

EDUCATOR INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS: PROVIDING A QUALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE

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Since the implementation of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, educator internship programs have flourished across the nation. Prior to 1994, these internship programs were primarily established by local employers and nonprofit organizations. Today, the majority of internship programs are operated by school districts, community colleges, educational service regions, and local education-business partnerships. This brief is designed to give educators and administrators practical information about participating in, or establishing, internships in business and industry for educators. An internship is traditionally defined as a work-site experience where participants complete a series of activities, and, after a period of reflection, produce a demonstrable product that can be used to improve their teaching.

The American education system plays an important role in transitioning youth from school to the world of work. Recent studies suggest that work-based learning, in addition to learning in the classroom, is vital to students' success in both career pursuits and post-secondary education (Bailey and Merritt, 1997, Stern, et. al, 1995). Yet many educators do not know what educating youth for the emerging global workplace entails. This puts them at a disadvantage when they try to integrate subject matter into a context that has meaning beyond school. Work-based professional development experiences give educators relevant and current information, as well as real-world examples that can enrich curricular content in a wide variety of courses—including those in academic areas such as history, English, and mathematics.

Proponents of adult learning theory and cognitive psychology (e.g., Knowles, 1987; Kolb, 1984; Lave and Wenger, 1991) stress the importance of internship learning for professionals. They believe that learning is not done in isolation but is grounded in experiences which have meaning beyond the academic setting. Learning in context clarifies educators' understanding of situations within social contexts and decreases the possibility of "misinterpretation or faulty learning" (Lankard, 1997). The internship experience and connecting components provide a crucial link between theory and practice, which enables instructors, administrators, and counselors to reflect critically and philosophically on their educational practice (Inkster, 1992). Internships are vital to creating teams of educators with firsthand, practical experience in problem solving, planning and management, facilitating collegial and experiential learning, and developing authentic forms of assessment.

Various stakeholders have acknowledged and applauded the benefits of participating in educator internship programs. Teachers benefit from the:

- application of real-world experiences to classroom subject matter
- enrichment of their knowledge and skills
- ability to validate and align curricular content
- recognition that their expertise has value beyond the classroom

- ability to link their experience to future student success
- academic credit and monetary compensation typically associated with these experiences.

Student learning is enhanced by the educator's ability to:

- connect school-based learning with real-world problems and examples
- provide the current information, skills, and knowledge necessary to function in the workplace
- integrate up-to-date information on trends in business organizations that utilize the academic knowledge and skills taught in the classroom
- provide accurate and timely information on careers
- create appropriate work-based learning experiences for students

Schools and colleges benefit from the:

- improved links to the community through its educators
- curricular improvements
- professional development experiences that improve educational reform efforts and enhance strategic plans
- increased access to technical workplace teaching technologies (e.g. donation or use of cutting-edge equipment, software, case studies).

Businesses and nonprofit organizations that support educator internship programs benefit by having:

- local schools and colleges focus directly on

the skills and knowledge required by new employees

- a community profile that demonstrates their commitment to strengthening education
- insights about improving the lifelong learning capacity and educational programs of their businesses
- educator interns engaged in projects that contribute to the organization's success

A review of national educator internship programs shows wide variation in purpose and design. The unique design of educator internship programs, which align with local educational improvement plans, is vital to their success. Although the programs may have some structural components in common (as noted in the latter part of this brief), most need to be tailored to the unique characteristics of the surrounding community. The remainder of this brief provides guidelines for designing a high quality learning experience for participants engaged in an educator internship program.

COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS PARTNERSHIPS

Given the nature of school-to-work legislation, it is important that participants collaborate on the design

GEORGETOWN & HORRY STW CONSORTIUM Georgetown, South Carolina

This bi-county consortium collaborates with 12 businesses to implement an integrated experience for educators. The initial session is facilitated by school staff and focuses on an overview of Tech Prep and school-to-work legislation. During the next 12 sessions, the businesses make three hour presentations during which they describe their business, their workforce needs, and the basic knowledge and skills required of all employees.

and delivery of internship-related activities, regardless of who is responsible for initiating the partnership. Collaborators may include local school-to-work

partnerships, Tech Prep consortia, school improvement committees, area businesses, chambers of commerce, universities, local school districts, and workforce development groups. The degree of involvement of internship organizers will vary. Some programs will involve business partners as career mentors for the participating educators at the work site. Other programs contribute more significantly to the educational experience. Effective partnerships that have developed and sustained educator internship programs have:

- involved all partners equally in the design of the program
- recognized the bottom-line needs of and for business, educators, and educational institutions
- incorporated appropriate incentives for educator interns
- developed strategies for evaluation, feedback, and continuous improvement.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

High quality internships have, as their goal, the development of new knowledge and experiences for educators that ultimately improve student learning. The “framework” refers to the information needed to design and implement effective school-to-work curricula in the classroom. To some program planners that means ensuring participants have an understanding of:

- school-to-work initiatives at the local and state levels
- information about the education, skills, and attitudes that business leaders are seeking in employees
- how to develop curricula and apply the knowledge gained during an internship
- labor market trends and statistics
- the local and regional economy.

The educator internship course offered at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee is organized around four conceptual knowledge bases: the national agenda as it relates to school-to-work issues, state school-to-work initiatives, the Milwaukee Public School school-to-work agenda, and career counseling theory. The conceptual framework of the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay’s educator internship program is based on the interrelationship of economics and education.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Work-based internships have been designed for varying groups of K–16 and pre-service educators. Academic and vocational-technical educators, counselors, administrators, and educators working with special populations are encouraged to participate. Although programs vary considerably, all are designed to increase participation in and awareness of the workplace and provide the knowledge and experience that will help educators prepare students to enter and learn from work related experiences. Our research of effective internship programs suggests that four components need to be included in the design of an educator internship program: an action plan, a pre-internship orientation, an experiential component, and connecting activities.

ACTION PLAN

The goal of this activity is for the intern to develop an Action Plan that presents an informed approach for designing, modifying, and informing educational practice that integrates school-based and work-based learning. The Action Plan documents how the internship experience is to be translated into educational practice. The performance objectives that guide this assignment should state:

Given the educator’s participation in an educator internship program the communication and documentation presented through the Action Plan will:

- Demonstrate a connection between work-based (internship experience) and school-based (educational setting) learning.
- Describe strategies for integrating the internship experience into academic and occupational learning opportunities.
- Demonstrate the impact of the internship experience on personal professional growth and development.

Participants typically develop one of three types of action plans. One focuses on an individual's professional development goals and objectives. This form of Action Plan helps educators in identifying what they want to do and how they want to do it within the internship experience. A second type of Action Plan translates the internship experience into classroom applications and curricular improvements. The third combines the first two types in an effort to integrate the intern's experience into the educational setting.

Action Plans may include: lesson plans, journal entries, reflective analyses, videos, databases with resources, strategic plans, computer plans, proposals and budgets, and meeting agendas. An Action Plan is more than a lesson plan or summary report; it must address the following:

- A description of the educational practice(s) to be addressed and the changes to be made as a result of implementation.
- A description of the target audience and an analysis of:
 - a. their probable learning styles
 - b. the probable forms of learner resistance
 - c. potential structural and functional organizational conflicts that could affect the success of the Action Plan.
- A detailed outline and explanation of the

exercises, presentations, and activities to be conducted after participating in the Educator Internship Program. This should include samples of any materials, handouts, overheads, or other documentation that can be used to support the activities.

- A list of references that are pertinent to the topic of the Action Plan. This list should be comprised of contacts made during the internship, organizational documents, and literary publications that may be useful to the intern and others.

The Action Plan should address the specific components outlined yet allow flexibility in how they are articulated. There is no set length or specified format since the scope and nature of plans vary among participants. The Action Plan may be completed individually or in collaboration with others participating in the Educator Internship Program. Exemplars of outstanding Action Plans should be made available. Interns should be encouraged to seek feedback from colleagues familiar with the process before submitting an action plan.

PRE-INTERNSHIP ORIENTATION

A pre-internship orientation is vital for the educator and the work-site mentor. This session is instrumental in setting the stage for both the employer's and intern's experience; it should provide ample opportunities for both to identify goals and expectations. Mentors should prepare for the educator's arrival by setting clear expectations for the experience and providing the educator with an orientation to the company or organization.

STW EMPLOYMENT SERVICE INTERN PROGRAM

New Jersey Department of Labor

This project was designed to train guidance counselors and classroom teachers in the use of labor market information. Prior to their experience, they were trained about the agency to which they were assigned. They learned about the various resources available and how to work with adult clients to meet their career-related needs. During the orientation, interns constructed learning objectives for themselves and began a journal documenting their experiences. The journal was subsequently used to formulate a final written curriculum.

EXPERIENTIAL COMPONENT

The experiential component can range from an intensive internship during which an educator is expected to work 40 hours per week on the job for a full eight weeks, to a less formal job-shadowing experience that might last a day or two. The less formal experiences are recommended for educators interested in obtaining a general or initial overview of workplace issues and knowledge to use in building their understanding of the “new economy.” Details about these less formal types of work-based experiences are documented in Professional Development in Support of School-to-Work: Jackson-Hillsdale Counties and Bringing the World into the Classroom: Business-Education Compact—case studies in this series.

To improve teaching, learning, and curriculum, an intern should participate in a more formal 3–18 week experience. During this time the intern pursues specific learning objectives, completes a planned series of activities, and completes a project. Tasks associated with the completion of a project are designed to provide a deep understanding of a business or organization, a workplace technology application, the use of math and science skills in emerging careers, or other insights important to the intern and the sponsoring employer. The project should culminate in a demonstration (product or presentation) of learning (NWREL, 1997).

INDUSTRY INITIATIVES FOR SCIENCE AND MATH EDUCATION (IISME) Palo Alto, California

This program was founded by a consortium of San Francisco Bay Area companies and government laboratories that recognized the need for a skilled workforce. Employers hire science and math teachers for paid eight-week summer fellowships. Teachers who participate are expected to return to their classrooms equipped with new tools and strategies for teaching students. They emphasize teamwork, problem-solving, communication skills, and practical applications of math, science, and technology in their teaching.

During their time in the workplace, educators are expected to focus on:

- identifying technology applications and career opportunities to use in instruction and career guidance activities
- documenting skills that both beginning and advanced workers need to be successful
- compiling career and labor market information that will help students when they are ready to enter the workforce.

The scope of the internship experience varies dramatically based on the organization of the program. Some internship experiences are designed for an individual to obtain a single in-depth workplace experience. This experience may be related to a specific project identified to complement the intern's skills. Other programs expose interns to a wide variety of experiences in an effort to identify the various ways in which their curricular subject matter affects the business or organization. The depth of experience is also dependent on the specific program. During the course of an internship, participation may range from observation and shadowing to having full

responsibility for a project or production activity. Generally, interns have varying levels of involvement during an extended internship. Participation may be related to the amount of knowledge and skill the individual brings to the business and the internship assignment.

SCHOOL-TO-WORK ACADEMY
Shelby, North Carolina

Teachers in this internship program were asked at the beginning of their experience to identify gaps in their lesson plans where they needed more current and relevant examples and activities. Their assignment was to gather activities and/or materials from their worksite to enhance their lesson plans. For example, a pair of technical math teachers included graphs and charts containing information about cars at a Ford service department in a lesson that emphasized interpreting and analyzing information.

CONNECTING ACTIVITIES

Seminars and workshops, facilitated by institutions of higher education and intermediary organizations, are the common format used to provide collaborative group activities following—and occasionally during—the experiential component. This structured period of time set aside for debriefing is another component of a successful internship experience. During this time, discussions of learning theories, new methods of instruction, and strategies for curriculum integration may occur. Activities may promote and increase awareness of themes such as alternative assessment, the teaching of SCANS skills, and student career guidance. Seminar participants may spend time reading and discussing professional articles and research that is relevant to educational reform and the role of business-education partnerships. In contrast to the collaborative group activities, individual documentation of the experiential component occurs through journal entries, reflective written narratives,

and the development of curricular and instructional materials that integrate knowledge, skills, and insights obtained from the work-based experience.

BUSINESS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM
Spring Arbor, Michigan

This program is based on a six-week summer experience. Each week educators spend 36 hours on the job making observations and working on activities that apply concepts learned during their work-site experience. Four additional hours each week are spent on the Spring Arbor College campus discussing the implications of their experiences and their application to the classroom. This weekly collaboration is seen as an integral part of the program. Follow-up sessions scheduled during the fall and spring semesters allow participants to share lesson plans which have been implemented based on their experience during the Business Fellowship Program. In addition, the participants discuss changes that have occurred in their pedagogy and how this has affected their classroom.

Journal entries typically describe what was observed in the workplace, as well as the intern's perceptions of the business and workforce activities. Often, entries will describe the strengths of and challenges faced by the organization, questions that arise as the intern comes to terms with new information and strategies, comments on new understandings or connections to specific curricula, enlightening experiences, and comments on the approach used by the organization to conduct business (Keystone, 1996). These daily entries become extremely valuable when reflecting back on the experiential component and in developing applications for the classroom.

BUSINESS-EDUCATION COMPACT Portland, Oregon

This intensive three-to-eight week internship program emphasizes the curriculum writing component of the internship experience as the critical part of each Action Plan. Quite often these Action Plans focus on translating the internship experience into classroom applications through curriculum development, enrichment, and alignment. One of the staff members working with interns has a strong background in curriculum development and is experienced with the needs of industry. A mentor is assigned to work at the internship site with educators to help them discover ways to work on their Action Plans by translating their work into information and activities that can be used in the classroom.

- plans for new or expanded work-based learning programs for students
- action plans that describe how the internship experience will translate into an applicable unit for students in the classroom.

Several programs require interns to complete a formal presentation of their projects, while a number of others require them to write articles for school newsletters and to meet with educational administrators to determine how they can infuse their workplace experiences into the curriculum. The connecting components justifiably become the evidence and tangible products that link work-based internship programs with educational improvement efforts.

The reflective narrative is a systematic way for participants to learn more about themselves and how they can better effect change in their educational environments. This written document highlights the workplace experience and allows the intern to reflect on the curricular and instructional implications of their experience. The reflective narrative allows the participant to learn from their internship experience in ways that will assist their teaching performance.

Not all educator internship programs require a product or curriculum at the conclusion of the project, but it becomes a critical component if educators are to integrate their work experiences into the educational setting. Typically, a complete curriculum, or a teaching or counseling unit is required. The development of curricula that integrates insights from the experiential component may be an individual or collaborative venture. Activities associated with this process may include the development of:

- lesson/unit plans that infuse knowledge and skills obtained in the workplace
- curricular pathways for specific occupations

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANS State of Oregon

Oregon's school improvement plan requires that new curriculum be tied to both the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and a Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM), which are being utilized to assess student achievement. School administrators are relying on educators to contribute new knowledge and information to the curriculum so that it contains the necessary components needed for certification. The internship program designed by the Business-Education Compact in Portland provides educators with workplace experiences, which enables them to develop essential standards-based curricula leading to the CIM and CAM. The products and results of the internship are exactly what the school districts need to meet the goals outlined in their school improvement plans.

INTEGRATING THE EXPERIENCE

For the full benefit of the work-based internship to be realized, educators must bring their experiences into the educational setting. This generally occurs through the connecting activities required by most programs. Once educators bring the knowledge into the classroom, students, and other educators will

benefit. Experiences in the workplace typically provide educators with insights on how to make their curriculum come alive with relevant and practical applications. Once work-based experiences have been converted to curricular content and have been implemented, time should be spent reflecting on the student outcomes associated with these modifications. Several educator internship programs bring together educators in the year following their experience. In these seminars, educators can share with one another the difficulties they face in implementing their specific action plans. Internship experiences contribute to one's individual professional development, as well as providing support for local and state level initiatives for school improvement. For example, interns interested in becoming principals, deans, or curriculum directors might focus their internship on the "management development" or "technical training" programs offered by businesses or organizations.

this experience is ultimately measured by analyzing the ability of interns to expand and adapt their instructional practice to include workplace knowledge and skills in an effective and authentic manner. There is no one "right answer" or one "best way" to implement and evaluate an internship program—there are many ways, all adapted to the environment in which the program is established. Internship program leaders should plan to annually collect experiential and impact information from business and industry sponsors, participants, and former participants. This information should be used to modify and improve the educator internship program as needed.

In conclusion, internship programs serve as an "eye opening" experience for the majority of educators who participate. The success of any internship program rests in finding the optimal mix of design components that can be applied in a particular educational setting and produce the desired outcomes for students.

**VERMONT EMPLOYER/TEACHER
INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
Burlington, Vermont**

Participants are expected to integrate their experiences into Individualized Professional Development Plans, which are required for Vermont licensing. Additionally, they must complete a product that demonstrates curriculum redesign based on their internship experience, such as units of study, a journal, a log, or a portfolio of their work experience.

**EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT**

The evaluation process used by most educator internship programs entails a survey of participant experiences and perspectives and the uses of the internship in shaping curricula, teaching, counseling, or learning assessment. In most cases, the effectiveness of a internship is judged by participants' satisfaction with the program or an indication of change in their knowledge and methods of instruction. The value of

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