Overview of the Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education

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The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE) commenced in 2000, is fully online and a free open access journal. Over the last 12 years, the journal has grown and become well-established in the cooperative education (co-op) and work-integrated learning (WIL) community. Number of publications per year has steadily increased and number of submissions has shown strong growth, especially in the last three years. Articles from the journal are increasingly being cited in articles in other journals, with some APJCE articles obtaining regular and sustained citations. The article presented here will provide an overview of the journal, recent developments, a statistical analysis of submission and publication rates, and how the journal sits in the context of co-op/WIL literature internationally.

Introduction

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education (APJCE) was founded in 1999 by Prof. Richard K. Coll, hosted by the University of Waikato and published by the New Zealand Association for Cooperative Education (NZACE). The first volume was published in 2000. The driving factors for founding the journal were several prominent factors. Near the end of the 1990’s cooperative education (co-op) and work-integrated learning (WIL) research appeared to have slowed, with little new research appearing in the literature. However, activities at regional and international conferences suggested that much research, albeit mostly program evaluation type research, appeared to be occurring. In addition, co-op research in the Asia-Pacific region was mostly restricted to New Zealand and Australia, which contrasts to the strong growth of co-op programmes in the Asian countries. This suggested that research activity in the Asia-Pacific region was perhaps in the developmental stages, with either research activity being limited or co-op practitioners who are engaged in research having little experience in publishing the research in journals. Thus, APJCE set out with the intention of becoming a developmental journal to encourage emerging researchers from the Asia-Pacific region to develop their works, which often is presented as conference papers, into a published journal article. The journal took a hands-on, constructive approach with guidance, to reviewing to better enable up-and-coming researchers to successfully publish their work, and not appear to be overly discouraging or critical.

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Development and growth of Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education

Initially APJCE sought five types of manuscripts; research, discussion/topical issues papers, best practice, book reviews, and correspondence from the community. Since 2003 there has been no correspondence published in APJCE and as the journal has developed further, it is no longer something the journal seeks. The prevalent forms of manuscript submitted have been topical issues/discussion papers and research paper submissions. There have been several book reviews published, however, will likely remain limited to a few per year. Best practice papers were also originally sought, as this is the likely paper type where new researchers begin their publishing career, however is now actively discouraged unless it explores a particularly unique or unusual setting. Instead best practice papers are encouraged to refocus the manuscript from the context (e.g., placement programme delivery) to a particular unique or challenging educational aspect encountered (using the context of the placement programme).

Reviewers of literature state that co-op/WIL literature worldwide has improved over the last 15 years. Bartkus and Stull (2004) described the co-op/WIL literature in 1997 as 'sketchy, limited, and uncertain’, with a predominate focus on best practice, however, since then Bartkus and Higgs (2011) note that the literature has strengthened. The strengthening of the literature is reflective of greater research activity over that period, particularly by Australian researchers, which subsequently is also reflected in the growth of APJCE. Of significance, an overview of the international co-op/WIL research community (Zegwaard & Coll, 2011) shows that over the last 15 years it has matured to be able to sustain two central journals, the APJCE and the Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships (JCEI). A further indication of the maturity of the co-op/WIL literature is that increasingly co-op/WIL orientated literature is being cited in discipline-specific educational journals other than two central Co-op/WIL journals (Bartkus, 2007; Coll & Kalnins, 2009).

At the beginning of 2010, the APJCE publication rate had grown enough to require a copy editor to undertake the tasks of preparing the manuscripts for publication and interacting with authors to clarify details. The original APJCE website, by then significantly dated, was restructured and upgraded to improve functionality and allow better accessibility of what has grown to be a significant resource of literature (as of begging of 2013, containing ~150 articles). The editorial board has also expanded over this time to 37 members from a variety of countries.

In 2010, APJCE was ranked by the Australian Research Council (ARC) as a B journal, which was particularly favourable in light of its humble and recent beginnings. The ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) is currently reviewing inclusion eligibility and recently APJCE was added to the Reuters Scopus database, Cabell’s Directories, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). Inclusion in these databases will grant APJCE a higher profile and likely increase the number of citations its articles receives. With the recent inclusion to Scopus, the journal will eventually be provided with an Impact Factor and other bibliometric data (which is being computed from 2013 onwards, with first results to be made available in 2014).
Reviewing process

APJCE adheres to the editorial guidelines by the International Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE). Manuscripts are double blind peer reviewed by at least two members of the editorial board. Before the manuscript is sent to members of the editorial board, the Editor-in-Chief conducts a review of the manuscript to determine if the manuscript is suitable for editorial board’s review.

Review of the manuscript is usually completed within two months. The review documents are returned to the author verbatim, along with any additional comments and the manuscript recommendation. If the manuscript has been recommended for publication after modifications, the authors are asked to attend or respond to the reviewers comments and recommended modifications. The manuscript is then returned to the Editor-in-Chief to determine if the editorial board’s comments have been reasonably addressed or responded to, and if so, the manuscript is passed to the copy editor for preparation for publication. Final publication of articles occurs as articles become available from the copy editor. As with most other online journals, articles can be published as these become available (a rolling publication) rather than waiting for a full issue.

Journal statistics

For tracking and statistical purposes, APJCE maintains a database of all submitted manuscripts which, with data from Google Scholar (providing citation statistics) and Google Analytics (providing APJCE website visits and download statistics), a valuable insight of the journal performance can be obtained.

Submission, rejection, and publication rates

The annual publication rate grew in two stages; from 2000 to 2002, and again from 2006 to present (Figure 1a). The decline in 2005 mirrors a decrease in the submission rate in the previous year (Figure 1b). The 2009 increase in publication rate was a response to the special edition around the WACE Manly, Australia, conference theme, whilst the increased submission rate in the 2010, was a combined effect of the special edition based on the theme of the 2010 ACEN conference and the 2010 release of the ARC rankings.

Not all journals openly communicate rejection rates and may measure ‘rejection’ differently. Rates of 40-50% appear common, with journals claiming a high impact factor rejecting well over 70% (Aarssen et al., 2008), with some over 90%. Some journals use high rejection rates as one measure of quality of its journal; however, it is argued by some that many publishable manuscripts are rejected in the process. APJCE takes the approach of having as many publishable manuscripts published, on the proviso these are ultimately of publishable quality and scholarly. APJCE uses a constructive approach to reviewing and will provide editorial support if warranted to assist the authors with their manuscripts.
An outright rejection of the manuscript after review is unusual, however, some manuscripts require ‘major revision with re-review’ (essentially a ‘fatal review’). Some authors, with support, do carryout this major revision and resubmit for review, and ultimately produce a publishable manuscript. For the purposes of reporting APJCE overall rejection rate in this article, the rejection rate is the sum of the number of manuscripts that are; 1) rejected prior to review, 2) rejected after review, 3) and review outcomes of ‘major revision with re-review’ which subsequently are not resubmitted. The overall rejection rate for APJCE is ~30% (Figure 1b). This reject rate has trended up recently, mostly due to a growing number of manuscripts rejected before editorial board review on grounds of relevance.

**APJCE authors and website usage**

The initial intent of APJCE was to focus on the Asia-Pacific region. There were already well-established bodies of researchers in New Zealand and Australia, which is reflected in the current makeup of the editorial board, however, there was little published research activity from Asia. There are APJCE articles authored by researchers from Asia (e.g., Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand), however, when analysing the country of origin for all APJCE authors (Figure 2a), the portion of authors from Asia are comparatively few. Most APJCE authors were based in New Zealand and, particularly since 2009, Australia, which is reflective of the recent growth of WIL in Australia. Beyond New Zealand and Australia, a number of authors were based in Africa (mostly South Africa) and Europe (mostly the UK and Germany).

For the period between 1 January, 2012 and 1 January, 2013, the APJCE website received 5,390 individual visits creating 9,939 downloads. Countries of origin that most often accesses the APJCE website were from the regions of Asia and the Pacific (the later
consisting mostly of New Zealand and Australia with some from Philippines and Indonesia), reflecting APJCE original Asia-Pacific focus, with a further 32% beyond the Asia-Pacific region (Figure 2b). The high usage from Asian countries contrasts to the low portion of authors based in Asian countries (Figure 2a), which may indicate that APJCE is fulfilling a significant need for (free) literature resources in this region rather than a destination for publishing research, and suggests perhaps that co-op/WIL research in this region is still limited. Similarly, the low number of authors from the Americas (North, Central, and South America) contrasts to the amount of website usage from this region (almost entirely from the US and Canada). Unlike in Asia, Co-op/WIL has had a long and well-established history in North America, and the contrast between the two data sets may reflect that either researchers from this region are publishing in other journals (e.g., JCEI) or that co-op/WIL is at a stage of maturity where limited research activity tends to occur. Whatever the reason for this difference, this region nevertheless appears to have an appreciable want for co-op/WIL literature.

When analysing the website usage per country, significant volume were from six countries; New Zealand (19%), Australia (15%), the US (10%), Indonesia (8%), Canada (5%), India (4%) – website usage from other Asian countries was evenly spread across a large number of countries rather than concentrated to a few particular countries. Four of these countries are traditionally regarded as ‘powerhouses’ in co-op/WIL research. Usage statistics, however, are constantly changing. The UK (another co-op/WIL ‘powerhouse’) for the period of mid-2011 to beginning of 2012 was the 4th most common country of origin for users (Zegwaard, 2012), however, has now dropped to 12th, whilst over this same period rapid usage increases were generated from Indonesia and India.
For the year of 2012, just over half of APJCE website users arrived at the website using search engines, an increase from the 2011 period, whilst a quarter was direct traffic (e.g., entering in the URL or using bookmarks/favourites) and the remainder was referral traffic (e.g., via hyperlinks or databases). Analyses on key search words used includes (in descending order); the journal title (in a variety of combinations), APJCE, graduate competencies, achievement and work placements, and then sentences using ‘cooperative education’ and ‘work-integrated leaning’ with modifiers such as; ‘learning models’, ‘assessment’, ‘reflection’, and ‘impact’.

Citations of APJCE articles

One measure of acceptance of any journal by its research community is the number of citations its articles receives, in particularly its citations in other journals. Often citations are within articles published in the same journal or author self-citations in other journals. However, increasingly APJCE articles are cited (which are not self-citations) in other journals (e.g., in Science Education International, Journal of Chemical Education, The Qualitative Report, Social Indicators Research, Asia Pacific Education Review, The Journal of International Agricultural Education, Higher Education, and Tertiary Education and Management).

The total number of citations of APJCE articles, according to Google Scholar, appear to increase, with the work by Hodges and Burchell (2003) and Rainsbury, Burchell, Hodges, and Lay (2002) being the most cited APJCE articles (Table 1). The method for measuring citations employed by Google Scholar tends to overlook citations in books unless these are made available online, and favours older publications as these have had greater time to be cited. Redner (2004) in his extensive analysis of all the ISI-catalogued journals and the Physical Review journals, including nearly 800,000 journal articles – mostly science, indicated a mean citation age of 6.2 years, with an average of 8.81 citations per article. However average number of citation for an article have been proven to vary widely amongst disciplines and journals (Calver & Bradley, 2009), with more commonly reported average citation numbers being between one and four (Amin & Mabe, 2000). Some APJCE articles from post-2005 are in the top 10 commonly cited APJCE articles (Table 1), and increasingly APJCE articles are being cited in scholarly books, for example the greatest portion of post-2000 literature cited in the 2011 International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education (Coll & Zegwaard, 2011) were articles from APJCE (Zegwaard, 2012).
Conclusion and the future

Since the founding of APJCE, the journal has grown and matured, with the submission and publication rates steadily increasing. The journal now holds a substantive collection of scholarly literature that informs current research work in co-op/WIL. As the wider co-op/WIL literature has advanced, APJCE has become well-established within its community of researchers. For example, there are a growing number of APJCE citations in subject-specific and general educational journals, and in the 2011 International Handbook for Cooperative and Work-Integrated Education, it was the most common journal cited for recently published articles. The open access, online model has been a strength for the journal, allowing free and readily accessible literature to the wider research and practitioner community. Most APJCE authors are from Australia and New Zealand, with a significant contribution from European and African countries. However, APJCE users are internationally more evenly distributed than its author base, suggesting that APJCE is meeting a need for co-op/WIL literature well beyond Asia-Pacific.

With the increasing submission, the journal’s rejection rate has proportionally increased to 30%, largely due to a higher number of submissions of non-relevant manuscripts. With the restructuring of the website, APJCE is well placed for future growth. With APJCE now included in databases of scholarly journals (e.g., Scopus, DOAJ, and Cabells), the journal’s profile will likely continue to rise and drive further growth. Reflecting on past growth and
potential future growth, it is encouraging to both the editors of APJCE and the APJCE authors that the journal has carved out a successful and well-established presence in the co-op/WIL community and is well placed for future growth.

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References


**APJCE submission process**

Full details of the APJCE manuscript submission process are available on the APJCE webpage ([www.apjce.org](http://www.apjce.org)), particularly on the ‘Manuscript Submission’ page ([www.apjce.org/submitting-manuscripts](http://www.apjce.org/submitting-manuscripts)). In brief, manuscripts are to be between 3,000 and 5,000 words (excluding abstract, references, and tables). Formatting details are available on the ‘Instructions for Authors’ page ([www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors](http://www.apjce.org/instructions-for-authors)); in general, APJCE uses Palatino Linotype font size 9, American English, and APA 6th edition referencing style. All manuscripts, in ‘.doc’ or ‘.docx’ file format, are submitted directly to the editor via email ([editor@apjce.org](mailto:editor@apjce.org)). All manuscripts are double blind reviewed by two or more reviewers. Reviewing typically takes four weeks, after which notification of the reviewing outcome and required amendments will be provided to the author(s) by the editor-in-chief.