

Work-Based Learning
The Career Internship Network
A Program of the Youth Development Institute

Context

The following research summary is intended to support staff working with adolescents to identify promising practices in career internship programs. The research is intended to support agencies to design programs that lead to successful outcomes for young people.

Overview of School-to-Work Research

Most of the studies cited below examine work-based learning that include: youth apprenticeships, cooperative education, school-supervised work experience, career academies, and work simulation. There are few, if any, studies that examine the unique features of career development internship programs; therefore, the research cited below refers to school-to-work learning as a whole.

A review of 132 studies of school-to-work programs found:

- (1) School-to-Work students maintain good grades and take difficult courses.
- (2) Students in School-to-Work stay in school and receive their high school diplomas.
- (3) It is unclear how School-to-Work participation affects students' test scores.
- (4) School-to-Work students are prepared for college.
- (5) School-to-Work students can define their career interests and goals.
- (6) School-to-Work helps young people become prepared for the work environment.
- (7) The jobs that students obtain through School-to-Work tend to be different from and of higher quality than their typical employment.
- (8) School-to-Work helps students plan for the future and act in ways that will help them achieve their goals.¹

What is Quality Work-Based Learning?

Work-Based Learning is defined as activities that occur at a workplace, providing structured learning experiences for students through exposure to a variety of occupations. Students learn by observing and/or participating in real work. Learning in the workplace should support learning in the classroom and should promote the development of transferable skills. Within the work-based learning context, the following are criteria for quality internship programs. Any given internship program may not address all criteria, but program design should be built around select criteria.

1. The program appropriately trains and prepares interns for their internship experience.

¹ Hughes, K. L.; Bailey, T.R.; and Mechur, M.L. 2001 "School-to Work: Making a Difference in Education. A Research Report to America." New York: Institute on Education and the Economy, Columbia University, 2001. (ED 449 364)

2. The program employs trained and caring adult mentor/supervisors who work one-on-one with interns to support them in their work.
3. The program provides individualized, real-world, well-defined and safe projects that require effort and persistence over time, resulting in the creation of something of value to both interns and the workplace. Related work strategies and tools mirror those used by professionals in the field and help students develop a sense of accomplished adult performance.
4. The program affords opportunities to acquire both life (e.g., time management) and workplace skills (e.g., teamwork). As interns progress in the program, they are given increasing responsibility.
5. Program experiences develop students' critical-thinking skills, including problem solving and the ability to tackle complex questions and carry out independent investigations.
6. The program offers both facilitated and intentional opportunities for reflection, helping interns make sense of their own learning.
7. The program offers opportunities for students to voice opinions and shape their internship experience, enabling them to take an active role in their own learning.
8. The program encourages an awareness of career opportunities within particular career fields and an understanding of the educational requirements for these careers.
9. The program employs evaluation techniques and student, mentor, and internship staff self-assessment.

Worked-Based Learning and Mentorship Experiences

Mentors should be trained to work with youth. Mentors should be supported by internship staff throughout the program so they can positively enhance students' skills, access to social networks, and sense of self.

Mentors should be encouraged to engage their interns in pre-planned authentic work experiences, which support the following:

Skill Enhancement

1. Diligence
2. Teamwork
3. An appreciation for rules and norms of settings
4. Willingness to take responsibility
5. Good written and verbal communication skills
6. Active listening

Social Networking and Advocacy

1. Recommending youth to potential employers
2. Expanding the number and types of work-related people the youth meets
3. Helping youth become part of more socially desirable or higher-achieving peer groups (e.g., students in an college-prep classes)
4. Helping youth to resist negative influences.

Enhance Self Concept

1. Help interns gain new skills and social connections to nurture a sense of mastery, confidence, and an increased sense of self.²

Programs should, wherever possible, include hands-on, authentic work along side a mentor

Whenever possible, internship programs should include sustained and staff-supported one-on-one mentorship experiences. Mentors and interns should collaboratively plan out the scope and sequence of the work, engage in deliberate discussions in which mentors share their career experience and provide guidance. Internship program staff should support the partnerships, making sure that mentors are:

1. Imparting crucial skills (both job-related and personal);
2. Enriching and expanding young people's social connections
3. Enhancing mentee's self concept and optimism about the future³

Limited, but promising research on youth work-place mentoring programs supports the need for strong mentor-mentee relationships. Students involved in well-organized and work-based apprenticeship programs have shown psychosocial, professional, and educational gains. Research also suggests that workplace mentoring and apprenticeship can increase youths' optimism about their occupational future, and lower their levels of aggression and delinquency.⁴

Mentors should be trained on how to develop a one-to-one caring and trusting relationship, enhancing their positive impact on youth during their adolescent development

Internship staff should take responsibility to ensure mentors are well prepared for the role they will be taking with interns. Research indicates that the key to effective mentoring relationships lies in the development of trust between two strangers of different ages. One

² Hughes, K. L.; Bailey, T.R.; and Mechur, M.L. 2001 "School-to Work: Making a Difference in Education. A Research Report to America." New York: Institute on Education and the Economy, Columbia University, 2001. (ED 449 364)

³ "Worked Based Mentoring" within the mentoring.org website

(http://www.mentoring.org/program_staff/research_corner/work_based_mentoring.php?pid=all)

⁴ Freedman, Marc. 1993 *The Kindness of Strangers: Adult mentors, urban youth and the new volunteerism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

of the strongest research conclusions champions the importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and develop positive relationships with youth.⁵

Workplace learning should provide students with opportunities to gain job-readiness skills

Program design should intentionally incorporate means for interns to gain work-readiness-related attitudes and behaviors. Research indicates that these attitudes and behaviors are highly valued by students in their work-based learning experiences.⁶

Internship Programs and Career Journey

Internship programs should contain planned experiences that help students clarify their career goals

Internship programs should incorporate intentional discussions and hands-on work experiences with professionals in a given field in order to help provide interns with a “window” into a selected career.⁷

Evidence of the benefits of exposure to careers includes research on students in a Wisconsin youth apprenticeship program. Findings show that students acquired technical skills, knowledge, improved abilities to apply knowledge in the real world, maturity and judgment skills such as critical thinking, problem solving skills, and teamwork skills. These students also reported improved self-concepts as well as more positive perceptions of their future employment, education, and career options.⁸

Notable Research on Work-Based Learning

Work-based Learning and Academic Impact

Internship staff and funder are interested in a program’s positive impact on students’ academic achievement. Internship programs by their nature are work based and should remain focused on their unique position: to provide students with experiences that they would not otherwise receive in school.

Research about the impact on academic performance through work-based learning is limited. Studies have shown that student interns primarily learned job-related skills and work-readiness-related attitudes and behaviors, with little or no effects on their academic

⁵ Sipe, Cynthia. 1996 *Mentoring: A Synthesis of P/PV's Research: 1988-1995*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

⁶ Stasz, C., & D.J. Brewer 1998 *Academic skills at work: Two perspectives*. (MDS-1193). Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.

R. Bailey, Thomas & Katherine L. Hughes and David Thronton Moore. 2004 *Working Knowledge: Work-based learning and education reform*. NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

⁷ Haimson, J, and Bellotti, J. 2001 “Schooling in the Workplace: Increasing the Scale and Quality of Work-Based Learning.” Final Report. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2001. (ED 455 444)

⁸ Scribner, J.P., and Wakelyn, D. 1997 “Youth Apprenticeship Experiences in Wisconsin: A Stakeholder-Based Evaluation.” 1997 (ED 422 505)

achievement. The key finding is that there is rarely correspondence between math, science, and reading taught in school and the internship experience.⁹

Several non-academic benefits have been shown in work-based mentoring programs, including enhanced self-concept, acquisition of workplace skills, and knowledge of work related information.¹⁰

Programs that desire a positive impact on academic performance must pursue a substantive and deliberate integration of work experiences into the classroom curriculum in order to potentially encourage a positive impact on academics

Research also indicates that a deliberate collaboration between school personnel and internship staff that intentionally integrates school knowledge at work, and work-based knowledge at school can “have positive effects on students’ educational, attitudinal, and employment outcomes.”¹¹

Potential positive impacts on the academic arena include students completing more academic courses, earning higher grades or grade point averages, improvements in attendance, study of academics necessary for their career interests, enrolling in post-secondary education, and attending college on schedule.¹²

⁹ R. Bailey, Thomas & Katherine L. Hughes and David Thornton Moore. 2004 *Working Knowledge: Work-based learning and education reform*. NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

¹⁰ L. Hughes, Katherine, David Thornton Moore, and Thomas R. Bailey. 1999 “Worked-based learning and academic skills.” Institute on Education and the Economy; Number 27/November 1999

¹¹ Wonacott, Michael E. The Impact of Work-Based Learning on Students. ERIC Digest. <http://www.ericdigests.org/2003-4/work-basedhtml>

¹² Brown, C. H. “A Comparison of Selected Outcomes of Secondary Tech Prep Participants and Non-Participants in Texas.” *Journal of Vocational Education Research* 25, no. 3 (2000): 273-295.

Freedman, Marc. 1993 *The Kindness of Strangers: Adult mentors, urban youth and the new volunteerism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.