

Internship and Portfolio for Superintendent Preparation

Margaret H. Dalton, PhD
Professor
Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, Missouri

ABSTRACT

The Educational Administration faculty at Southeast Missouri State University implemented a revised internship program in 2001 with the intent of providing students pursuing the Specialist Degree in School Administration supervised experiences centering on the daily administration and supervisory duties of the PK-12 superintendent. This was done through the development of a team of individuals including the intern, superintendent, and university supervisor. The commitment of each party was required to provide a quality internship experience including observation, practice, and reflection. This article discusses how the internship and portfolio were designed to meet NCATE standards.

Introduction

The Educational Administration faculty at Southeast Missouri State University implemented a revised internship program in 2001 with the intent of providing students pursuing the Specialist Degree in School Administration supervised experiences centering on the daily administration and supervisory duties of the PK-12 superintendent. This was done through the development of a team of individuals including the intern, superintendent, and university supervisor. The commitment of each party was required to provide a quality internship experience including observation, practice, and reflection.

Review of Literature

Much has been written on the value of the internship process for school leaders. Research findings suggest that a well planned internship experience where students work closely with a practicing administrator are effective learning experiences for the student (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004) and lead to the development of effective school administrators (Pounder & Crow, 2005). Internships have been a part of most preparation programs for a number of years and their beneficial effect on the development of school leaders is widely accepted (Milstein, 1990).

Effective internship programs are built around a strong concept of mentoring. Mentoring helps the novice administrator develop administrative skills not covered in the classroom. The novice administrator learns to lead from the experienced administrator (Daresh, 2004). In addition to mentoring a widely accepted part of an effective internship is reflection. Research findings suggest that learning occurs by honestly analyzing an activity after its completion (Leithwood & Stager, 1986).

Purpose

The purpose of the specialist internship was to help the intern gain the necessary knowledge and skills to make a successful transition to the superintendency. This was achieved by providing a broad experience in the internship that allowed understanding of the key aspects and functions of the superintendency through hands on experiences. The end product of the internship was a portfolio based largely on reflective practice. Reflective thought is an essential part of the internship process and is approximately one fourth of the internship portfolio. Reflective thought allows students to gain insight into their own abilities to carry out the responsibilities of the superintendency. A final purpose of the internship was for students to gain licensure in the state of Missouri which requires:

The intern will complete a field experience of at least **160** hours within 12 continuous months in the superintendency as an administrative aide to a licensed and practicing school superintendent or have placement with a licensed educational administrator appropriate for the school superintendency.

NCATE and the Full-time Internship

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) included the internship as one of its standards for accreditation. Standard 7 of the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership for Principals, Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, and Supervisors is the internship and it is defined as, “The internship provides significant opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply the knowledge and practice and develop the skills identified in Standards 1-6 through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit” (NCATE, 2002).

The administrative degree programs at Southeast Missouri State University are NCATE accredited. NCATE recommends that a student obtaining initial certification for the superintendency participate in a six-month full-time internship. NCATE defines full-time as, “the number of hours per week required for attendance by a full-time student, receiving federal financial assistance (generally 9-12 hours per week)” (NCATE, 2002). The question arises: How can a university meet this requirement when school districts are unable or unwilling to give students time off from teaching or other responsibilities? The University serves mostly small rural school districts that do not have the resources to allow employees to take time off from their jobs to serve as interns. The Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling met this challenge by developing a 600 hour internship which was determined to be more than equivalent to a fulltime internship. The hours were divided between the internship course that required 160 hours of hands on experience in the field and the core courses that required specific hands on experiences as a part of each course. The remaining 440 hours were embedded into the core requirements of the specialist degree.

Expectations

The expectations of the internship are based on the belief that three elements are present in an effective internship: observation, practice, and guided reflection. By working with a mentoring superintendent, the intern is given the opportunity to shadow or observe that individual and gain insight into the role and responsibilities of the job. The intern is given every possible opportunity to practice the role of superintendent through interacting with all stakeholders including but not limited too parents, students, teachers, district personnel, community support services, and other community groups. The intern is exposed to and given the opportunity to practice at least some of the following responsibilities of the superintendency: communications, business operations, employee relations, public relations, curriculum, facilities management, transportation, food service, and human resources management. The guided reflection is part of the portfolio that the intern presents as the culmination of the internship.

Portfolio Process

As a part of the internship, students are required to develop a detailed portfolio demonstrating their application of the ISLLC and NCATE standards. The portfolio process was developed by the Educational Testing Service for submission under contract with the Council of Chief State School Officers. The Department of Educational Administration uses this portfolio process with the permission of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This portfolio process can be used in Missouri for recertification for the superintendency. The portfolio contains six components based on the ISLLC and NCATE standards. The components are:

1. Facilitating the Vision of Learning within the School Community
2. Sustaining a Culture Conducive to Student Learning
3. Understanding and Responding to the Larger Context
4. Collaborating with Families and Community
5. Supporting Professional Growth and Development
6. Organizing Resources for an Effective Learning Environment

The heart of each component is four commentary questions and one reflective question. Each question is answered in less than two typed double spaced pages with up to five pages of supporting documentation provided for each of the commentary questions. The reflective question at the end of each component requires interns to access their actions and determine what was done well and what could be done differently. The structure of each component is as follows:

1. Focus: a short statement of the central idea of the component.
2. Overview: a brief snapshot of the work that the student will be required to do.
3. Standards: the specific indicators from the ISLLC Standards that will guide the work for each component.
4. Confidentiality: a reminder about the constraints that the students must follow in using the names of individuals, schools, and districts.
5. Questions and Documentation: these are the essential elements of the Portfolio Components. These consist of the four commentary questions and the reflection question the student will respond to, with a description of the necessary documentation materials.
6. Strategic Decisions: additional suggestions for making important decisions in completing each entry.
7. Evaluation Criteria: a reiteration of the criteria drawn from the Standards that will guide the evaluation of each entry.
8. Forms: complete all forms (e.g., Minor Release Form, Adult Release Form, Attestation Form, etc.)
9. Feedback: each Portfolio Component the student completes contains a Feedback Form. These are designed to provide the student the

opportunity to comment on each Component.

The portfolio is the culminating experience in the internship course and is also presented as the exit exam for the specialist degree.

Evaluation of Internship and Portfolio

Interns were asked to evaluate each component of the internship. Feedback from students was positive with the most frequent comment being the large amount of time it took to put together the portfolio. However, most students found the internship process to be worthwhile and felt prepared to take on the role of superintendent.

Data were also collected from the evaluation of the portfolio at the end of the internship course. The analysis of the data suggested that students completed the first four components (Facilitating the Vision of Learning, Sustaining a Culture Conducive to Student Learning, Understanding and Responding to the Larger Context, and Collaborating with Families and Community) in a clear, consistent, and convincing manner. The analysis of the data dealing with the last two components (Supporting Professional Growth and Development and Organizing Resources for an Effective Learning Environment) were deemed to be the most difficult for students to complete. The factors that might have affected the depth and scope were lack of access to sensitive information in the district, lack of understanding of components, and student fatigue. Due to the analysis of data, the following changes were made to the internship and portfolio process:

1. Increased amount of time during the required seminars spent on Components dealing with Supporting Professional Growth and Development and Organizing Resources for an Effective Learning Environment.
2. Increased communication with students about the expectations of all six components
3. Increased communication with site supervisors concerning areas covered in the components dealing with Supporting Professional Growth and Development and Organizing Resources for an Effective Learning Environment
4. Implemented Site Supervisor Evaluations
5. Implemented Pre and Post Self Evaluations

Concluding Remarks

The commitment was required to provide a quality internship experience including observation, practice, and reflection. This article discussed how the internship and portfolio were designed to meet NCATE standards.

References

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