

Research about Career Development Internships

Context

The following document has been created from various sources about the impact of school-to-work experiences. While not pertaining specifically to career development internship programs, the findings are of interest to programs of these sorts. The research will hopefully be informative to those who run internship programs for its own sake as well as its possible incorporation into grant proposals and other formal writing.

Introduction

The United States Congress passed the School-to-Work Opportunities Act in 1994. The act identified work-based learning, school-based learning and connecting activities as three essential components of a rigorous and relevant education that would better prepare all students for the future.

Overview of School-to-Work Research

Most of the studies cited below examine work-based learning that includes 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 drew the some of the following conclusions:

(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 world of work; (7) the jobs that students obtain through School-to-Work tend to be different from and of higher quality than the jobs they would normally get; (8) School-to-Work helps students plan for the future and act in ways that will help them achieve their goals.

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)

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 range of occupations. Students learn by observing and/or actually doing real work. Learning in the workplace

should support learning in the classroom and should promote the development of broad transferable skills. Within the work-based learning context the following are criteria for quality internship programs themselves. Any given internship program may not address all of these criteria, but program design should be built around the ones selected.

1. Appropriate training and preparation of interns for their experience.
2. Trained and caring adult mentor/supervisors who work one-on-one with interns and support them in their efforts.
3. Individualized, real-world, well-defined, safe projects that require effort and persistence over time, and result in the creation of something that matters to interns and has an external audience. The related work strategies and tools mirror those used by professionals in the field and help students develop a sense of what accomplished adult performance involves.
4. Opportunities to acquire both life (e.g., time management) and workplace skills (e.g., teamwork). As interns progress they are given ever-increasing responsibility.
5. Experiences that develop students' critical-thinking skills, including problem solving and the ability to tackle complex questions and carry out independent investigations.
6. Facilitated and intentional opportunities for reflection that help interns make sense of their own learning.
7. Opportunities for students to have their voice heard about and a say in their internship experience, enabling them to take an active role in their own learning.
8. Awareness of career opportunities within particular job fields and an understanding of the educational requirements for these careers.
9. Preplanned, quality evaluation of the internship program and student, mentor, and internship staff self assessment and that of interns throughout the program.

Additional criteria are important to developing a quality career development internship program and should be taken into consideration:

Worked-Based Learning and Mentorship Experiences

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

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; and
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); and
4. Helping youth to resist negative influences.

Enhance Self Concept

1. Help interns gain new skills and social connections to enhance the sense of mastery, confidence, and an increased sense of self.

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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)

- **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 together plan out the scope and sequence of the work and 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 the youth's social connections; and
3. enhancing mentee's self concept and optimism about the future

"Worked Based Mentoring" within the mentoring.org website

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

Freedman, Marc.

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

Limited, but promising research on youth work-place mentoring programs supports the need for a strong mentor-mentee relationships. Students involved in well-organized, work-based and 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.

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

Internship staff should take responsibility of making sure 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 of the strongest research conclusions is that of the importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and develop positive relationships with youth.

Sipe, Cynthia.

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

Freedman, Marc.

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

- **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, which research indicates students highly valued about their work-based learning experiences.

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.

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.

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)

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

Scribner, J.P., and Wakelyn, D.

1997 “Youth Apprenticeship Experiences in Wisconsin: A Stakeholder-Based Evaluation.” 1997 (ED 422 505)

Research of Note Related to Work-based Learning

Work-based Learning and Academic Impact

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

The positive impact on academic performance through work-based learning is limited and contradictory. Studies found that student interns primarily learned job-related skills and work-readiness-related attitudes and behaviors, with little or no effects on their academic achievement. Notably there is often little correspondence between the math, science, and even reading taught in school in the internship experience. Furthermore there is now a body of research that demonstrates not the connection between, but the separation between classroom knowledge and that outside the classroom. Research spanning decades shows that individuals do not predictably transfer sound everyday practice to school endeavors, even when the former seems relevant to the latter.

R. Bailey, Thomas & Katherine L. Hughes and David Thronton Moore.

2004 *Working Knowledge: Work-based learning and education reform*. NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Furthermore there are “some studies [that] find no effect, or negative effects [on academics].... The 1996 High Schools That Work Assessment found that those students who were earning credit for part-time jobs connected with school had lower achievement in reading, mathematics, and science than students with part-time jobs that were not related to a school program.” (Hughes, Thornton, & Bailey, 1999)

As seen above, even though work-placed learning does occasionally appear to connect to let alone reinforce academic knowledge, such a claim is more tenuous than common wisdom and the prevailing rhetoric would have it. Although there is some evidence that work-based-learning helps motivate students to study harder, overall work-based learning proponents who stand on the reinforcement claim as a way to convince skeptics of the program's value are standing on thin ice. Importantly though, other, non-academic benefits have been shown to come from work-based mentoring including enhanced self-concept, acquisition of workplace skills, and content information related to the work itself.

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

- **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**

Connections between school- and work-based learning do not typically occur. There is a limited body of research however that 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 at times to “have positive effects on students’ educational, attitudinal, and employment outcomes.”

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

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

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.

Unless there is a deliberate well-planned and executed school-work cross-curriculum effort by internship staff and classroom teachers programs should be wary of making claims about a connection between their programs and students' academic advancement and remain focused on what they do best: provide interns with unique work-based and career exploration experiences in a real-world environment.