the challenges of his workplace, conscious that he might not be able to perform to meet the approval of those in his workplace. Unlike Lydia, he was unable to rise to the situation and actively sought a way out of his discomfort, hence exhibiting attitudes that were closed and self-conscious, rather than open and direct. He was not prepared to take responsibility for the probable consequences of his future actions, as this type of thinking involved risk with an outcome that could not be guaranteed in advance. Although Fergus suggested that he felt he could take risks and try new things within the safety of the cooperative arrangement, in reality he was not prepared to do this. During his second placement, there was evidence of change in his attitude. He became more open-minded as he started to see his experiences from different perspectives and how this affected his outcomes. His narrative suggested an evolution of directness as he moved from being self-absorbed (self-conscious and afraid) in his first placement towards becoming more self-aware in the second placement. These attitudinal changes were reflected in his attempts at being more reflective, where he began to migrate from a focus on self towards thinking more about others.
Openness to learning required making the most of opportunities and actively committing to the process of learning from both positive and negative events. Dana and Maia both expressed a willingness to think about things in a deeper manner but had difficulty enacting this desire. This may be a reflection of Darren’s comment that they were exposed to different ways of thinking through being expected to critically reflect; that is, they were learning to critically reflect. Developing or enhancing these attitudes plays a part in the preparation and practice of critical reflection, as well as workplace engagement, by helping overcome the challenges that impact on one’s ability to grow intellectually and emotionally.

6.4 The utility of critical reflection as learning strategy

Cooperative education is a complex educational strategy because of the multifaceted nature of the interactions and integration between the university, workplace and student. The use of the term ‘education’ here aligns with Dewey’s definition of education as a “reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one’s] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (Dewey, 1916/2007, p. 61). Rodgers (2002) develops Dewey’s statement further by adding, “[reflection] is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society” (p. 845). Importantly, both Dewey and Rodgers expressed emphasis on a type of learning that is future-orientated, rather than seeing reflection as something focused solely on the past. In fact, Elkjaer (2009) describes Dewey’s pragmatism as “a learning theory for the future” and suggests those who have the capacity to learn through experience can be considered “socialised individuals” living in an “interpreted world” (p. 75).

Critical reflection is a process that intertwines workplace experiences with learning, resulting in the creation of new knowledge. Dewey (1916/2007) argued that a reflective experience is one where intentional thinking occurs to discover the detailed, specific connections between something we do and its consequences (p. 111). Fook and Gardner (2007) argue that critical reflection is a complex transitional process and a particular way of thinking, usually practised based on an identified framework. The use of the word ‘critical’ within this research context aligns with Dewey’s notions of reflective inquiry rather than the paradigmatic lens of critical theory. The purpose of this section is to explore the utility of critical reflection revealed through the research narratives, as a means to address the research questions related to students’ understandings, and practice of, critical reflection in real life settings.
6.4.1 The place of critical reflection in cooperative education

To date, there have been no published diagrammatic representations to assist with the understanding of the complex dynamics and interplay of factors that may contribute towards the place of critical reflection within the cooperative education context. The unique transactional model of critical reflection shown in Figure 6.2, although structurally simple, provides a starting platform for further educational conversations to progress the understanding of critical reflection in complex learning environments and consequently how it might be better taught, learnt, assessed and researched. It also provides a framework for understanding and demonstrating the versatility of critical reflection in drawing together the multiple dimensions of the cooperative education experience that is continual, cumulative and progressive.

![Figure 6.2 A transactional model of critical reflection (CR) within a cooperative education framework where E = experience, TP = theory and practice, A = assessments / pedagogy / academic supervision.](image)

Strongly influenced by Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience, this transactional model of critical reflection was developed from analysis of the research narrative data. It highlights the place of critical reflection within the BSR cooperative education programme, as it brings together each of the three key contributors within the programme, that is, the student, university and workplace. Each contributor is dynamic in his or her own right; however, within this educational arrangement transactions occur between each contributor. The overlapping areas between each contributor represent dynamic transactional drivers of critical reflection within a cooperative education framework. The student-workplace interaction (E) provides
opportunities for experiences to occur that form the basis of critical reflection. Interactions between the university and student (A) included implementation of specific pedagogical approaches that encourage critical reflection, as well as the provision of academic supervision for guidance and support with reflective practice and other academic requirements. Lastly, the university-workplace interaction (TP) depicts how theoretical knowledge from the university when applied to workplace activities and vice versa generates opportunities for critical reflection.

This multidimensional transactional model is interpreted from two orientations: firstly, by identifying factors that influence critical reflection and, secondly, by recognising the influence critical reflection may have on each learning community (workplace and university) and the individual learner. Examining this model from the transactional areas (E, A and TP) towards the centre (CR) suggests these interactions may influence students’ perceptions, practice and engagement with critical reflection. The practice of critical reflection brings together each of the key contributors, enabling students to better understand the workplace, self and university within the context of cooperative education. The orientation viewed from the centrally positioned critical reflection towards each contributor (student, workplace and university) highlights that there are consequences and actions resultant from engaging in critical reflection. Critical reflection may bring about changes in student perceptions and understandings to enable planning of future actions. New ways of thinking and being, stimulated through critical reflection, enabled active student participation with the workplace community with the potential for the student to initiate or influence change in workplace practices and culture. The practice of critical reflection contributes towards development of the university graduate profile and may enhance the university’s reputation for developing students that are not only work and career ready but also future ready, in the industry.

6.4.2 Enabling capacity of critical reflection

Within this study, critical reflection is presented as a transitional process that enables change. Critical reflection enables a connection to be made between personal and sociocultural influences within the experience, that is, it is subject to transactions occurring, as seen in figure 6.2. Benade (2015) suggested that Dewey’s (1910/1997) longstanding definition of reflection as “active, persistent, and a careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6) assumes a “level of directed, proactive cognitive activity” (p. 44) that must be undertaken by the reflector in an ongoing and sustained way. It was through regular,
sustained practice of critical reflection that students in this study were able to acknowledge the role emotions played within their learning, develop more reflexivity and become more familiar with a ‘different’ way of thinking. These three factors are discussed in the following section.

6.4.2.1 Acknowledgement of emotions

The presence of a strong emotive dimension within each of the narratives adds to the complexity of understanding the factors influencing the practice of critical reflection and the nature of the learning gained. Dewey believed emotion was “central to human experience” (Hildebrand, 2008) and that it plays an essential role in all learning (Boud, 1999; Boud & Walker, 1998; Coulson & Harvey, 2013). The reaction to a situation and the emotions attached may evoke reflection and be understood through reflection. Thompson and Thompson (2008) present critical reflection as a three-dimensional entity, including cognitive, affective and value dimensions, although the challenge is realising the interplay between all three dimensions. It is well documented that emotions play an important role in critical reflection (Bolton, 2010; Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Dewey, 1910/1997; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Hildebrand, 2008; Moon, 1999; Rodgers, 2002).

Each narrative provided evidence that emotions, both positive and negative, are a factor in supporting and promoting an inquiry into an experience (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Lydia understood herself to be an emotional, passionate and impulsive person. She regarded these personal traits as flaws in her character, believing that if you react in an emotional way you must be weak, rather than considering herself someone who cared deeply, with strong ethical and moral values. Her emotional responses, including frustration, anger and disappointment at what was clearly an unsettled and personally conflicted workplace situation, were powerful drivers for many of her critical reflections. As she engaged in the practice of writing a critical reflection, she was able to pause momentarily, step back from her situation, and analyse and evaluate before she planned her next action or response. This was not something she was able to do abstractly, or simply inside her head. By writing about her situation and how she was feeling, she gained a deeper understanding of her situation and was able to explore solutions. Through the process of critical reflection, she was able to be more objective and less inclined to react impulsively as she had done in the very early phases of her placement. There was a sense of her gaining greater control over her destiny. Her emotions were pointers for what was important to her, as they provoked personal change and enabled her to reorientate her efforts to negotiate a challenging situation (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Lydia’s
critical reflections also served a therapeutic function for her as she grappled with remaining professional in her workplace. However, Fook and Gardner (2007) warn against focusing on “emotions for their own sake” (p. 103) believing that they may mislead the learning away from professional development. In Lydia’s case, emotions prompted reflection that led to a better understanding of herself and her workplace situation. Reflecting on experiences driven by emotions provoked Lydia to examine her ethical values and the foundation of professional practice (Bolton, 2010).

Fook and Gardner (2007) suggest that learning through critical reflection may not be effective for everyone, as some form of resilience or emotional maturity may be required to be able to use critical reflection effectively. Indeed, many of the students’ critical reflections focused on the disclosure of something that could be perceived as negative or needing improvement. This caused some students, such as Fergus, to feel vulnerable, exposed, resistant and anxious rather than to think of it as an opportunity to learn more deeply from an experience (Fook & Askeland, 2007). Fergus was an example of how learners need to believe in themselves to be capable of using critical reflection as a learning tool; otherwise, they will be continually hindered in what they do. If engagement in critical reflection as a learning activity is related to bad feelings and/or constant disapproval, it is unlikely to be used successfully (Boud et al., 1993).

The resilience demonstrated by Lydia during her difficult workplace placement was enabled by her ability to identify and organise her actions and learning. Through the processes of journal writing and receiving constructive feedback, she gained the confidence to continue her use of critical reflection as a platform for personal and professional growth. Through critical reflection, she was able to unearth positivity within a negative experience and turn adversity into opportunity. Her emotions provided the impetus that drove the reflections that led to her increased adaptability and willingness to engage in change. However, the challenge in this type of situation is how to encourage maximal learning in such a way that the learner is put at minimum risk.

Interestingly, Phillip indicated a sense of an embargo on emotions within his written critical reflections, suggesting that a culture of objectivity was required. This was especially so when his reflection was centred upon workplace or professional activities, therefore inhibiting his ability to fully engage in critical reflection. Fook and Askeland (2007) suggest this is not uncommon, as many people wrestle with feeling it is not correct to integrate personal feelings with workplace practice. Phillip implied there were expectations or rules imposed within paper
guidelines to ensure that the “proper and right way” of being academic and professional was upheld, so he went about trying to avoid or “clean up” what he considered personal, emotive journal contributions. This tension may have arisen from assumptions he made about learning through experience by equating it to heavily content-driven learning domains within his university experiences. His concerns align with Fook and Askeland (2007), who identified that creating knowledge through critical reflection “challenges more traditional ideas about learning” (p. 527). Lydia has a brush with this concept too, but seems to align objectivity with being able to manage and use her feelings to gain control of her situation, not to remove them from her experiences. Generally speaking, the students appeared to be uncertain about making sense of their inner experiences or emotions arising from their workplace experiences, even though they are inextricably linked, suggesting they had a limited understanding of the role emotions play in active learning. Greater investment in explaining the use of critical reflection templates, either voluntarily or imposed, in early phases of developing critical reflection would provide reassurance about the role of emotions in this form of learning. Given the complexity of the role emotions play in critical reflection, further understanding of how they might inhibit or enhance critical reflection would be warranted (Fook & Gardner, 2007).

6.4.2.2 Encouraging reflexivity

The sustained practice of critical reflection encouraged some students to transition from examining their experiences from an inward-looking perspective, focused on themselves, towards interpreting experiences by bringing together both inward and outward perspectives (Shaw, 2013). Reflexivity can be understood as an ability to see oneself as participating, contributing and influencing the social situation, such as in a workplace, indicating the development of self-awareness and self-analysis. Many authors agree that this ability plays a key role in critical reflection (Bolton, 2010; Malthouse, Roffey-Barentsen, & Watts, 2014; N. Thompson & Pascal, 2012; S. Thompson & Thompson, 2008). The value of self-awareness within workplace practices and critically reflecting on the influences arising from personal contributions may improve connectedness with colleagues through shared experiences.

Maia’s narrative suggests she was inclined to be reflexive, as early on in her placement she was able to acknowledge her own, and others’, participation within particular workplace experiences. For example, she was aware of her own knowledge limits and would laugh at herself with the children during gymnastics sessions. In her reflections, she provided a sense of stepping outside of herself as if “watching a movie” of herself. Similarly, Dana’s daily use of
reflection within an outdoor education setting assisted with developing her reflexivity, in an
effort to better understand her presence in relation to others and the influence she had in the
workplace. She demonstrated her reflexivity through her willingness to ask questions of
herself and through beginning to explore her experiences from multiple perspectives. Through
examining themselves in their practice, recognising weaknesses and questioning workplace
assumptions, the students were able to develop deeper insights into how thing were and how
they might be.

As the students reflected on their capacity to function autonomously, they began to think about
how they might be perceived within the workplace and how they might influence it. As both
Maia and Dana developed self-awareness, there were times when this meant dealing with
uncertainty, self-doubt and insecurity as they progressively developed confidence, authority
and responsibility for their own learning and practice. As Dana stated, “Confidence is a hard
thing to measure but an easy thing to feel… I have felt a shift in my confidence when
instructing”. There seemed to be a link between confidence and reflexivity. Reflecting back
and forth through periods of uncertainty and doubt gave rise to improved confidence, only to
find new moments of uncertainty in seemingly unending loops. As the full extent of their
responsibility and confidence became evident through reflection, the students were more likely
to be reflexive.

Bolton (2010) explained that reflexivity involves examining how personal workplace behaviour
might be complicit in supporting organisational practices that may exclude or marginalise
others. These narratives did not extend to this aspect of reflexivity; however, Lydia’s own
feelings of marginalisation made it difficult for her to move into a self-aware space, as she was
intensely focused on surviving in challenging circumstances. She questioned workplace
behaviour and the impact it had on her experiences. Yet Lydia did not venture into examining
her role in shaping her reality or how she related with others in shared practices and
conversations. Thinking from within the experience may be compromised when reflection
becomes solely a practical problem-solving exercise, leaving deep-seated questions about
circumstances, relationships, ethics and values unrequited. Reflection and reflexivity should
enable students to consider responsible and ethical ways of practising.

6.4.2.3 A ‘different’ way of thinking

The practice of critical reflection provided students with opportunities to think freely about
experiences from multiple perspectives and solve problems creatively (S. Thompson &
Thompson, 2008). As Dewey (1910/1997) argued, “thinking is specific, in that different things suggest their own meanings, tell their own unique stories, and in that they do this in very different ways with different persons” (p. 39). Dewey’s statement affirms a sentiment emerging from the narratives of students being expected to think in a ‘different’ way. Darren described this in terms of his academic supervisor looking for a particular ‘thought process’; however, Darren left this notion largely unexplained, implying clearer guidance in this ‘process’ could be beneficial. Dewey (1910/1997) argued that, “everything that comes to mind, is called a thought” (p. 1), although he identified several modes of thought, including belief, imagination, stream of consciousness and reflection. Reflection is considered a rigorous, systematic thought process unlike less structured forms of thinking (Rodgers, 2002), suggesting that there are principles to be considered and followed when thinking reflectively.

The students considered that thinking deeply about experiences to understand them in order to learn or create new knowledge was somehow different (Martin, 2013) from other previously experienced ways of thinking to learn. For example, when understanding a complex physiological function or the principles of business management, thinking is about ideas that are made sense of through propositional knowledge. These students were relatively new to the responsibility of generating new knowledge from their own experiences, that is, experiential knowledge. Therefore, this exercise was challenging, as most students expect knowledge to come from experts in the field; hence, this expectation of knowledge production through reflection and about practice was somewhat uncomfortable (Bolton, 2010; Fook & Gardner, 2007).

Arising from an uncertainty of how knowledge is created was a disconnection between critically thinking about literature in an academic setting and critically thinking about a situation in a workplace setting. The students perceived that analysis embedded within reflective thinking was different, whereas, in reality, the major difference was in the subject matter being examined and the format of examining the material within a journal writing exercise. Subject matter provided by a workplace situation is unstructured and does not have linear progression or well-defined solutions (Moon, 2004; Rolfe et al., 2011). The ability to reflect may be hindered if students have limited confidence in generating new knowledge. A simple way to overcome this barrier might be for each journal to be based on a workplace experience that is used to explore something new that may or may not work and that requires analysis, synthesis and revision, should a similar situation arise again.
During the post-placement interviews, Maia, Lydia and Phillip each identified the concept of higher order thinking or an intention to understand ideas (Moon, 1999), both new and old. These students perceived that changes had occurred in the depth and breadth of their thinking as a consequence of their prolonged engagement with critical reflection. Maia explained that she “had to make herself think deeply”, implying she could turn it on and off when necessary. Initially she was not accustomed to thinking this way, as it required more processing than recalling information. In order to think deeply, she purposefully made an effort to engage with higher order cognitive processes that meaningful critical reflection required. Lydia’s experimentation with critical reflection templates assisted her with “seeing the patterns”. Through these templates, she was able to develop and expand her thinking, enabling her to progress towards the realm of deeper engagement, and therefore improve her problem-solving strategies. Darren thought he understood the concept of critical reflection, acknowledging it as a “higher order of thinking”. However, he found it difficult to put into practice. Darren also acknowledged that having to critically reflect provided him an “opportunity to learn how to think”, suggesting that he took time to think about his thinking. Each of these students had different experiences with critical reflection according to their specific understandings and purposes, but overall, their engagement enabled them to explore deeper understandings of whatever they were reflecting on. The capacity to develop reflective thinking was dependent on the needs, desires, maturity, purposes and capacities of each student, within a unique learning environment (Dewey, 1938; Fook & Gardner, 2007; Moon, 1999). There was evidence of tension between thinking to understand a new concept created by another person and thinking to construct new knowledge from an experience.

One of the most helpful ways of enabling learners in higher education to reflect and learn from experience is to enable them to progress in their conception of the structure of knowledge. Enabling them to progress in their understanding of reflective learning will bring them to stages in which they will recognise there are alternative interpretations that require reflection. (Moon, 2004, p. 162)

### 6.4.3 Understood but unresolved

The practice of reflective writing over the duration of their placements advanced students’ understandings of the intention and purpose of critical reflection. Although the theory of critical reflection may have been understood, it was much more difficult to put into practice. Learning how to critically reflect while learning from critical reflection appeared to be challenging (Fook & Gardner, 2007), as the approach to this form of ‘writing to learn’ appears to run counter to their dominant learning experiences of writing for others, such as essay writing (Rolfe et al.,
Moon (2004) indicated that much of the literature devoted to exploring reflection has focused on how reflection can be applied to learning and the production of particular learning outcomes rather than “the mechanics of the process” (p. 83). This next section explores two areas within the process of critical reflection that proved most challenging for these students, namely, identification of a topic and critical analysis.

6.4.3.1 Identification of a topic

While students admitted to initially not knowing what to write about, this progressed to students describing a wide range of journal entry topics, such as an incident, an event, a failure or success, a situation, a challenge, a problem, an idea, a specific goal or a new experience. As this list indicates, what students considered of significance to write about may have been a single moment in time or a series of activities contributing towards something taking place over an extended period of time within the workplace or university or both. Students on placement need to develop observation skills to determine what contributes meaningfully to their learning, personal development and professional identity. Identifying something to reflect on requires a capacity to observe and think deeply about what is happening around them in a complex and dynamic workplace environment. According to Dewey (1938), the difficulties or highlights that present themselves within an experience may perplex or excite a learner, to form the basis of a reflective inquiry. Following on, Rodgers (2002) argued that “the impulse to reflect requires an encounter with, and conscious perception of, the potential significance inherent within an experience. Not everyone has the ability to perceive this potential” (p. 850). This may be especially true of students, in the early stages of cooperative education, who are new to workplace observation and the practice of regular reflection.

A particular experience may stand out as significant enough to warrant reflecting upon; however, the process of deconstructing the experience must be provided through some level of critical engagement. For instance, Maia made an interesting comment within her reflective journal regarding her inclination to observe and take notice within her workplace. She wrote, “every day is similar but not the same, providing new problems and solutions for me to handle”. Acknowledging the subtleties of her experiences, she suggested that she was prepared to identify and determine very precisely the distinctive nature of each experience by looking below the surface at what was happening around her. Observations considered by
students to be pertinent for reflection ranged from a macro (wide-angle) to a micro (close-up) level, in some cases, moving between the two extremes.

At the macro level, observations sweep broadly over an experience or activity. An example of this was seen in Darren’s initial reflections on his day assisting at a conference managed by his organisation. As he reflected on this experience, his reflections encompassed many general observations, including how the registration desk operated, friendly competition with another student and his social interaction with a keynote speaker. His journal entry could have remained focused at a macro level if he had not been provoked to interrogate his experiences more deeply. When he relooked at his general observations, he was able to provide more depth and analysis, moving towards a specific micro level of what he had learnt from his observations and experiences that day. Moving between these two levels assisted him in putting his experiences into the overall context of the workplace (bigger picture), as a basis for analysing them and making new meaning from them. While observing is deliberately exploratory in nature, it goes beyond recognition and perceptions of the familiar to understanding something new or unknown (Dewey, 1910/1997).

It was evident from the narratives that the stimulus for reflective writing was primarily to write about something that enabled learning, the purpose for reflecting, and was not solely limited to identifying uncomfortable situations, as these students, with the exception of Lydia, spent most of their time involved in positive workplace activities. Dewey (1910/1997), along with several other authors, including Fook and Gardner (2007) and Rolfe et al. (2011), have paid particular attention to reflecting on observations that may culminate in a state of uncertainty or discomfort. However, Dewey’s approach to reflecting can equally be applied to understanding experiences with a positive outcome, as it is possible to wonder what happened in both positive and negative situations, as was apparent within these narratives. This notion is supported by Dewey’s (1910/1997) statement that “no object is so familiar, so obvious, so commonplace that it may not unexpectedly present, in a novel situation, some problem and thus arouse reflection in order to understand it” (p. 120). The way students in this study reflected highlighted how the focus of reflection could be on anything that happened to them that they considered was worthwhile writing about and had purpose. This determination lay with them.

The students had the freedom and control over selecting their particular observations and feelings generated from their workplace experiences as the focus on which to write or reflect. There was tension within this deliberation, as students based this decision-making process on
their understanding, at that point in time, of knowing what to write about, how to structure their writing and who might read the entry. Interestingly, although most students had numerous positive workplace experiences, many found it was easier to focus their writing on something negative or needing to be improved, even though these experiences were often more challenging and emotional. Maia suggested that her approach to reflection was to focus on evaluating her performance, as it was “so much easier to write about self-improvement”. She considered it was more difficult to write about things that went well or when there was a perception of little happening within the workplace worthy of further scrutiny. The students felt they needed to be able to recognise and choose something from their experiences to write about that contributed meaningfully towards their learning, personal development and workplace practices. As a result, lengthy descriptive accounts were commonplace in their journals. Dana explained that, initially, she was not sure “what part I needed to look at”, which resulted in broad writing, as she was unable to easily identify a significant moment. She seemed to focus on developing the bigger picture before being able to consider the finer details. As relative beginners, most students found the practice of reflective writing challenging. The openness, freedom to choose and seemingly lack of direction rendered them unsure of how to focus and where to start their reflections (Moon, 2006).

How students moved their reflections beyond simply cataloguing their whole day tended to lie in their ability to question the significance of each experience and what it meant to them and others. If something was significant, for whatever reason, it was worth exploring (Rolfe et al., 2011). With a strong focus on self in the workplace, early journal entries were concerned with their ability to perform workplace activities through the development of technical language, competencies and skills necessary for their particular role and general communication within the workplace. This approach privileged practical knowledge (knowing what) over intuitive or tacit knowledge (knowing how) as the students developed an understanding of workplace systems.

Experiences moving towards moral and ethical issues within the workplace were seldom key drivers of critical reflection, unless there was direct personal involvement where injustices were experienced, as was seen previously with Lydia. It is not clear if these experiences were silenced and why this might be, or if they were just left unattended, as they are complex and difficult to understand. For example, Phillip reflected on a netball programme administered by an outside agency; he was concerned the children were not learning what he had expected from this costly experience due to the utilisation of an older style coaching approach. He wrote
in his journal this question: “Is it my place to say these things to coaches who are paid to do this?” Although he raised this question, he did not explore it from a moral and ethical standpoint; instead, through reflecting on this experience, he identified a potential opportunity that might enable him develop greater autonomy. His reflection had suggested an implicit awareness of rules and hierarchy that he must operate within; however, he did not extend his reflection to examining this aspect of his experience.

Depending upon the individual students’ circumstances and their desire to develop critical reflection during placement, there were transition points when their reflections became directed at assisting with making sense of other dimensions of the workplace and cooperative education. Some reflections were pragmatic as students used their reflective writing to find solutions to problems, such as progressing learning outcomes, completion of hours and managing time. However, each student advanced some aspects of his or her reflection during placement. Using Smith’s (2011) four forms and domains of critical reflection, certain students were seen to progress their focus from personal (thoughts and actions), through interpersonal (interaction with others) and contextual (concepts, theory and methods), and to critical (political and social context) forms. These noticeable but personally variable changes in the type of reflection topics occurred as the students progressed through the cooperative education programme. This observation gives support to the understanding of critical reflection as a cumulative process, progressing as the student’s practical knowledge and experience develops. These findings are similar to those of Bulpitt and Martin (2005), who examined the reflective practices of a small cohort of counsellor students. In general, as their placements advanced, the students’ journal entries began to move from predominantly descriptive accounts of workplace activities to somewhat more reflective writing as they began to question and take more notice of what was happening around them (Ovens & Tinning, 2009). It seems that when students become more analytic in their account of an experience, it is a sign that they are becoming more experienced in the practice of critical reflection (Moon, 2006).

6.4.3.2 Critical analysis

The aspirations of our cooperative education programme to have our students critically reflecting are a high expectation. Many authors agree that critical reflection is a high order skill plagued with many challenges for both teachers and learners (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Harvey et al., 2010; Moon, 2006; Rolfe et al., 2011; N. Thompson & Pascal, 2012; S.
Thompson & Thompson, 2008). To this end, BSR students were firstly encouraged to use Borton’s simple three-question framework (What? So what? What next?) as a way to guide and provoke their thinking and writing. These questions encourage a personal dialogue and the prompts form a basic outline for any piece of reflective writing. In addition, students were provided with Gibbs’s reflective framework (see Appendix M), adapted from Dewey’s six phases of reflection (Rodgers, 2002). Here, they were expected to migrate their reflective writing as they gained confidence and experience with critical reflection through ongoing writing and academic feedback. However, there were no hard and fast rules regarding the use of these frameworks, and they were not enforced. Rather, students were encouraged to take responsibility for developing their own approach to critical reflection and to use their initiative to explore their options to find an approach suited to their own style of learning. This section explores students’ uptake of frameworks to support their development of critical reflection and how they grappled with analysing their experiences.

As the practice of critical reflection was a relatively new concept to many of these students, one might assume that they would immediately feel compelled to adopt a recommended framework that might make the process of reflection seem relatively straightforward. Interestingly, many students at the outset chose not to engage in the use of a framework to help construct their reflective writing and were prepared to rely on their ‘natural’ ability to reflect.

The narratives showed how these students utilised frameworks to guide their reflective writing to varying degrees. Fergus’s reflective writing was largely short and descriptive, as he made no attempt throughout the duration of his placement to engage in a structured approach, and any change occurring to his writing was around the nature or focus of his topic choice. It is possible that his lack of confidence with engaging in the reflective process inhibited his desire to explore ways to improve his writing. Similarly, Phillip was aware of the recommended frameworks but adopted a descriptive approach to his writing based on his prior experience with reflection. In the early stages of his placement, he sought academic advice for advancing his ability to critically reflect. He had a desire to improve his reflecting; however, upon receiving a bevy of questions from his academic supervisor aimed at encouraging him to think more reflectively, he quickly reinstated an unstructured approach to his writing. He later acknowledged that the advice he received was too difficult to enact or understand. An appropriate level of guidance and support, at that point in time, may have enabled him to advance his reflective writing through giving him the confidence to try something new in his
approach. For Phillip, there was an underlying tension between wanting to improve reflective practice and not having the time or being prepared to make an effort and commit to persevering with advancing reflective practice.

Although Maia did not blatantly engage with a particular framework, it seemed she wrote her reflections based on her understanding of critical reflection, which was focused on evaluating and improving her performance. Her reflections occasionally aligned with Borton’s framework, which may suggest she subconsciously adopted elements of this simple guideline or her own version of it through her exposure to the framework in workshops and elsewhere. Her chatty writing style might suggest she preferred a narrative approach to make sense of her experiences, which leant towards a less structured (non-linear) format. In contrast, Darren admitted to utilising the “simple structure” given in class, finding that it was a convenient and an easy starting point for his reflective writing. The simple framework was easy to engage with, as it provided a clear memorable structure that was a good stepping stone for more advanced writing frameworks. In addition, he considered those who were good at writing could “make it [Borton’s framework] look like an essay”, implying that a perceived need for a level of formality and structure within his writing was necessary to satisfy assessment requirements. Although he clearly understood he had the freedom to develop his ‘own reflective style’ and should not be constrained by any one framework, he was content to let his writing style evolve through the feedback he received from his supervisors. He did not search for an approach he felt comfortable with; rather, he embraced an approach to learning by allowing his supervisors to instruct him. Consequently, his ‘you direct me’ approach did little to assist with advancing his reflective writing.

Alternatively, Dana and Lydia both experimented with critical reflection approaches during their placements. Initially, Dana was content to reflect on the key characteristics of her outdoor experiences, with the nature of her reflecting mimicking practices inherent within her outdoor education context, so she had little desire to use a specific framework. It was likely she would have persisted with this stance if it had not been for feedback from assessments that prompted her to focus on improving her ability to examine her experiences more deeply. As a consequence, she attempted to use Gibbs’s framework to structure her reflective writing, only to find it was too restrictive and unworkable for her to manage. She was unable to interpret all of Gibbs’s steps in order to translate them into her own writing, which had a tendency to be non-linear and did not conform to a sequential process as suggested within the frameworks. However, from her attempts at using the Gibbs framework, she gleaned some ideas and
moved to framing her journal entries around monitoring her progress against her specific learning outcomes, one of which was to improve critical reflection. Through tinkering with Gibbs’s framework, Dana attempted a self-questioning style around which she developed an internal dialogue, with an emphasis on addressing the question ‘why?’.

Dana’s interest in advancing her capacity to reflect came from her desire to improve this capability. In contrast, Lydia was compelled to improve her reflecting in order to sustain her existence in an unfavourable workplace. Her journal entries were often fuelled by emotional reactions to her experiences as she repeatedly encountered barriers in the workplace. Initially, her writing was heavily descriptive as she tried to make sense of what was happening around her. It was largely due to her workplace circumstances that she moved to using her journal as a platform for analysis and problem-solving of these events. She used Gibbs’s framework to provide a more defined structure to her writing, but she discovered that she was easily distracted and had difficulty interpreting the descriptions of each subtitle. It was difficult to translate the framework into her writing. Her experience with applying Gibbs’s framework to her writing prompted a search of the Internet, where she discovered a detailed critical reflection framework based on a series of questions to be addressed as the writing occurred. As she engaged with her new format, it stimulated new ways of thinking about her situation and moved her beyond her personal viewpoint to inquiring about that of others. She engaged in answering the “tiny questions” to develop and improve her critical analysis, as she found this the most difficult component of being able to critically reflect. Lydia’s narrative showed how the interaction of a determined person in a challenging social environment, combined with a purpose and desire to succeed, enabled her to discover her own way of reflecting, which helped her develop the skills to critically reflect. Therefore, the flexibility for students to develop and practice reflection, highlighted by Lydia’s narrative, allowed greater integration of reflection across the boundaries of the workplace, university and personal life (Dean, Sykes, Agostinho, & Clements, 2012) but may not lead to critical reflection.

Taking a non-systematic approach to reflective writing constrained the development of critical reflection for these novice reflectors. In support, Smith and Betts (2000) argued that “it is only from systematic reflection with support and guidance that effective learning is established. The quality of the learning is not dependent on the quality of the experience, but on the quality of the process of reflection in relation to the agreed learning outcomes” (p. 597). Simple, memorable frameworks were helpful with providing structure to their writing and thinking, but seemed limited in developing the depth of their reflection beyond descriptive reflection.
Similarly, more complex frameworks, such as Gibbs’s framework, posed a challenge for students to understand how each step of the process could be applied to their own writing, and therefore equally hindering the development of their reflective writing. Callens and Elen’s (2011) study of the impact of learner control on both systematic and non-systematic reflection approaches concluded that students who reflected using a systematic manner in an environment where the learner controlled the focus and layout of reflection were more reflective. The development of critical reflection can be fostered through the use of structured frameworks (Coulson & Harvey, 2013). However, this is reliant on strategic guidance being in place to advance the students’ understanding of how these systematic frameworks can be applied to their writing to improve it and as exemplars to illustrate standards of reflection. In addition, students’ attitudes and motivations to advance their ability to reflect are important. The findings of this study suggest that in the early stages of developing critical reflection, it could be beneficial for students to enlist the use of specific reflective writing guidelines. However, there are potential drawbacks to structuring and guiding reflections for students (Bolton, 2010), particularly if the responsibility of the learning is with the learner. These findings add to the ongoing debate around the use of structured frameworks in the facilitation of critical reflection within a work-integrated learning context (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Dean et al., 2012).

Irrespective of whether or not students used frameworks to structure their reflective writing, this study highlights the difficulty students had with moving their reflective writing from descriptive to analytical. This is not an uncommon finding when examining students’ reflective writing (Callens & Elen, 2011; Hickson, 2011; Lucas & Fleming, 2012). To complicate matters further regarding the process of reflective writing, Bolton (2010) has suggested that “carefully observed, detailed descriptions are reflective” (p. 95), as awareness of certain details can elicit insights, while providing an opportunity for “re-looking, re-observing and re-understanding” (p. 96). Meanwhile, Moon (2004) maintains the role of description within the process of reflection is to frame the issue and put it into context for reflecting upon. Bolton (2010), however, countered this claim by suggesting that “the dichotomy between description and analysis is false” (p. 96). Within the context of this study, Moon’s concept of the place of description has been adopted; however, Bolton’s comments bring to light an alternative view that may explain why students struggle with traversing between describing and analysing, as the transition may not be as clear-cut as Moon has suggested.
For example, as Dana wrote her reflections, she routinely found herself becoming “lost in the description”, as she wrote broadly about her experiences. The description is important, as it brings to light facts (Rodgers, 2002) that explain and clarify the situation; however, she thought there was an expectation that she keep this first part of her writing contained. Dana suggested that her expansive descriptions were written at the expense of moving into an analysis rather than the problem lying in her inability to choose or locate a critical point (Dewey, 1910/1997) to examine deeply. As she worked on improving her capacity to critically reflect, she became more able to identify a specific critical point that contributed meaningfully to developing her personal or professional learning goals. This practice gave her more definite focus and improved her confidence to examine an aspect of her experience. However, she remained challenged by the concept of analysing her experience. This outcome raises questions about how to support and enable students to confidently engage in critical analysis, as it is a key element in critical reflection.

Dana and Maia both thought it was a struggle to move beyond describing their experience to analysing a situation. This struggle may stem from Maia’s explanation that “I never really understood the word analysis,” which is interesting given these students are expected to critically analyse material in many papers/essays throughout their degree. Based on Dewey’s phases of reflection (Rodgers, 2002), the stepping stone from description to analysis requires the student to identify an issue, problem, concern, highlight and so forth drawn from the description of their experience. If the description is a dense catalogue of experiences rather than a discrete critical point, then identification of the issue or highlight, to be examined further, will be difficult and confusing. An issue or highlight must be identified from the description for an analysis to ensue, with suggestions to be put forward as to the possible explanations for the issue. This is where the analytical process typically begins.

These students typically wrote their analyses from one viewpoint: their own. This acted to situate them as the one influenced by the experience, therefore making meaning of the experience based solely on their own assumptions and understandings. This orientation limited the depth and breadth of their analysis. Interestingly, Lydia began to strengthen her reflective capacity by considering multiple viewpoints of the same event, such as how others might view the issue and what the literature might suggest. However, she did not extend this to recognising the role she might play in the event. Lydia’s experiences illustrated how more detailed analysis may bring together multiple resources to deepen and broaden understandings to be better equipped to act in the future. Although the students generally
agreed that the ability to analyse and reflect was an important part of what they learnt at university, it was apparent that it was difficult for most of them to articulate what it was and how to implement it. This suggests that further studies to investigate students' understanding of analysis and reflection are warranted.

6.5 Chapter summary

This chapter highlights the complexity of developing critical reflection within a cooperative education framework, provoking further discussion to consider how to invite students to be more proactive in developing this important capability. Students’ practice of critical reflection was expected to advance through the implementation of specific pedagogies within the programme, specifically, reflective journals. However, student uptake was highly variable, seemingly dependent upon many factors that might either enable or constrain an individual’s genuine engagement with its practice. Something that enabled critical reflection for one student might be constraining for another and vice versa, highlighting the importance of a degree of flexibility in any approach to developing student critical reflection. That said, irrespective of the challenges experienced in encouraging students to critically reflect, each made some measure of progress towards this goal. Overall, the picture painted is relatively positive, as students embark on the world of work having gone some way to understanding how the tools of critical reflection can enable them to self-manage, cope with and implement change, think about future experiences and approach their professional lives within a paradigm that situates them as lifelong learners.

This chapter identifies the need for ongoing research in this field, in particular, to explore the role of the academic supervision, and the impact of the complexity of the workplace on students' development of critical reflection. This research raises a number of issues around engaging students with critical reflection in ways that can improve the development of ‘depth, complexity and criticality’ of this practice. As students embark on their cooperative education journey, they are well schooled in the understanding and practice of essay writing for grades. Accordingly, this situation culminates in tension when students are expected to write reflectively as they try to predict how this type of writing should be presented for grading. The issues presented in the next chapter are centred around students’ understandings of challenging assumptions, the role of critical reflection in work readiness, practising critical reflection through curriculum design, integration of theory and practice, and university and workplace mentorship of critical reflection. Chapter 7 will discuss these issues in relation to their implications for practice and further research.
Chapter 7: Implications and future exploration

In recent times, universities, both locally and globally, have been under considerable pressure from government, employers, parents and students (who are amassing enormous debts) to produce work-ready graduates, that is, students who can walk out of university with a degree in their hand and hit the ground running into a place of work. Cooperative education, a form of work-integrated learning, is by its very nature a programme directed at preparing students for work. Issues surrounding employability have been in the forefront of those involved in cooperative education for some time; nevertheless, the philosophy of cooperative education is much further reaching than this. Its emphasis on developing critically reflective thinkers, through the experiences of work, means cooperative education has the capacity to produce graduates who are not only work-ready, but are also career ready for the future.

This thesis has explored the characteristics of critical reflection within a context previously unexplored and presented the data through unique accounts of students’ workplace experiences, as research narratives. The approach of this study has brought a degree of originality to this field of research, broadening the ways of thinking about the practice of critical reflection in cooperative education, and potentially beyond. In this chapter, I highlight the key learnings gained and the significance of my contributions to this field of study, in particular, the challenges faced with facilitating the development of critical reflection, implications for future educational practices and avenues for further exploration.

This study has strengthened the argument surrounding the complexity of workplace-based learning within higher education programmes. In particular, it explores some of the challenges facing students who are expected to be self-directed learners by engaging in, and learning through, critical reflection. Irrespective of the approaches utilised by those seeking to improve the understanding of critical reflection, it is well recognised as a complex, idiosyncratic, ideological and multidimensional phenomenon. This study is an exploration of core dimensions impacting on the practices of critical reflection in cooperative education across the tripartite structure of the student, workplace and university. It is at the heart of each of these dimensions that the challenges exist for learning about and through critical reflection.

7.1 Students

This study highlights the challenges faced and opportunities availed, within the field of cooperative education, to move students’ engagement with critical reflection from abstraction
(concept) to a utility (meaningful practice). While it is one thing to teach students about the theoretical principles of critical reflection and the rationale for its inclusion within the cooperative education programme, it is much more difficult to get them to use critical reflection as a tool for improving practice.

7.1.1 Challenging assumptions

Upon students entering their placements, it was generally perceived as being advantageous that they have prior knowledge and understanding of the workplace. However, as is shown in the data, it can also be constraining. Having strong preconceptions about how a particular workplace or profession functions can foster a lack of questioning and an unproblematic acceptance of the dominant discourses and ideologies that pervade that workplace. For example, Dana’s advanced prior knowledge of the outdoor education field restricted her growth beyond rehearsing and reaffirming dominant practices and understandings. Against this backdrop, she overlooked many moments and experiences that had the potential to offer new insights into the lived experiences of learners and the ways in which they privileged and marginalised particular ways of thinking and being in an outdoor education environment. Similarly, Lydia had quite clear expectations of herself in her workplace setting as a trainee (sport) manager. However, these expectations did not constrain her in the same way that they did Dana, primarily because they did not play out the way she expected them to. While her level of workplace engagement was very restricted, it was through the processes of critical reflection that she was able to identify clear and purposeful learning. Although all the students had preconceived notions of their workplaces based on prior experiences and knowledge, the utility of this knowledge manifested very differently in the critical reflection process.

On the basis of the narrative accounts presented in this study, it appears that the higher the correlation between students’ preconceived knowledge of a particular workplace and the actual practice of the workplace, the less likely they are to question and interrogate their experiences and assumptions. When there was a strong positive alignment between students’ experiences with their expectations, there was a greater tendency towards adopting a relatively superficial, descriptive approach to the practice of reflection. Conversely, when there was considerable disconnect between their expectations and the actual workplace, the invitation to look below the surface and question what was happening and how it might be different was stronger. It was here that the critical reflective process was at its most purposeful and powerful.
Unsettling or challenging students’ preconceived notions and prior knowledge in some way may foster greater depth of learning through critical reflection (Fook & Gardner, 2007). Taking for granted how an organisation functions and how to operate effectively within it led to the acceptance of the status quo, rather than developing deeper understandings of the workplace by questioning practices, particularly those related to sociocultural, moral and ethical issues. Questioning ‘normal or everyday’ practice may help make sense of the tensions that arise as a result of performative workplace practices and assist students in developing strategies to either engage with, or reject, performative cultures in their workplace setting. The narratives suggest that as ‘novices’ in the workplace, students were not inclined to question their assumptions about their workplaces unless they were faced with uncertainty or adversity. Added to this, critically examining workplace routines required a depth of understanding about workplace practices and cultures they initially did not have. This limited view of how to enact critical reflection meant students’ perceptions of becoming a professional were that of the ‘practising self’ rather than as a critically aware member of the workplace.

It is not clear how critical reflection as a tool may make visible assumptions for examination, but it would be worthwhile considering how to raise students’ awareness of this potential. This study suggests that journaling activities, workshops and supervisory meetings that foster discussions about critical reflection in the workplace would encourage and nurture reflections of this nature. Emerging from this analysis is the existence of tension between learning through critical reflection while concurrently learning how to critically reflect. This study implicates the need to find ways of moving students to challenge or problematise the known or familiar, in order to increase the likelihood of generating deeper, more meaningful critical reflection.

### 7.1.2 Critical reflection in work readiness

In this study, reversing the control of the learning from the teacher to the student disrupted the students’ learning routine, leaving them initially feeling uncertain about what to learn and how they would go about learning during their work placement. The students’ critical reflections, as captured in this study, demonstrated a strong emphasis on describing skills to develop strategies and techniques for future work of the same or similar kind, with most students seldom going beyond these margins of learning. Their preoccupation on workplace skills being the most important part of their job readiness meant they were generally content to distil their cooperative education experiences to preparation for that workplace. A basic construct of cooperative education is for students to have workplace experiences to increase their overall
work readiness. Therefore, if cooperative education is interpreted as being instrumental, students obtain a very narrow view of what it means to be work-ready, and the value of critical reflection becomes heavily constrained. Unfortunately, this is very evident within a number of the student narratives captured within this study.

The research narratives showed that critical reflection could potentially play two important roles in workplace learning. Firstly, it can *advance* understanding and practice of workplace skills, that is, procedural knowledge. Secondly, it can *broaden and extend* workplace knowledge and skills to develop greater dispositional knowledge or values and attitudes (Billett, 2009). These roles were not clearly understood by the students, which seemed to dilute their commitment to engaging with critically reflective practices. This was clearly evident within Fergus’s story, where he could not see the value of critical reflection in the preparation for work and becoming a professional in the sport management industry. There is a need for greater clarity for students to understand how critical reflection is strongly orientated around the practices of being work-ready and how this might be further extended beyond a specific workplace.

This study identifies the need to explore ways to increase the connectivity or value of critical reflection in a programme of work-integrated learning. For this connection to be improved, fresh and more explicit approaches should be adopted to ensure critical reflection is better coupled with a wider understanding of what it means to be work-ready. An implication of this study involves advancing how to position critical reflection as a tool or medium that can advance workplace learning, beyond simply the development of technical skills, in clear and constructive ways.

7.1.3 Scaffolding critical reflection

The BSR cooperative education programme goes to great lengths to embed critical reflection within its educational strategies to create a climate supportive of developing reflective practitioners (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; Ramsey, 2010). Reflective journals are utilised, as they can play an important role in provoking students to reflect on their experiences, they provide sustained opportunities for practising critical reflection and they are a convenient location for recording experiences. Although the students in this study had numerous opportunities for critical reflection within their journal writing, and elsewhere, most did not appear to understand how or why reflection influenced their learning.
These students were well schooled in essay writing for grades, whereas tensions arose as they tried to predict how to ‘write reflectively’ for grades. The practice of critical reflection began as the students entered the workplace through the directive of completing a regular, graded, online reflective journal. This demand meant students were required to engage with journal writing and were rewarded for doing so, albeit in a small way. Nonetheless, journal writing was challenging. Journal entries took time to complete and were perceived as personal because of the presence of emotive thoughts within the writing process. The latter made it an uncomfortable activity for some students to engage with. Therefore, most students entered into the activity of journal writing because it was compulsory, not because it was seen as a valuable exercise to enhance and extend learning.

In this study, regular reflective journal writing was a discursive practice intended to assist students with learning about critical reflection and what it can produce for them. Unfortunately, for many students, the value of critical reflection within a medium of journal writing only became apparent as they constructed their final written reports. These reports encouraged them to review their journal entries as a means to evaluate their development of the graduate capabilities. This finding suggests that regular review of journal entries, via supervisory feedback or peer discussion or other activities, can enhance engagement with and advance understanding and practice of critical reflection.

The students were introduced to, but not prescribed, frameworks aimed at giving assistance with structuring journal entries and advancing their capacity to critically reflect. Overall, there was some reluctance to engage with these structured approaches. This reluctance may be due to familiarity with the process of reflection based on prior experiences or uncertainty with the stepwise expectations of the frameworks. Those students who attempted to utilise frameworks, such as Lydia and Dana, were seen to make advances with their reflective writing. In addition, students generally experienced difficulty knowing what to reflect on within the workplace. In light of these two findings, reflective journals could be utilised as a platform to provide more explicit guidance for students to make specific types of observations or recollections within the workplace. Encouraging students to make certain observations or recollections, within a framework of themes or questions, could enhance students’ understanding of the benefits of critical reflection, both personally and professionally. A developmental approach, within specified journal entries, could prepare students to follow a guided path of critically reflective thinking by moving progressively through domains focused on personal, interpersonal, contextual and critical issues (Coulson & Harvey, 2013; E. Smith,
2011). A more directed approach with journal writing, from the outset of the programme, might foster improved student motivation to engage with and advance their capacity to critically reflect with a greater sense of purpose and understanding. However, formalising the process of critical reflection may put at risk the aims of critical reflection, in particular, the development of independent, self-directed learners. A recommendation of this study is to explore whether students who adopt a framework as well as participate in formalised activities within their journal writing enhance their capacity to critically reflect and are better able to assimilate the benefits from their cooperative education placement.

### 7.1.4 A notable silence

A foundational principle of cooperative education focuses on the integration of theory and practice. Given this premise, it was interesting that the students’ critical reflections seldom explored their understanding of how theories examined and understood within the classroom – that is, espoused theories – were utilised (or not) within the realities of workplace practices and vice versa. There was a lack of clarity around how they could examine ‘theories in use’ using critical reflection. Boud et al. (1993) claimed that “reflection created problems for the learner in balancing the abstract with reality” (p. 125). This deficit might be explained in three ways. Firstly, students do not clearly understand what constitutes ‘theory’. Secondly, alterations from the advocated form of ‘theory in use’ to suit the specifics of the workplace render it unrecognisable. Finally, there was a lack of clarity around using critical reflection for the creation of ‘personal theory’ from within practice. This situation might be symptomatic of tension between academic and practical knowledge. This implication is worthy of further interrogation to understand how critical reflection supports integration in a world where rapid changes to academic theory and theory in practice may or may not allow them to be compatible.

### 7.2 Workplace

The findings of this study reinforce claims that the environment is the single most influential factor for reflection and learning (Boud & Walker, 1998; Fook & Gardner, 2007). The type of workplace and sociocultural features of the workplace environment influenced what students aspired towards and how they framed expectations, consequently affecting how they engaged with critical reflection. The workplace, by its very nature, provided the students with elements of certainty, such as getting to know routines, and uncertainty, based around the unpredictability of sociocultural responses to different situations. Work for students was as
much about performing specific workplace activities as it was about social integration into the workplace culture. However, the focus of critical reflection was predominantly on skill development. This outcome may stem from a natural human tendency to avoid reflecting on situations that do not relieve uncertainty, therefore operating as a form of self-preservation and a way of maintaining comfort (Fook & Askeland, 2007; Hickson, 2011). This issue has implications for educators wanting to advance students’ reflections towards more critical engagement in a sustainable, ongoing manner.

7.2.1 Workplace mentors

A significant challenge for facilitators of cooperative education programmes is to gain greater acceptance from industry supervisors or mentors around the value of critical reflection in workplace learning and for them to engage in exploring workplace experiences with students from a critical perspective. Evidenced from the research narratives, there was a clear sense that most industry supervisors assumed that their role within cooperative education was to prepare students to work within their organisation, not to assist them with learning to reflect. A similar finding was recently presented in a doctorate undertaken within the same context (Fleming, 2014). Therefore, there was a natural tendency for industry supervisors to be instrumentally focused in their role of mentoring students. This finding further reinforces the challenge associated with identifying ways to embed and promote critical reflection as an integral part of the workplace experience in a more robust and holistic manner.

Opportunities to critically reflect on a wide range of learning experiences within the workplace were evident within each of the research narratives. These opportunities broadly extended from developing routine practical skills, through to acquiring greater depth of understanding of workplace and industry cultures and politics. Although there was an abundance of learning opportunities, equally, there were considerable barriers restricting students from taking their learning to greater depths. This was largely due to the workplace mentors’ perception of critical reflection as being peripheral to the core practices of working, and as a university-directed activity.

Workplace supervisors or mentors, and others in the workplace, are ideally situated alongside the student to play an important role in the facilitation of critical reflection. In spite of this, there was little evidence of this practice occurring during the work placements presented in this study. It was evident, however, that some types of workplaces placed value on reflection and actively engaged in reflective activities with their students. These workplaces were anchored
within the areas of outdoor education and coaching, which are domains well known for using reflective practices. Although this reflection was undoubtedly useful, it was heavily constrained around developing and improving best practice. Nonetheless, this realisation is somewhat encouraging, as it provides an opportunity for the university to build on industry relationships to advance the understanding of reflection that already exists in the industry and introduce greater incentives for the presence of critical reflection within the workplace.

Unless workplace mentors actively engage with critical reflection as part of their core workplace practices, this factor potentially imposes a significant challenge to encouraging the development of student critical reflection. If the practice of critical reflection is not valued by the workplace and industry, then students are unlikely to embrace it within this context. In light of this, an examination of industry supervisors’ understandings of critical reflection in the workplace and how they perceive their role in developing student critical reflection is warranted.

### 7.2.2 Incentivising critical reflection

Presently, the incentive for workplace mentors to provoke critical reflection within the workplace is limited. Lydia’s narrative identified little tutelage of any type originating from her industry mentor, along with the existence of an uncomfortable workplace culture. Provocation from this uncomfortable situation, not her workplace mentor, helped Lydia discover critical reflection as a useful vehicle for nurturing learning and coping with adversity. This study has identified the need to explore opportunities for the university to work with workplace mentors, in order to gain more involvement with, and increase their understanding of, critical reflection within the workplace. The positioning of the university within this learning partnership provides it with the perfect rationale to provide workplace mentors with information to enhance their understanding of critical reflection and ways of encouraging students to critically reflect in the workplace. The provision of workplace mentors with some (albeit) simple tools, such as questions for fostering student critical reflection, could have positive outcomes for the overall practice of critical reflection.

### 7.3 University

Earlier chapters within this thesis developed a strong rhetoric around the purpose of a cooperative education learning experience and the rationale for embedding critical reflection within such a programme of experiential learning. The literature clearly articulates what critical reflection is attempting to do within these learning situations. However, the data presented in
this study showed that at the moment (within the context of this study), we are only partially meeting these goals. The problem arises because critical reflection is not well recognised as a skill developer, and it is not clearly understood exactly what skills are being developed as a consequence of engaging in its practice. This is a challenge for those attempting to encourage critical reflection to advance learning.

7.3.1 Connecting the classroom to the workplace

As Figure 6.2 illustrated (see Section 6.4.1), critical reflection has the potential to be utilised as a bridge for bringing together the two learning environments, namely, the classroom and the workplace. Within the context of cooperative education, the primary place and source of the information for learning is located within the workplace. The onus of the learning is placed firmly in the hands of the student, with support from the university. Although critical reflection was not an entirely new concept for the students who participated in this study, there remained many challenges with the implementation of this learning approach. For example, when Dana reflected back on her yearlong placement, her initial thoughts were that “it had seemed overwhelming”. She remarked on the cumulative demands placed on her by the workplace and the university. She found herself learning how to juggle academic requirements, such as exams and written reports, with the expectations of contributing to workplace activities and developing technical competencies. In addition to the workplace hours and university assessments, other life commitments required Dana’s time, including part-time paid employment and family commitments. She was not alone here, as others, too, found ‘boundary spanning’ across both learning environments (Peach et al., 2011) created tensions, requiring skilful time management, prioritisation and negotiation. Therefore, on occasions, students’ reflective writing would result in the development of effective strategies for coping with these challenging situations. These findings advocate the need to improve our understanding of the cumulative demand that the cooperative education learning model, including the demand for critical reflection, may have on student time and well-being.

Cooperative education programmes strategically utilise critical reflection to enable students to negotiate and manage workplace and university expectations. At the beginning of cooperative education, an important defining step for the students upon entering the workplace is the identification of their role and strategies for their personal and professional development within the organisation. An important part of forming the learning contract occurs when students reflect on their past, present and future to create new and personalised learning goals. The learning contract has the flexibility to help facilitate understanding of what it means to operate
successfully within the workplace, in a way that is progressive and developmental (Cooper et al., 2010). Critically reflecting upon their learning outcomes provides a platform from which the students can develop a deeper understanding of their workplace.

Several avenues, already existent within the BSR cooperative education programme, are obvious channels to improve student engagement and practice of critical reflection. Throughout a series of workshops, there are many opportunities to facilitate and encourage students to clarify and improve their understanding of the theory and practice of critical reflection. Examples include activities in the form of group work exploring the purpose of critical reflection, exemplars of reflective writing for examination, practice in utilising reflection frameworks to reflect on a recent experience and having past students as guest speakers. Workshop activities should be reinforced to encourage ongoing reflective practice. This reinforcement can be readily positioned within supervisory meetings and reflective journals. Further support could arise from receiving timely constructive feedback that may occur in a variety of forms, such as student-to-student discussion, workshop facilitator feedback, group discussions, supervisor feedback, reflective journals and other reflective elements of the programme. However, it is important to remain cognisant of a fine line between not providing adequate support and placing too much emphasis on the provision of structured learning opportunities, as both may result in student demotivation.

7.3.2 Supervision encourages critical reflection

The provision of academic supervision for each student is a significant feature of the cooperative education programme, especially as this process is located within an undergraduate degree. Although the principles of cooperative education supervision are very similar to those required for supervision of a postgraduate student, this might not be clearly understood by the academic supervisors. The university environment presents an opportunity to encourage effective cooperative education supervision as a means of gaining and advancing postgraduate supervision skills. Therefore, cooperative education supervision can be viewed as a developmental opportunity for emerging supervisors, such as late-stage doctoral candidates. Accordingly, it can be a place for experimenting with different approaches to supervision because the stakes might not be so high. With some 30 plus academic supervisors involved in our programme, it is unclear whether they role model and mentor critical reflection as a means of developing their own learning through their supervisory practices. This area warrants further exploration.
Academic supervisors are expected to provide students with feedback on some journal entries. In addition, supervisors should encourage students to learn autonomously through maintaining a reflective journal, engage students in reflective conversations to help draw out multiple perspectives surrounding an experience and assess the reflective journals at the completion of each paper/unit. In some instances, they also provide moral and emotional support. Analogously to the industry supervisors’ role, if the academic supervisor has limited recognition of the value of critical reflection or how to apply it to learning, then student feedback is likely to be limited, thus creating a barrier to the advancement of the students’ understanding and practice of critical reflection.

It must be clearly understood by students that there is no right or wrong topic of reflection and that feedback is not given as criticism but rather as constructive guidance and assistance to deepen, expand or enhance the understanding of the experience and broaden the thinking associated within it. Although this was not directly announced within the data presented in this study, my experiences as an academic supervisor have brought this point to my attention from time to time. In particular, this has highlighted to me the importance of forming constructive supervisory relationships and developing good mentoring practices that include making explicit through negotiations the expectations of the supervisory relationship.

Although the bulk of university funding arises directly from undergraduate student fees and related government contributions, university status is heavily contingent upon research outputs. Consequently, university academics can gain considerable recognition, kudos and promotion through meaningful engagement in research activities. This point can lead to situations where academics will readily abdicate teaching responsibilities in order to pursue research outcomes. Whereas the opportunity to supervise a postgraduate student usually arises via a personal invitation, cooperative education supervision within the BSR programme is mandatory, with all academics being allocated a quota of students to supervise. Where supervision within cooperative education is seen as an impost, it will almost certainly influence the input a student may receive to assist them with their development of critical reflection.

Student support and encouragement with critically reflective thinking and writing arises from their academic and industry supervisors. As previously indicated, the supervisor can play a pivotal role in the student’s development and practice of critical reflection. This study has identified that the university needs to be more proactive in encouraging greater supervisor understanding of critical reflection within cooperative education. Further, it would also be beneficial to encourage supervisors to enhance their own reflective practices within this
process. Improving supervisor understanding and practice of critical reflection would lead to more student support in this area and, ideally, better practice. Greater supervisory support could be in the form of professional development days, hints and tips in newsletters, guidelines within supervisory guides, encouraging reflective dialogues during meetings, and so forth.

The School of Sport and Recreation has attempted to add value to cooperative education supervision through presenting an annual academic supervision award. This award includes a small financial incentive that may contribute towards any form of professional development, such as attending a conference. At the completion of their cooperative education programme, students are invited to nominate their academic supervisor for the award. As a result of the insights generated through this study, it is clear more research needs to be conducted to explore academic supervisors' understanding and practices around supporting student critical reflection in the workplace.

7.4 Closing comments

From this study, it is clear that to invest in nurturing the understanding and practice of critical reflection within a cooperative education context, the roles of the student, workplace mentor and academic supervisor must be considered. Multiple barriers and enablers are situated across and within these three standpoints, and are uniquely different within each setting. Although the data generated through this study are orientated around student experiences, they clearly highlight the respective contributions of the workplace and academic supervisors in harnessing the potential of critical reflection. It is reasonable to conclude that bringing these three standpoints into closer alignment has the potential to build stronger synergies to maximise the outcomes of cooperative education and advance the contribution of critical reflection within this context.

The true value of critical reflection lies at the heart of employees of the future, who must be capable of learning, unlearning and relearning (Boud et al., 1993; Boud & Walker, 1998). An educative process that includes the practice of critical reflection should provide conditions for increased self-awareness and professional growth (practical, intellectual and moral) (Dewey, 1916/2007, 1938), thus creating building blocks for lifelong learning. While the data highlight the complex nature of its practical translation within a cooperative education programme, they also sustain my belief that critical reflection has the potential to develop professionals who are better placed to understand the present and shape the future (Eames & Coll, 2010).
This thesis challenges the notion that cooperative education, because of its workplace or work readiness intention, may somehow constitute a more vocationally focused style of learning. Given the primacy I have placed on the ‘student voice’ in the compilation of this thesis, it is fitting that I give them the last word. Here, I draw on Lydia’s interview to amplify the potential for critical reflection to be used in practical and purposeful ways to achieve deeper understandings for better outcomes:

[Critical reflection] was like a saviour for me… I just think it’s a wonderful tool and I will continue to use it in my future… I’m just relieved that I learnt about that at university, it was great… I use it for my parenting; I use it for situations where I feel angry about things and want to change things. I find it is like a life coach. It makes you really analyse what you are doing and why you’re doing it. And makes you think that maybe if you change your own attitude, things might be different. (Int5)


Fleming, J. (2015a). Enhancing cooperative education through action learning projects. In M. Li & Y. Zhao (Eds.), *Exploring learning and teaching in higher education* (pp. 171–187). Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-55352-3_7


Appendices

Appendix A: AUT ethics approval

MEMORANDUM
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Patricia Lucas
From: Rosemary Godbold, Executive Secretary, AUTEC
Date: 31 August 2012
Subject: Ethics Application Number 12/214 Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education.

Dear Patricia

I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 27 August 2012. Your application is now approved for a period of three years until 27 August 2015.

AUTEC noted that with the potentially high number of Maori participants, this might provide the researcher with an opportunity to consider cultural perspectives within critical reflection.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit to AUTEC the following:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 27 August 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 27 August 2015 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6902. Alternatively you may contact your AUTEC Faculty Representative (a list with contact details may be found in the Ethics Knowledge Base at http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics).

On behalf of the AUTEC and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee
Appendix B: AUT ethics approval amendment

24 September 2014

Patricia Lucas
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Patricia

Re: Ethics Application: 12/214 Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education.

Thank you for your request for approval of an amendment to your ethics application.

I have approved the minor amendment to your ethics application to allow alternative treatments for the presentation of the data.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC):

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 27 August 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 27 August 2015 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Signature Redacted by Library
Appendix C: Deakin ethics approval

Memorandum

To: A/Prof Chris Hickey
   School of Education
   G

From: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC)

Date: 02 October, 2012

Subject: 2012-269
   Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation in cooperative education
   Please quote this project number in all future communications

The application for this project was considered at the DU-HREC meeting held on 01/10/2012.

Approval has been given for Ms Patricia Rose Lucas, under the supervision of A/Prof Chris Hickey, School of Education, to undertake this project from 1/10/2012 to 1/10/2016.

The approval given by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Human Research Ethics Unit immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Modifications are requested by other HRECs.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Human Research Ethics Unit
research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Telephone 03 9251 7123
Appendix D: Deakin ethics approval amendment

Human Research Ethics
Deakin Research Integrity
Building BC Burwood Campus
Postal: 221 Burwood Highway
Burwood Victoria 3125 Australia
Telephone 03 9251 7123
research-ethics@deakin.edu.au

Memorandum

To: Prof Chris Hickey
School of Education

From: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC)

Date: 21 October 2014

Subject: Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation in cooperative education

Please quote this project number in all future communications

The modification to this project, submitted on 21/10/2014 has been approved by the committee executive on 21/10/2014.

Approval has been given for Ms Patricia Rose Lucas, under the supervision of Prof Chris Hickey, School of Education, to continue this project as modified to 1/10/2016.

The approval given by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee is given only for the project and for the period as stated in the approval. It is your responsibility to contact the Human Research Ethics Unit immediately should any of the following occur:

- Serious or unexpected adverse effects on the participants
- Any proposed changes in the protocol, including extensions of time.
- Any events which might affect the continuing ethical acceptability of the project.
- The project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
- Modifications are requested by other HRECs.

In addition you will be required to report on the progress of your project at least once every year and at the conclusion of the project. Failure to report as required will result in suspension of your approval to proceed with the project.

DUHREC may need to audit this project as part of the requirements for monitoring set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

Human Research Ethics Unit
research-ethics@deakin.edu.au
Telephone: 03 9251 7123
Appendix E: Participant information sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:
03 August 2012

Project Title
Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education.

An Invitation
Hi, I am Patricia Lucas and I am currently doing my PhD in education at Deakin University. You are invited to participate in my research project that seeks to determine Bachelor of Sport and Recreation (BSR) students' understanding, engagement and practice of critical reflection in cooperative education. The study will focus on the students' experiences of critical reflection during their cooperative education papers in their final year of their degree. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way. Any information obtained from you will not be used.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You are invited to participate, as you are a student who has completed the sport and recreation cooperative education papers at Auckland University of Technology. Participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any stage. (Any student that I have been the academic supervisor for during their cooperative education papers will be excluded from the study).

What will happen in this research?
There are several ways you may participate in this study.

1. Complete a questionnaire that will be administered by a research assistant at the completion of your cooperative education papers.

2. Give consent for your journal/blog and the reflection section of your final report to be analysed. Your reflective writing will assist with understanding the application of reflection framework, levels of reflection, progression, nature of issues, characteristics of writing style, missed opportunities and evidence of feedback. Your reflective assessments will already have been read and assessed prior to the documents being used for this study. A final grade for the sport and recreation cooperative paper will also have been awarded.

3. As a graduate of the BSR degree you may participate in a semi-structured interview to be held at a time to be arranged that is convenient for you to attend, either in person or via SKYPE. You will give written contact details to the research assistant at the time of the questionnaire completion. An administration person will arrange an interview time and I will conduct the interview. A consent form will be completed at the time of the interview.

4. At the time of the interview you may be asked to provide further consent for your reflective writing (journal and report) to be accessed a second time to align this data with your interview transcript. Your identity will be protected at all time by the removal of all names from transcripts and documents.

What are the discomforts and risks?
This project is using graded student assessments (reflective journal is part of assessment 6 in the paper and reflection section of the final report which is assessment 3) therefore any conflict of interest or issues around confidentiality will be addressed by using an independent person to copy the documents and...
remove any evidence of names or ID numbers before the documents are given to the researcher for document analysis.

You may feel discomfort at being interviewed, and your thoughts being audiotaped. Talking about aspects of your experiences may also be unsettling. However I will be conducting interviews in a friendly manner, respecting and valuing your contribution. Any information you provide, oral and written, will be treated confidentially and your identity will be protected at all times.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

It is unlikely that there will be any risks to you as a participant.

The data will be aggregated so there will be no individual journal and report analysis. All reflective journals and reports will be treated with respect and confidentiality. Interviewees who consent to have their reflective writing copied again and aligned with their interview will be de-identified by the removal of all names and allocation of an interview number.

You can choose whether you answer questions during interviews, you can stop an interview and you can withdraw from the research at any time. Counselling is available if requested, through AUT Counselling Services, at no cost to you for up to three sessions.

The researcher is not involved in teaching postgraduate papers.

**What are the benefits?**

The findings of this research will primarily be used to improve the cooperative education experience for students. As a participant in this study you may benefit from focusing on aspects of your experiences within your degree. Some findings may be relevant for other programmes and will be made available through the national body for work-integrated learning (New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education). In addition this research will be presented as part of my PhD thesis.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Your identity will remain confidential at all times during and following this research. This will be achieved through safe storage of your personal details and consent forms, kept separate to research data. In addition, your name will be replaced with a number following transcription of all interviews and upon my receiving your reflection documents. All data collected will be combined with data from other participants. Reports and publications of findings will not contain any identifying material. Throughout the research project and beyond, all email communication with you will be copied and transferred to a secure external hard drive that only I have access to. Inbox copies will be deleted from my AUT address, to ensure your privacy.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

Cost to the participant will be time for completion of:

1. Questionnaire completion approximately 15 minutes.
2. Interview approximately 45 minutes

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

This information sheet will be available for you to consider, on AUTonline, one week prior to the data collection date. If you would like further information regarding the study, please email or call me (details provided below). Please consider this invitation and if you would like to participate in this research. Your participation throughout this study is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time prior to completion of the data collection (December 2012), with the exception of the questionnaire which will unable to identify. Written or verbal withdrawal from the study will be required and all data from you would then be removed and destroyed, with no adverse consequences for you.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you participate in the questionnaire this is indicates your consent.
You can give consent to have your journal and report used in this study by completing the journal consent form at the time of the questionnaire administration or at the time of your interview.

If you agree to participate in the interview, you will provide contact details at the time of completing the questionnaire and a research assistant will arrange a convenient meeting time for your interview. You will be invited to complete an interview consent form prior to the interview.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you would like to receive feedback on the results of this research, you can indicate this on the consent forms. You may also verbally indicate an interest in receiving results of the research at any time during the study. I will forward information to you, through email or via post once the research is completed.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Christopher Hickey, chick@deakin.edu.au, phone +61 3 522 72666

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Dr Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6902 or to the Manager, Research Integrity, Research Services, Deakin University, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, Vic 3125, Australia. Telephone (+61 3 9251 7129)

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:
Patricia Lucas, Room AF203, School of Sport and Recreation, Auckland University of Technology, patricia.lucas@aut.ac.nz, phone (09) 921 9999 extension 7134

Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Professor Christopher Hickey, Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Arts & Education, Deakin University, Locked Bag 20000, Geelong, VIC, Australia, chick@deakin.edu.au, Phone +61 (0)352272666

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012, AUTEC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 02 October 2012, Reference number 2012-269.
Appendix F: Interview consent

Interview Consent Form

Project title: Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education

Project Supervisor: Professor Chris Hickey (Deakin University, Australia)
Researcher: Patricia Lucas, Senior lecturer, School of Sport and Recreation, Auckland University of Technology and PhD student (Deakin University).

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 03 August 2012.
☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself, or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
☐ I agree to take part in this research.
☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant’s signature: .................................................................
Participant’s name: .................................................................
Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):
.................................................................................................
.................................................................................................
.................................................................................................
.................................................................................................

Date:
Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012 AUTC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 02 October 2012 DUHREC Reference number 2012-269

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.
Appendix G: Journal consent 1

JOURNAL and REPORT CONSENT FORM

Project title: Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education

Project Supervisor: Professor Chris Hickey (Deakin University, Australia)

Researcher: Patricia Lucas, Senior lecturer, School of Sport and Recreation, Auckland University of Technology and PhD student (Deakin University).

☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 3 August 2012.

☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ I understand that my identity will be removed from my journal/blog and final report prior to handing over to the researcher for analysis. Reports or publication of the findings will not contain any identifying material.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw the consent that I have provided for this project at any time prior to the identity being removed from my journal/blog and final report, without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ If I withdraw when my journal/blog and final report has been copied but the identity not yet removed, I understand that the copy of my journal/blog and final report will be destroyed using a shredder.

☐ I agree to allow my journal/blog and final report to be used in this research.

☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant signature: .......................................................... 

Participant’s name: ..........................................................

Date: 

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012
AUTC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 02 October 2012 DUHREC Reference number 2012-269

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form
Appendix H: Journal consent 2

JOURNAL and REPORT CONSENT FORM

Project title: Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education

Project Supervisor: Professor Chris Hickey (Deakin University, Australia)
Researcher: Patricia Lucas, Senior lecturer, School of Sport and Recreation, Auckland University of Technology and PhD student (Deakin University).

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 3 August 2012.
○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
○ I understand that my identity will be removed from my journal/blog and final report prior to handing over to the researcher for analysis. Reports or publication of the findings will not contain any identifying material.
○ I understand my journal/blog and final report will be aligned with my interview transcript and my identity will be removed.
○ I understand that I may withdraw the consent that I have provided for this project at any time prior to the identity being removed from my journal/blog and final report, without being disadvantaged in any way.
○ If I withdraw when my journal/blog and final report has been copied but the identity not yet removed, I understand that the copy of my journal/blog and final report will be destroyed using a shredder.
○ I agree to allow my journal/blog and final report to be used in this research.
○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ○ No ○

Participant signature: ..........................................................................................................

Participant’s name: ..........................................................................................................

Date: ...............................................................................................................................

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012
AUTEC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 02 October 2012 DUHREC Reference number 2012-269

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form
Appendix I: Expressions of interest

I have read the information provided about the above project and I would like to volunteer to participate in an interview that will be conducted at a later date.

Name: __________________________________________
Phone contact: ___________________________________
Email address: ___________________________________

DO NOT attach this form to your questionnaire.

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM IN THE SEPARATE ENVELOPE PROVIDED.

Researcher contact details: patricia.lucas@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012
AUTEC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee on 02 October 2012 DUHREC Reference number 2012-269
Appendix J: Confidentiality agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education

Project Supervisor: Professor Chris Hickey
Researcher: Patricia Lucas

- I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber’s signature: ............................................................................................................
Transcriber’s name: ...................................................................................................................
Transcriber’s Contact Details (if appropriate):
..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................
..............................................................................................................................................

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 August 2012
AUTEC Reference number 12/214 and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee
on 02 October 2012 DUHREC Reference number 2012-269

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form.
Appendix K: Questionnaire

Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education.

You are invited to take part in a questionnaire to help gain an understanding of your experience of critical reflection in cooperative education. The questionnaire will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. This is an anonymous questionnaire and therefore you will not be identifiable to the researcher or in any presentation or publication of the results. By completing this survey you indicate your consent to participate. If you would like further information please contact: the project supervisor, Dr Chris Hickey chris.hickey@deakin.edu.au or the researcher Patricia Lucas patricia.lucas@aut.ac.nz.

Background

Gender: Male Female (circle)  Age: Under 22  23-30  Over 30 (circle)

Ethnicity: (circle)
- NZ European/pakeha
- Maori
- Pacific Islander
- Asian (please write your country of origin) ________________
- Other (please write your ethnicity) ________________

BSR major: ______________________
1. What does critical reflection mean to you?

2. Have you used reflection in your other papers prior to co-op?
   If so, which paper/s.

3. Why do you think critical reflection is incorporated in the co-op papers?
4. What helped you with critical reflection? Why?

5. Do you think there are benefits of doing critical reflection? If so, what and why?

6. How do you decide what to critically reflect on and why?

7. When do you critically reflect and why?

8. Where do you critically reflect and why?

9. Did your opinion of critical reflection change through the duration of co-op? If so, what changed and why?
10. What was it about critical reflection that you found most challenging? Why is this so?

11. Was there anything about critical reflection that became easier as time went on? Why is this so?

12. What would help you improve your ability to critically reflect? Why is this so?

13. How important is critical reflection to you? Why?

14. Think back to your experiences of critical reflection in your co-op papers. With those experiences in mind, write a statement to complete each of the following sentences. If the introduction to the sentence does not apply to you, do not attempt to complete it. It will be helpful if your responses can be specific and detailed. In relation to critical reflection:

   In the beginning I thought .....  

   At the end I thought .....  

   I found it easy to .....
I found it difficult to ....

I always look forward to ......

I was surprised that ....

I am not sure why we ....

I don't enjoy ....

I did enjoy......

15. Draw a picture of how you see critical reflection fitting into the co-op papers.

16. I found critical reflection was.....

17. Any other comments.

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire.
Please place in the box provided.
Appendix L: Interview guidelines

Events within the interview

Understanding critical reflection in sport and recreation cooperative education interview.
Indicative schedule.

The following questions may be revised when the questionnaire analysis is underway.

1. Opening and welcome
2. Tell me about your co-op experience.
3. What do you think about critical reflection. Can you give me some examples.
4. What is your understanding of the meaning and purpose of critical reflection in cooperative education? How do you know this?
5. Tell me how do you go about critically reflecting? What do you do? Please explain each step that you take. Why do you go about it this way?
6. When and where do you critically reflect? Why?
7. What has helped you to critically reflect? What made it hard to critically reflect?
8. Thank you and closing.
Appendix M: Gibbs’s stages of reflection

Stages of Reflection

Gibbs (1988) proposes a six-stage model to develop skills in reflection:

1. **Description of the event**, where a student describes in detail the event they are reflecting on: what they were doing; what was the context; what happened; what was their role; what part did other people play; what was the result.

2. **Feelings and thoughts**, the notion of self-awareness. At this stage the student tries to recall and explore those things that were going on in their head; how they were feeling when they started; what were they thinking about at the time; how did it make them feel; how they felt about the outcome of the event; and what they think about the event in hindsight.

3. **Evaluation**, the student considers what was good and bad about the experience.

4. **Analysis**, the student breaks the event down into the component parts to be explored separately in detail, including what went well; what they and others did well; what went wrong; and what others did that could be improved.

5. **Conclusion and synthesis**, make some concluding judgements based on the information explored during the analysis stage.

6. **Formulation of an action plan**, reflect on what they would do the same and what they would do differently if they were to encounter the same/similar situation again.