Developing and Implementing An Effective Online Educational Leadership Internship[*]

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Abstract

This publication aligns with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) Standard 1:
"An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation,
implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders."

NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of
Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship
and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content
Commons, this module is published in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation,[1] Volume 4, Number 1.

1 Introduction

Graduate students seeking to be educational leaders in today's high-demand society require more than
lectures and textbooks to learn the requisite leadership skills. They must also have the opportunity to develop
and test job skills in an on-the-job environment. Future leaders need the opportunity to grapple with the
dilemmas principals face (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2007). This is best accomplished in
an internship under the guidance of a fully involved site mentor and a university mentor working in tandem
with the graduate student.

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[1]http://ijelp.expressacademic.org

There has been continuous interest among many leadership preparation program faculty to learn which preparation approaches more effectively prepare their candidates as principals and district leaders. . The problem universities face as school leadership programs migrate to the online environment is how to construct a meaningful online internship – an internship that provides accountability, flexibility, and one that is based on accepted national and state standards.

2 Considerations in Developing an Online Internship

The Stanford Educational Leadership Institute (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2007) found the following elements in exemplary leadership preparation programs:

- A comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned with state and professional standards, in particular the ISSLC standards, which emphasize instructional leadership;
- A philosophy and curriculum emphasizing instructional leadership and school improvement;
- Active, student-centered instruction that integrates theory and practice and stimulates reflection. Instructional strategies include problem-based learning; action research; field-based projects; journal writing; and portfolios that feature substantial use of feedback and assessment by peers, faculty, and the candidates themselves;
- Faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including both university professors and practitioners experienced in school administration;
- Social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure and formalized mentoring and advising by expert principals;
- Vigorous, targeted recruitment and selection to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential; and
- Well-designed and supervised administrative internships that allow candidates to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the tutelage of expert veterans. (p.6)

The internship or practicum is a purposeful effort to connect theory and practice. The Southern Regional Education Board five-year study of school leadership preparation noted four core conditions for principal preparation: 1) university/district partnerships; 2) Standards and research based practices with practical learning experiences; 3) authentic field experiences integrated throughout the program with student, university faculty, and site mentor support; 4) an assessment plan designed to provide reliable evidence about the effectiveness of the program (SREB, 2006). The third core condition targets the internship.

Internship Team

Site Mentor

Student

University Mentor
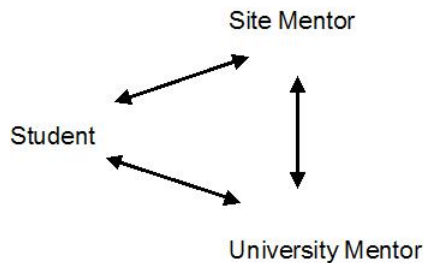
The SREB's call for integrated internship experiences must not stop at integration. The experiences must also involve conceptual thinking. Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000) noted that beginners in a field, tend to think more factually. On the other hand, experts in the field problem solve utilizing overarching ideas. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking's (2000) observations support the need to pair aspiring leaders with proven leaders. This is best accomplished through a team approach. The team being comprised of the aspiring leader (student), a site mentor, and the university mentor (SREB, 2007).

The site administrator selection greatly influences the quality of the internship experience. The amount of time the site administrator spends with the aspiring leader strongly influences the quality of the internship. Ideally the site mentor will make arrangements for the student to have additional release time from teaching duties to participate in internship activities (McCreight & Kaiser, 2004).

Lynn Erickson (2007) noted that,

"Conceptual thinking requires the ability to critically examine factual information; relate to prior knowledge; see patterns and connections: draw out significant understandings at the conceptual level; evaluate the truth of the understandings based on the supporting evidence; transfer the understanding across time or situation; and often, use the conceptual understanding to creatively solve a problem or create a new product, process, or idea." (p. 19).

Conceptual thinking is at the heart of the internship experience. Interns must have experiences that require them to relate their prior knowledge to situations so they can evaluate the truth of their understandings. It is only then that deep learning occurs.

3 Level of Complexity

The Texas Depth and Complexity Model (Fig. 1) lends itself well in defining the experiences that need to be incorporated in the internship. This model combines Bloom's taxonomy on the y-axis with Erickson's Structure of Knowledge on the x-axis. By combining Bloom's taxonomy and its level of depth with Erickson's Structure of Knowledge complexity dimension, quality internship experiences can be identified. These experiences fall within the box in the upper right-hand quadrant of Figure 1. Students must develop the deeper understanding that occurs with experiences that fall within this box. Experiences outside of the box,

while educational, will soon be forgotten.

Figure 1: Texas Depth and Complexity Model
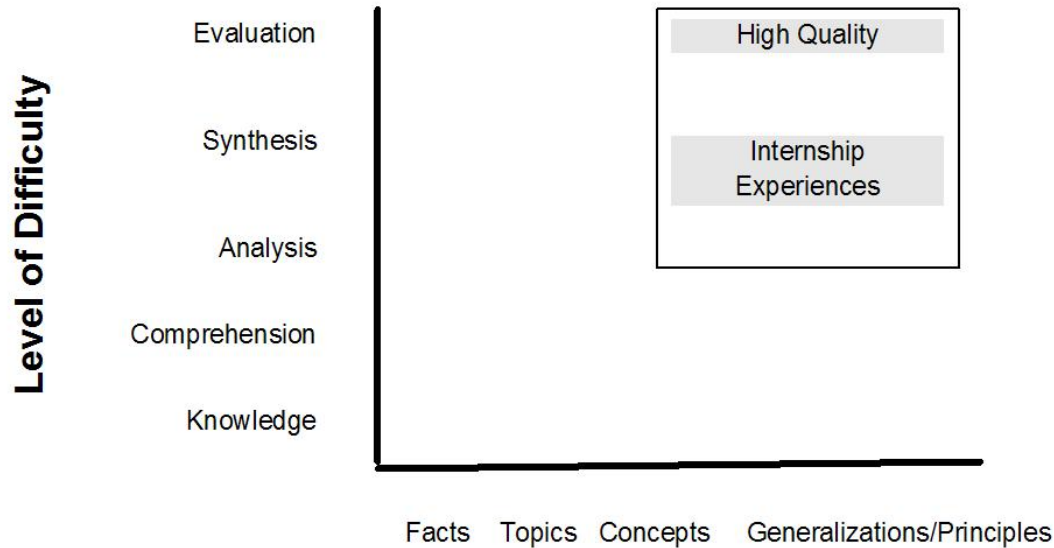
Reflection must be coupled with the field experience. Rose (1992, p.5) stressed the importance of collaboration in the reflective process. Reflection must demonstrate a full knowledge and understanding of the learning experience and its learning objective. It must communicate the rationale for selecting the internship experience and must demonstrate achieving the learning outcome. If a reflection does not communicate learning, then it is not a successful reflection. A reflection should communicate knowledge and understanding of the learning outcome, choice of the artifact, alignment, organization, and development.

4 Expected Outcomes

McREL identified 21 school-level leadership responsibilities with statistically significant correlations to student achievement. These 21 responsibilities do not represent all of the important responsibilities principals are expected to fulfill but do represent leadership responsibilities that when fulfilled skillfully, positively impact student achievement. (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005: Waters & Grubb, 2005).

Responsibilities The extent to which the principal...	Key feature
	continued on next page

|	
Fosters shared beliefs & a sense of community & cooperation	Culture
Establishes a set of standard operating procedures & routines	Order
Protects teachers from issues & influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	Discipline
Provides teachers with materials & professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	Resources
Is directly involved in design, implementation, & assessment of curriculum, instruction, & assessment practices	Curriculum & Instruction
Establishes clear goals & keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	Focus
Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction and assessment practices	Knowledge of curriculum
Has quality contact & interactions with teachers & students	Visibility
Recognizes & rewards individual accomplishments	Contingent rewards
Establishes strong lines of communication with teachers & among students	Communication
Is an advocate & spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	Outreach
Involves teachers in the design & implementation of important decisions & policies	Input
Recognizes & celebrates school accomplishments & acknowledges failures	Affirmation
Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers & staff	Relationship
Is willing to & actively challenges the status quo	Change agent
Inspires & leads new & challenging innovations	Optimizer
Communicates & operates from strong ideals & beliefs about schooling	Ideals/beliefs
continued on next page	

Monitors the effectiveness of school practices & their impact on student learning	Monitors/evaluates
Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation & is comfortable with dissent	Flexibility
Is aware of details & undercurrents in the running of the school & uses this information to address current & potential problems	Situational awareness
Ensures that faculty & staff are aware of the most current theories & practices & makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	Intellectual stimulation

Table 1

5 An Examination of the Abilene Christian University Educational Leadership Internship

The internship is just one component of the ACU Student-Centered Learning Model. Before examining the internship in detail, an overview of the ACU Student-Centered Learning model is offered in order to contextually place the internship within the learning model.

Figure 2: ACU Student-Centered Learning Model
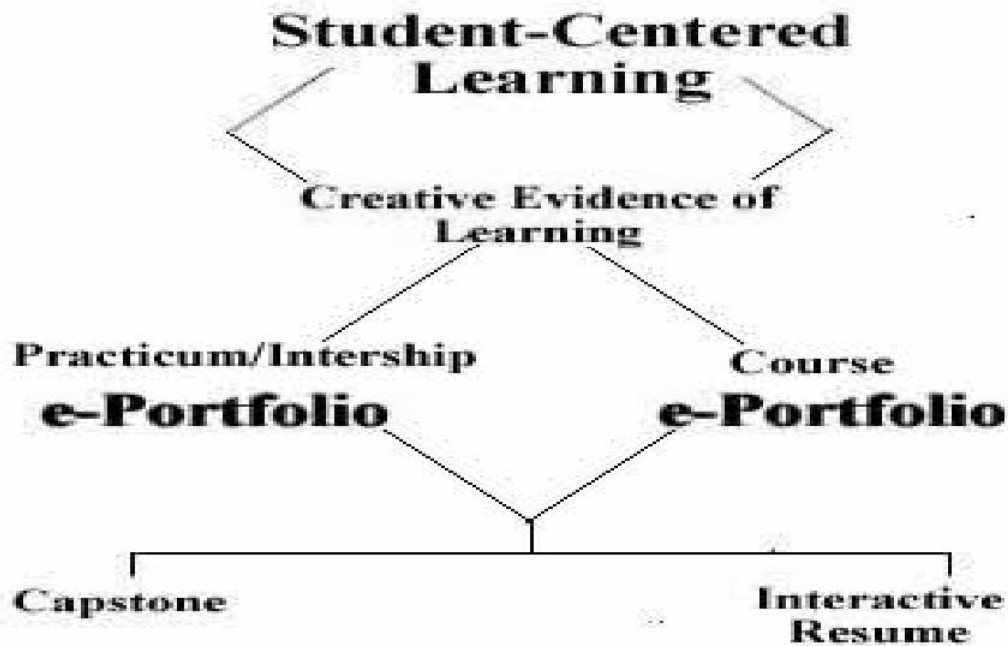
The two-track e-portfolio (Internship and course), the capstone, and the interactive resume are integrated components of the student-centered approach to teaching and learning that is central to the ACU experience. Using portfolios to showcase and assess learning is not a new idea. Portfolios have been used in the arts for many years. What is new, however, is the power of the computer for portfolio assessment.

The e-portfolio enables students to creatively use their strengths to demonstrate learning by sharing authentic examples of academic work and achievements. These examples are called artifacts. The e-portfolio

process allows individual learners to develop a stronger sense of identity by reflecting on how the artifacts demonstrate mastery of course learning outcomes.

At the completion of the program, the e-portfolio will contain collected and organized examples of the student's learning and represent the full spectrum of academic and professional experiences. As a final requirement, each student creates a capstone experience, using the e-portfolio to creatively demonstrate accomplishments by integrating authentic examples of learning into an Exhibition. The Exhibition is a student-centered and student-directed presentation, which allows the student to creatively mix evaluative styles and artifacts to demonstrate learning strengths.

The e-portfolio also allows the student to use authentic learning examples to create a web-based interactive resume or vita. Potential employers can access resumes containing authentic work examples. Students will have the capability to retain and update their interactive resumes throughout their careers.

To access the e-Portfolio students select the My Portfolio link in Moodle where they see five tabs at the top of the page – Student Folder, Course Matrix, Internship Matrix, Capstone Area, and Career Folder.

- Student Folder

A secure, designated storage space in which students can create sub-folders, upload, delete or move items. Students each have one Student Folder that will stay with them throughout their program.

- Course Matrix

The Matrix is a graphic representation of the student's e-Portfolio. A list of courses for the program is located in the left column of the matrix. To the right of the courses is a clearly visible Key that informs the student what has and has not been submitted. By selecting the Key the student will get clear instructions on how to submit items and receive feedback from the instructor.

- Internship Matrix

If a student is required to complete an internship or practicum with their program the Internship tab will be active. The look and feel is very similar to his Course Matrix. In place of the courses a list of Internship Experiences will be listed down the left side. To the right of the Experiences is a clearly visible Key that informs the student what has and has not been submitted. This will allow the student to easily determine what they have completed.

- Capstone Area

In this area students will be able use a WYSIWYG editor to assemble items form their Course Matrix, Internship Matrix or Student Folder to a web-based presentation. Only the student and the instructors of the Capstone will have access to this area.

- Career Folder

In this folder student will be able to use a WYSIWYG editor to assemble items from their Course Matrix, Internship Matrix or Student Folder and create a web-based resume. The student will have the ability to send the URL for this resume to future employers. They can update this folder at any time.

Given this brief introduction to the ACU Student-Centered Model it is now appropriate to focus on the internship element of the model.

Many leadership programs have a one-semester internship at the end of the preparation program. These internships have proven to be neither instructionally effective nor cost-effective (Sid W. Richardson Foundation [SWRF], 1997). The ACU internship is integrated throughout the program. The internship consists of five components: an internship orientation, an action research project, national standards based activities, an e-portfolio, and a capstone experience.

5.1 Action Research

Students examine action research in the program's second course. Students collaborate with their university and site mentors to develop a plan for a significant school research project. The research project plan is developed to insure the project is implemented in an orderly and timely manner. Progress checkpoints are embedded throughout the program. Students have approximately one and one-half years to conduct their research project.

5.2 Internship Orientation

During the break between the program's second and third course, students attend a mandatory internship orientation webinar detailing the online internship. Students actively participate in the webinar's presentation and discussion. Students have the opportunity to submit questions and make comments during the webinar, either orally or via text messaging using a chat box.

5.3 Internship Activities & Management System

The School Leadership Internship 2nd Edition by Martin, Wright, Danzig, Flanary and Brown (2005) is the internship text. This book offers 38 skill sets based upon national standards. Each of the national standards-based 38 skill sets offers the intern a menu of one to nine activities. While this book is an excellent internship text, further action was required to match instruction with technology to function optimally in the online environment (Strehle, Whatley, Kurz, & Hausfather, 2001).

ACU contracted with a firm to develop intern-friendly software to manage the 38 skill sets and their multiple activity options as well as other components of the online internship text. Internship Matrix software was developed to make managing of the internship easier for the mentors and the students. This matrix is key to a smooth implementation of the online internship. Color was incorporated in the grid's deign to enhance its user-friendly requirement. Each of the 38 leadership skill area activities cells begin with no fill. Figure 3 depicts The Internship Matrix as a student initially sees it. It should be noted that this figure is not the final product but is a representation of the matrix's concept.

Figure 3 ACU Internship Matrix

Activity	Menu								
1.1 - Vita									
1.2 - Assessment									
1.3 - Assessment									
1.4 - Assessment									
1.5 - Goals									
1.6 - Assessment									
1.7 - Summary									
1	A	B	C	D					*
continued on next page									

2	A	B	C	D	E				*
3	A	B	C						*
4	A	B	C	D	E	F	G		*
5	A	B	C	D					*
6	A	B	C						*
7	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	*
8	A	B	C	D	E				*
9	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	*
10	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
11	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
12	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
13	A	B	C	D					*
14	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
15	A	B	C						*
16	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
17	A	B	C	D					*
18	A	B	C	D	E				*
19	A	B	C						*
20	A	B							*
21	A	B	C	D					*
22	A	B							*
23	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
24	A	B	C	D					*
25	A	B	C	D					*
26	A	B	C	D					*
27	A	B	C	D					*
28	A	B	C	D					*
29	A	B	C						*
continued on next page									

30	A	B	C	D	E				*
31	A	B	C	D	E				*
32	A								*
33	A	B	C	D	E				*
34	A	B	C	D	E	F			*
35	A								*
36	A								*
37	A	B	C						*
38	A								*
Action Research Project									

Table 2

6 Demonstration of the Internship Matrix

Dr. Howard is a professor in the Leadership of Learning program and oversees the internship for twenty-five students. Dr. Howard logs into his ACU Moodle port and sees within the list of courses he instructs, the Leadership Internship. He opens the course and sees on the right hand side an ePortfolio block, with the link "Internship Matrix" inside the block. Dr. Howard clicks then link and is taken to a new page that displays the Matrix for the Internship Matrix (Figure 2). The Internship Matrix details all the internship requirement activities as well as the internship experiences and learning outcomes. At the top of the page, Dr. Howard clicks a drop down box that allows him to select any one of the twenty-five students that he oversees. Dr. Howard selects Ernest Bass from the list and when clicked, Ernest's Internship Matrix appears with the requirements, the activities, and the learning outcomes that he has completed so far. Dr. Howard notices that when he scrolls the mouse cursor over the internship activities, that a tool tip appears giving him the title and description of each activity.

Dr. Howard received notification from his student, Ernest Bass, that he uploaded an artifact and reflection for his first internship activity. Dr. Howard enters Ernest Bass's Internship Matrix and sees Experience 1C changed color to light blue indicating that Ernest Bass chose 1C to demonstrate mastery of experience 1. Dr. Howard clicks on cell 1C and a pop-window opens giving Dr. Howard the following options:

Dr. Howard opens both the artifact and reflection documents. After reviewing, Dr. Howard now wants to add his feedback. Dr. Howard writes his feedback in a word document and saves it to his C drive. Dr. Howard then goes back to the Internship Matrix and clicks the link "Add Feedback" and a pop-up window appears. Dr. Howard clicks the button "Browse" and a file directory is opened from which he can select the feedback document. Once Dr. Howard attaches the document and clicks "Submit" he is taken back to the Internship Matrix view. Dr. Howard sees that the "Add Feedback" title has been changed to "View Feedback". Dr. Howard now clicks the "Lock" checkbox and clicks submit. Dr. Howard returns to the Internship Matrix where he sees that 1C has changed to Dark Blue and has a padlock icon that indicates it is now locked.

1	A	B	?C	D					*

Table 3

- View Artifact (Title of artifact shown)
- View Reflection (Title of reflection shown)

- Add Feedback
- Lock (Check Box)

7 Capstone Experience

The capstone experience is the final component of the online internship. Although students register for this experience as their final course, they have been working toward the capstone experience since the internship orientation webinar after the second course. Students reflect on their experiences throughout the degree program. This self-reflection includes reviewing the 38 internship activities and the other artifacts on the Internship Matrix and how they support the student's mastery of the program outcome and the national standards. Students are encouraged to involve their site mentor in this self-evaluation process.

The student prepares a 45 to 60 minute presentation with these required elements: 1) address the site mentor's final assessment of the student's fulfillment of internship activities, 2) an informal self-evaluation of the student on his strength and weaknesses as well as the perspective of the site mentor; and 3) demonstrate mastery of the program and national standards using artifacts chosen by the student from the 38 skill sets. The capstone experience can occur in a variety of formats chosen by the student. These include face-to-face presentation, webinar conference, podcast, or any other format approved by the university mentor.

8 Conclusion

As online courses and programs proliferate across our country, is it essential for educational leadership faculty to embrace the advantages of new technology versus fearing the cyberspace divide. The program developed at Abilene Christian University found greater communication between mentors and interns and a means to better supervise progress, assist student interns with immediate questions or concerns, and collect data on learning outcomes. Although technical experts were needed in the development of the model and much initial time spent by the professors, the benefits to interns were worth the effort. And we sincerely hope that the advancements made to the online internship will ultimately benefit the children they lead and serve.

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