

Learning from Graduates and Interns: Examining Graduate and Student Experiences in the Education Administration Internship

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The purpose of this study was to more fully understand: (1) the degree to which administrative interns are provided with the opportunity to lead administrative experiences; (2) the types of administrative experiences in which interns engage during the administrative internship experience; and (3) the value of the administrative internship to aspiring administrators. A survey instrument was designed and administered to two cohorts of aspiring administrators in one university's administrative preparation program to answer these questions. Overall, we found that recent interns indicated they had been well prepared to lead managerial tasks during their practicum experiences and that interns were increasingly seeing leadership of instructional activities and staff development. This finding runs counter to previous research conducted on interns' experiences leading instructional activities. Study respondents also highlighted the mentor/intern relationship as a key factor influencing the aspiring administrator's opportunity for leadership experience during the internship.

Introduction

Despite the crucial nature of the education administration internship, there is much disparity both between and within states as to the requirements, implementation, and evaluation of the internship experience for students (Author, 2012; Orr, 2011; Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). Research suggests full-time practicums, in which aspiring educational leaders are relieved of classroom responsibilities, are most likely to provide interns with the leadership experiences needed to assume an administrative position (Lovely, 2004; Norris, Barnett, Basom & Yerkes, 2002; SREB, 2005; Wallace, 2010). Unfortunately, many aspiring leaders do not have the resources to cede a teaching position to engage in a full-time administrative internship.

As a result, to complete required administrative hours, many aspiring administrators participate in summer internship experiences or engage in a mixture of activities that are administrative in nature during planning time and before and after school. The quality of these experiences, as well as the degree to which interns are provided with opportunities to assume leadership during these types of administrative practicums, greatly varies. Aspiring administrators often lack the opportunity to engage in active and direct leadership opportunities, instead focusing on passive, observational opportunities (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005). Fry et al. (2005) also found that internships are generally not structured to provide the continuum of observing, participating in, and leading activities that develop aspiring principals' abilities to improve schools and increase student achievement, two primary responsibilities of principals in the area of instructional leadership. Yet, mounting research points to the critical role of the school principal in improving instruction (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

In addition to the challenge of ensuring that administrative interns assume leadership roles in part-time administrative preparation programs, aspiring administrators must also gain experience in the wide range of activities for which school leaders are asked to assume responsibility. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, regularly observing classroom teachers, providing constructive feedback, and serving as the curriculum expert (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), even while they still serve as the facilities manager, the budget manager, and the disciplinarian (Davis et al., 2005). Further, preparing new leaders for the first year of the principalship is known to be incredibly difficult as new principals face the challenge of reshaping a vision for the school and addressing issues remaining from the preceding administrator (Casavant & Cherkowski, 2001). Leadership preparation programs that aim to provide aspiring administrators with all the necessary skills for the principalship struggle to ensure that aspiring leaders acquire each of the needed competencies to fulfill their future roles (Author & Author, 2013).

In a previous study we conducted, we explored how current school and district leaders who are alumni of one university's educational administration preparation program describe how they acquired the essential skills and experiences needed to be effective in leadership positions (Author & Author, 2013). Current administrators who were interviewed for this prior study identified their internship experiences as a key component of their growth and preparation to be successful school leaders. These alumni indicated that the degree to which they were provided with the opportunity to lead as interns was a critical factor in contributing to the value of their own positive internship experiences (Author & Author, 2013). It was also consistently reported that internship experiences helped prepare alumni to assume pseudo-administrative roles¹ right

¹ Coaches, department heads, teachers-on-assignment in central office, etc.

after completion of the program, even though many waited to become full-time administrators. However, as this prior study relied on interview data with a select number of alumni, we lacked data on how many students in this administrative preparation program are actually provided with leadership opportunities during the internship experience and on the types of experiences in which they are provided with the opportunity to lead.

The purpose of this study was to more fully understand the degree to which interns are provided with the opportunity to lead and the types of administrative experiences in which interns in this administrative preparation program engage. Students in this program are all completing their graduate work part-time, while also maintaining full-time positions in other educational roles, often as teachers or instructional specialists. We wondered whether administrative interns received more opportunities to lead managerial tasks than to gain instructional leadership experience, in line with evidence from current research. Further, while our previous study had asked alumni to analyze their experiences retrospectively, in this study, we sought to understand how aspiring administrators described the value of the internship experience to their preparation as future administrators when asked to reflect on it one-two months after the internship's completion. The instrument administered to recent interns for the purposes of this study was informed by our prior research about how current K-12 district and school leaders described acquisition of the essential skills and experiences needed to be effective in their positions (Author & Author, 2013).

The specific research questions explored in this study were:

1. What types of experiences do aspiring administrators engage in during the administrative internship?
2. To what degree are administrative interns provided with the opportunity to lead the administrative experiences in which they engage?
3. How do current administrative interns describe the value of the administrative internship to their future roles as school leaders?

The results of this research have implications for administrative preparation programs seeking to ensure that the internship experience provides aspirant administrators with an extensive range of administrative experiences, as are employed by effective school leaders, and with the opportunity to lead these activities while preparing for administrative roles on a part-time basis.

Review of Literature

Effective School Leadership

As leadership preparation programs continue to reform their programmatic foci and delivery methods, it is important they stay grounded in existent literature regarding effective school leadership. Principals have a critical role in building schools that promote effective teaching and learning and in ensuring that all students achieve, in contrast to the role of the principal-manager of the past. Today's schools are expected to teach a broad range of students with varying needs, while steadily improving achievement, an expectation that requires an effective principal to not only be an accomplished instructional leader, but to also allocate resources effectively and to lead a continual process of organizational improvement (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2007).

There are few responsibilities in schools that do not fall under the authority of the principal, as the job has continued to expand in reach and scope to include responsibilities that

many would argue exceed the capabilities of one person. A principal is asked to be an educational visionary, disciplinarian, community builder, budget analyst, facilities manager, and navigator of various relationships with stakeholders, to name just a few of his responsibilities (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Particularly in large schools, the demands of the day-to-day job of leading a school organization, which involves putting out fires both literally and figuratively, take precedence over the data analysis and long-term planning required to effectively improve instruction (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2007). In order to prepare aspiring principals to effectively meet all of these job requirements, leadership preparation programs must carefully consider how to design and focus the content of required courses and practicum experiences to prepare individuals to fulfill this wide array of responsibilities (Davis et al., 2005).

Instructional leadership. While principals are confronted by myriad responsibilities, it is clear that the principal's role as the instructional leader in initiating change efforts to improve teaching and learning for every child is paramount (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, & Meyerson, 2005). Research has demonstrated that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in school-level factors that influence student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). The teacher in front of the classroom directly impacts student learning, but the principal can directly affect teachers' abilities to meet every child's learning needs (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr and Cohen (2007) state that the principal's most important role is ensuring that every teacher is able to provide quality instruction. An effective school leader, therefore, must have an understanding of how to lead adult learning for the purpose of facilitating improved student learning.

Numerous researchers have identified specific actions principals must take to be effective in improving student achievement, each of which require leaders to demonstrate multiple skills and competencies. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) identified three practices at the core of successful leadership: setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization. Setting direction includes establishing a clear and achievable goal to guide instructional improvement across the organization (Stoll & Louis, 2007; Schmoker, 2004). Principals must also develop people by supporting teachers in improving their own practice through well-designed and focused opportunities for professional learning (Corcoran, 1995; Curry & Killion, 2009; Hord, 2009, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004). Finally, structures, processes, and protocols must be designed and implemented to engage the entire school community in an ongoing cycle of improvement that will facilitate achievement of instructional goals (Armstrong & Anthes, 2001; Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2005; Easton, 2004; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, March 2008; Holcomb, 2001; Love, Terc, & Regional Alliance for Mathematics and Science Education Reform, 2002; Pappano, 2007).

Mendels (2012) discussed five similar and necessary actions for current principals to lead schools effectively through instructional leadership, including: "1) shaping a vision; 2) creating a climate hospitable to education; 3) cultivating leadership in others; 4) improving instruction; and 5) managing people, data, and processes" (pp. 55-56). Additionally, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that when administrators focused on the key business of teaching and learning, student outcomes were positively affected.

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) sought to add specificity to the actions principals must take to improve student learning and identified 21 categories of principal responsibility that correlate with improved student achievement. The responsibilities they identified in the literature

that correlated most significantly with student academic achievement (>.26) included protecting teachers from issues of discipline, adapting leadership to the needs of the situation with flexibility, monitoring the effectiveness of school practices and their input on student learning, advocating for the school to stakeholders through outreach, and utilizing situational awareness to address current and potential problems (Marzano et al., 2005).

In light of the complexity of the principal's role, and particularly the number of areas in which aspiring principals must gain practice and experience in order to learn how to be an effective instructional leader, development of these skills must be prioritized during the administrative internship. LaPointe and Davis (2006) found that exemplary leadership programs focus on instructional leadership by seeking "to develop the ability to coach and support teachers, to share a vision for reform, and to lead a team to implement that vision for improved teaching and learning" (p. 4). Further, Pounder (2011) articulated how a focus on instructional leadership, specifically through using authentic tasks and field work focused on improving student results, develops the principal's ability to lead improvement in schools (Perez et al, 2011; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). Yet, in their study of educational leadership preparation programs, Fry et al. (2005) discovered a lack of hands-on activities that prepare aspiring principals as instructional leaders ready to lead school improvement and facilitate improved student achievement. This study, therefore, sought to understand to what degree administrative interns in a part-time educational administration program at one university acquired this hands-on leadership experience.

Administrative Internship Design and Activities

Within the field of leadership preparation, there is agreement by both scholars and practitioners of the need to engage aspiring leaders in authentic field-based learning experiences that tightly align to coursework (Perez et al, 2011). The theoretical foundations obtained during formal leadership preparation coursework are applied in a practical setting during the administrative internship experience by presenting students with real-life problems to solve (Perez et al, 2011). Furthermore, by integrating real-world practice with theoretically-based reflection in the classroom, aspiring administrators can see the theory in action (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2007) and experience the process of learning in real-time (Kolb, 1984). Well-designed internships align with course readings and include developmental assessments of interns' strengths and weaknesses. Such internship experiences are well-situated to extend the learning of aspiring leaders and prepare them for entry-level administrative positions. Orr and Orphanos (2011) furthered this notion in saying, "the higher the quality of programs and internship experiences, the more positive the effects on candidate learning and subsequent use of effective leadership practices" (p. 48).

Research suggests that administrative interns report finding value in their experiences as well (Dunaway et al., 2010; Orr, 2011). The internship gives aspiring school leaders the opportunity to problem solve and to attend to the daily challenges faced by those currently serving in administrative positions. Huber (2008) indicated the benefit of internships is found in the synthesis of coursework and practical experiences in real schools. Leithwood et al. (1996) learned that graduates of administrative preparation programs found their internships to be valuable as a result of the opportunity this experience provided to problem solve and to integrate theory and practice. Leithwood et al.'s (1996) study also found that a high quality, formal, leadership preparation program accounted for about eight percent of the variation in leader

effectiveness. Yet, the value of the internship experience can be affected by numerous factors, and most clearly by the internship requirements.

Impediments to the internship. While numerous states have established systems of leadership development to include specific requirements of pre-service leadership programs, discrepancies and variations continue to exist in the administrative internship (Roach, Smith and Boutin, 2011). Internship experiences vary across programs with regard to required numbers of hours, the sustained nature of those hours, the activities conducted within the internship, and the protocols for reflection and university faculty visitation utilized across programs. Some programs emphasize leadership and management skills while others focus on cultivating a deep understanding of instruction (Davis et al., 2005). These differences in program requirements are also representative of differences in the required number of internship hours that individual U.S. states indicate must be met for administrative certification to be granted (Barnett et al., 2009). In many cases, programs have designed discrete, unrelated administrative tasks for students to complete to meet the hours requirement, resulting in the internship becoming a compliance activity for both faculty and students (Perez et al., 2011).

Murphy (1990) pointed to the part-time delivery structure and evening classes incorporated into administrative preparation programs as indicators of these types of low expectations and below-standard program content. Indeed, in their research, Darling-Hammond et al. (2007) found that robust internships rated highly by graduates were full-time, yearlong, paid experiences in which a full-time certified administrator mentors interns. These internship characteristics shaped the experiences of aspiring administrators in the Delta State University program and in San Diego's Educational Leadership Development Academy (ELDA), as two examples. However, as many aspiring administrators continue working full-time while earning their administrative license, research on the internship factors that lead to variance in outcomes is critical to informing the requirements of part-time administrative internships.

Such variance in internship requirements is evident internationally as well. In Ontario, participants complete a sixty-hour internship at their own schools, and in Singapore, participants take part in two four-week internships at their schools that alternate with seminars (Huber, 2008). In both development programs, participants observe or shadow their school leader, carry out a project independently, and visit other schools to broaden their understanding. Many other countries may not have formal internships as part of a preparation program, but rather view the preparation of school leaders as a process that begins with early identification of leadership potential in teachers (Schleicher, 2012). Once this identification occurs, teachers are provided opportunities to serve on committees or in quasi-administrative positions as department heads or grade level leads. Singapore, Finland, and Norway, for example, focus on this type of early development. Additionally, some countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands have developed courses or seminars that allow interested school leaders to engage in reflective and practical activities to assess their own value, as well as provide their local agencies the opportunity to screen them. They are then eligible for more intensive training programs (Schleicher, 2012).

Variation is also apparent in the role of the mentor, coach, or site supervisor, affecting the value of the internship experience for aspiring leaders. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) state, "Although professors can design leadership preparation programs that focus on the theoretical underpinnings of educational administration, active engagement by practicing principals who serve as mentors to prospective candidates and novice school leaders provides authenticity" (p. 471). In fact, Walker, Bryant and Lee (2013) studied critical features of leadership preparation

programs internationally and found that practitioners play active roles in mentoring and job shadowing in effective programs. The criticism often voiced of a lack of authenticity and connection to “real practice” is avoided through active involvement and collaboration of both district and university personnel.

Administrative preparation programs that enroll aspiring leaders who are currently working full-time face additional challenges, including facilitating students’ opportunities to obtain leadership experience at multiple types of school settings while in the program; visiting and observing schools to engage in cohort-based learning during the workday in light of the need for teachers to take professional days to do so; and balancing students’ needs to gain essential competencies, often on an expedient time frame, while they balance their own work and family commitments. The results of this study will inform other part-time administrative preparation programs in prioritizing the key components of the internship experience to prepare future effective school leaders, while also aligning internship requirements to fit the lives of current working professionals.

Theoretical Design

Using the sociocultural learning tenets of Dewey (1916), Lindemann (1926), furthered by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), we examined how these adult graduate students engaged in learning through their internship experiences. An important component of the learning theories posited by the aforementioned authors are the importance of context and interaction of the learner socially in the environment. In this way, we viewed educational interns as experiencing a necessary component of learning by engaging in the environment and social context of schools and educational settings. Throughout their formal coursework in the leadership preparation program, interns acquired a theoretical foundation that included short engagement in the field. The internship provided an opportunity to fully engage full-time in educational settings in the role of an educational leader. According to Dewey (1916), “By doing his (sic) share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skills, and is saturated with its emotional spirit” (p. 26). The notion of experiential learning and social learning was furthered by Knowles in the mid-1970s through his work on adult learning (andragogy) and was renewed in 2015 along with Holton and Swanson. While there persists questions about how adults and children may or may not experience learning differently, the notion of learning while doing continues as a focus.

As we designed the instrument and worked to understand the experiences of the interns, we were attentive to these theoretical foundations that helped us approximate the level of real world and contextual learning experienced during the internship. The foundational questions of relevancy and active engagement allowed us to explore the level of involvement the interns had in myriad leadership activities.

Methodology

Instrument Design

During 2011-2012, we conducted interviews with 20 graduates of an educational administration program who were currently serving as administrators to gain insight into their current responsibilities and how those lined up with their preparation experience. We also sought to understand their perspective on the myriad preparatory experiences they had and how those did

or did not prepare them for their current roles (Author & Author, 2013). Two critical findings from this prior study included the need for engagement in early leadership activities while in a teaching role and the need for practical, hands-on experiences during leadership preparation experiences. These interviews contributed to our instrument design as we sought to gather descriptive data about how aspiring leaders were experiencing the internship.

The instrument (please see Appendix A for the full survey) collected demographic information, such as age, race, and position title. We then utilized a Likert-scale style set for students to rate their internship activities, based upon the 2005 SREB (Southern Regional Education Board) survey scale categories (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005), as did not participate (1), observed but did not participate (2), participated in activity (3), or led activity (4). The program provided categories and activities to interns and mentors as quality internship experiences. While we did not utilize the SREB question items, the Likert categories provided a needed continuum from observation to leadership to frame the work. Local administrators, program faculty, ELCC (Educational Leadership Constituent Council) standards, and reference to licensure requirements contributed to the activities presented. Finally, we designed and utilized open-ended questions to gather basic qualitative data regarding the following questions:

- Other than those listed, what other experiences did you participate in as an intern?
- Which of your experiences did you find most beneficial to your preparation as a school leader? Please explain why this was most influential.
- Did you encounter any specific challenges in working with your site mentor? If so, please describe.
- In your interaction with your site mentor, what benefits did you experience, if any?
- If you were provided with the opportunity to lead certain activities, to what would you attribute your mentor's willingness to delegate this responsibility to you?
- What aspects of your activities as an intern did you feel well prepared to complete? What aspects did you feel unprepared for?
- What were your expectations of the internship experience? Were you expectations met? Why or why not?

Program Context

The administrative preparation program that served as the research site for this study enrolls students in Master's and Education Specialist degree programs, as well as in an Administrative Certificate program. Students enroll at three different campus locations depending on their location of residence, but all students, regardless of campus location or the program in which they choose to enroll, complete the same 320 hour internship requirement. These hours are fulfilled through a combination of embedded hours in myriad courses and two dedicated internship courses, one of which requires full-time summer work.

In the first 80-hour internship course, students are expected to initiate and lead an administrative project under the guidance of a site-based mentor and the university supervisor. Most students in the program complete this first internship on a part-time basis in their own school settings. In the summer immediately prior to students' completion of the program, they complete the second 175-hour internship. During this internship, students are expected to take on the role of a full-time administrator by assuming leadership of at least one significant, semester-long project. Students must also assume responsibility to lead, facilitate, or participate in other administrative responsibilities in a multitude of areas during this internship, including from

hiring, budgeting, and supervising teachers to leading curriculum development, data analysis, and school improvement initiatives. Students are expected to fulfill administrative tasks that meet each of the six ELCC Standards. As a few examples, students may fulfill ELCC Standard 1 by supporting the development of or implementation of a component of the school's improvement plan (SIP), or by using data to monitor SIP goals, as two possibilities. ELCC Standard 3 might be met by contributing to the development of the master schedule, leading department or team meetings, or revising the school's safety and security plan, among other possibilities. Due to budget cuts by school districts over the last few years, some students in this program do not have the benefit of completing their second internship in a school with a summer school session and instead lead and participate in administrative tasks that take place during the summer in preparation for the coming school year.

Researcher role. As faculty members who teach in this university's Educational Administration program, we ensured that we would not unduly influence student participation. Therefore, neither of us served as the instructor for the summer internship course during the semesters when this survey was administered. We utilized student registration records to contact students who enrolled in the summer internship at each of our three campus locations during these summer sessions. In order to increase participation in the instrument between the first and second administration, we also presented to each class at its commencement to describe the study and to request students' participation. All participation was voluntary and confidential and participants were assured that their responses would have no impact, positive or negative, on their academic rating in the course.

Participant Sample

We distributed the instrument to all interns at one university within a week of completing their summer internship experience for two consecutive summers. At the completion of the first summer internship, we invited 56 interns to participate, and 19 responded for a response rate of 34%. In the second summer, we announced the instrument at the course commencement in addition to emailing the instrument invitation at the end of the course. During this second summer administration, we invited 78 interns to participate and 40 responded for a response rate of 51%. For purposes of analysis, we have combined the two years' data. The 59 interns included 48 women and 11 men who self-reported their race as 36 White, 19 Black, 3 Asian, and 1 Hispanic. Thirty-eight participants were under the age of 40, with the remaining 21 being between the ages of 41 and 60. Fifty of the interns had 1-15 years of educational experience. We were pleased with the cross-section we received of school types where interns were currently employed, including 24 in urban schools, 25 in suburban, 5 in rural, 2 in charter schools, 1 in a private school, and 2 in educational organizations.

We also wanted to understand the setting in which the participants completed their internships. The two students who worked in educational organizations also completed their internships there. The other students interned at an elementary school (14), middle school (6), high school (22), and central office (16). Within these settings, students worked in urban schools or settings (24), suburban schools (28), rural schools (5), a charter school (1), and a private school (1).

Qualitative Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

We used the qualitative data analysis software, AtlasTI, to assist with coding the open-ended responses. Open-ended questions on the instrument yielded varying depth of responses, ranging from a phrase to several paragraphs. In this way, it was challenging for us to identify specific themes due to abridged quotes. Three themes did emerge, however, that we saw evident in both smaller phrases and in the more extended responses. The themes included the value of the internship experience to personal growth, the significance of mentor trust and interactions, and the impact of critical incidents. Consistent with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations to establish trustworthiness, we engaged in individual coding, followed by interpretive community conversations, to ensure the codes were consistent in application and meaning. Given the limited nature of the qualitative aspect of this study and the anonymous status of the instrument, we were not able to engage in member checking.

Findings

Findings from the instrument administered in this study will be described and categorized under each research question. In regards to the first and second research questions, the results of the instrument indicate that aspiring administrators in this university's educational administration preparation program obtained experiences as direct participants, even if not as leaders, in areas of instructional leadership, and gained observational experience in leadership areas that were more managerial in nature. In regards to the third research question on the value of the internship experience, three main themes emerged: the value of the internship experience to personal growth, the significance of mentor trust and interactions, and the impact of critical incidents on the aspiring leader's development.

Leadership Experiences

In order to understand the level of leadership the interns engaged in on a variety of leadership categories and specific activities, we utilized the ratings of the SREB survey administered in 2005 which provided a Likert-scale style set for students to rate as did not participate (1), observed but did not participate (2), participated in activity (3), or led activity (4). Although we did not utilize the SREB survey statements, the Likert categories provided a meaningful way to create a continuum to allow participants to respond to their level of leadership on other activities. As we examined the percentage of each rating, we found some trends relative to what types of activities interns led versus engaged in as an observer. When it came to planning, staff development, discipline, supervision of instruction, scheduling, and stakeholder interactions, we found that interns assumed larger roles as direct participants, even if not as leaders. With more managerial tasks such as guidance and counseling services, food service, facilities, and budgeting, more observational interaction seemed to pervade. We calculated the percentage for each item and they are shown in rank order in Table 1.

Table 1
Level of Leadership in Internship Categories

Leadership Category	4 Led activity	3 Participated in activity	2 Observed, but did not participate	1 Did not participate
Planning	57.89	47.37	8.77	3.51
Staff development	33.33	49.12	10.53	7.02
Discipline	33.33	33.33	3.51	29.82
Supervision and evaluation	29.82	43.86	3.51	21.05
Stakeholder Relationships	28.07	61.40	17.54	22.81
School-community relations	24.56	42.11	15.79	15.79
Scheduling	22.81	52.63	8.77	15.79
Transportation	21.05	35.09	5.26	38.60
Substitute teacher procedures	21.05	21.05	24.56	31.58
Curriculum and instructional planning	19.30	28.07	19.30	33.33
Publications (policy and guideline handbooks)	19.30	42.11	12.28	24.56
Technology	17.54	38.60	19.30	24.56
Special programs (gifted and talented, art and music, etc.)	15.79	22.81	14.04	47.37
Staffing	14.04	45.61	17.54	22.81
Student activities (including budgets)	12.28	35.09	10.53	42.11
Budgeting	10.53	17.54	31.58	40.35
Instructional materials (including library, media, computer, etc.)	8.77	7.02	3.51	8.77
Food service	8.77	17.54	15.79	54.39
Guidance and counseling services	5.26	17.54	22.81	54.39
Care and maintenance of facilities	3.51	29.82	26.32	40.35

N=59; Reported in Percentages

We then provided interns with a list of more specific activities and asked them to rate their participation in them using the same scale. Interns seemed to have the most involvement in leading activities around professional development, managing the school building and transportation, preparing the school improvement plan, and conducting program evaluation.

Intern generally observed activities that involved designing school or districtwide curricula or plans and coordinating community events. Table 2 shows the calculated mean for each activity.

Table 2
Level of Leadership in Intern Specific Activities

Activity	4 Led activity	3 Participated in activity	2 Observed, but did not participate	1 Did not participate
Plan and/or facilitate professional development	33.33	36.84	7.02	22.81
Manage school building facilities and/or transportation	29.82	36.84	10.53	21.05
Prepare annual school or district improvement or strategic plan	29.82	33.33	12.28	24.56
Conduct program evaluation	28.07	29.82	14.04	26.32
Analyze data on a need for school or division	26.32	43.86	10.53	19.30
Coordinate and conduct student discipline	26.32	42.11	3.51	28.07
Manage special school program related to instruction that involved stakeholders	21.05	26.32	15.79	36.84
Conduct committee or team meeting	17.54	19.30	12.28	50.88
Prepare master schedule	17.54	21.05	8.77	52.63
Facilitate IEP meeting	17.54	31.58	10.53	40.35
Facilitate vision, mission, or other school reform activities	14.04	19.30	5.26	61.40
Conduct formal evaluation of teacher	14.04	15.79	3.51	64.91
Conduct informal observations of classrooms or learning walks with staff	14.04	29.82	5.26	49.12
Perform budget-related tasks or analysis	14.04	26.32	14.04	43.86
Conduct informal observations specifically related to diversity issues	10.53	38.60	8.77	42.11
Develop safety and	8.77	10.53	15.79	64.91

Activity	4 Led activity	3 Participated in activity	2 Observed, but did not participate	1 Did not participate
security plans				
Create newsletter for distribution	8.77	8.77	15.79	66.67
Interview and/or hire new staff	7.02	33.33	17.54	42.11
Redevelop district wide plans	7.02	26.32	7.02	59.65
Design technology plan	5.26	19.30	21.05	54.39
Participate in PTA/PTO events	5.26	15.79	12.28	66.67
Conduct faculty meeting	3.51	19.30	28.07	49.12
Coordinate community event or initiate community partnerships	1.75	12.28	7.02	78.95
Design or implement new curriculum or assessment system	1.75	12.28	14.04	71.93

N=59; Reported in Percentages

Value of Internship

As we analyzed the open-ended instrument responses, three main themes emerged: the value of the internship experience to personal growth, the significance of mentor trust and interactions, and the impact of critical incidents on the aspiring leader's development.

In more than half of the open-ended responses, we saw consistency in references to the importance of this type of internship experience. Many of the interns discussed the internship as being necessary and critical to their professional development, much as they viewed their student teaching experience. One reported, "While I learned much on the job in my first year teaching, I cannot imagine not having student taught first. This experience gives me the foothold to start, but also reminds me how much I will have to learn." Interns discussed the increased capacity that came through their experiences, such as one intern who wrote, "I felt confident when I began, but learned so much that I didn't know I needed to." An area of concern echoed by some aspiring leaders was the notion of managing time. One intern saw the experience as assisting development in that area and wrote,

Actually being placed in the position to learn how important multi-tasking is as well as staying organized. It was beneficial to see what an administrator's day really consists of and how many responsibilities you have. You may be working on a very important project, but if you have parents come in or a student discipline issue, you have to stop what you are doing and take care of the pressing issue immediately.

Several other interns referenced specific incidents on which they placed high value in the context of their overall preparatory experience.

When we asked interns about their internship activities, we consistently saw reference to the importance of the intern's interactions with the mentor, specifically the mentor's willingness (or lack thereof) to turn over important tasks for the intern to lead. Often, interns working in their regularly assigned buildings were able to garner trust more quickly than those who were meeting mentors for the first time. All responses included references to the mentor "trusting" the intern and turning over important responsibilities such as decision-making, administration of summer school, and teacher observations. One intern also discussed the mutual benefit of the mentoring arrangement, saying:

My mentor was very supportive and easy to work with. At the time, she was struggling with her own issues regarding the balance of family and work responsibilities. Talking with her helped me clarify my thinking on these issues and their potential consequences. She indicated the mentoring experience renewed her desire to work as an educational administrator. In the end, we both benefitted from the experience.

Another intern discussed the mentor's willingness to let her find her own style in the protected structure of an internship, saying "She would model situations for me and let me shadow her; however she also knew that her way of doing things wouldn't necessarily always be mine. She had a great amount of faith in me." Finally, some interns discussed positive mentor interactions that altered previously held views based upon prior negative experiences with building leaders. For example, one intern wrote, "I gained confidence that there actually were qualified, professional, personable leaders who have vision to help students and who are not just trying to climb the ladder." Another said, "My mentor believed in me and my abilities; something I had never felt before professionally."

The final theme that emerged in the area of mentor interaction was around trust. While some interns placed responsibility for not being given access to activities or leadership opportunities on the lack of leadership by their mentors, others placed that responsibility squarely on their own shoulders. In a positive sense, several recognized their own competencies and their willingness to demonstrate those as necessary for being given more "practice opportunities". One intern wrote, "My mentor's willingness to delegate responsibility to me is because of my ethics, determination, organization, and willingness to motivate others to bring out the best in them as well as learning from those same individuals and from my own experiences." Similarly, another intern reported, "They had complete belief in my competence resulting from my initial display of preparation and enthusiasm."

Finally, we recognized a theme regarding critical incidents, or a moment or event that interns found particularly meaningful to their development that caused them to question the nature of leadership, their personal leadership journeys, and systemically the state of education. One intern wrote, "Until I began this internship, I thought I knew more than my principal. In fact, if I am honest, it was one of my motivators for going into administration...I could do it better." Now, having completed this, I have a new sense of the challenges of this job and think all teachers would benefit from an administrative internship." Another echoed, "I was frustrated. I always thought all teachers were as dedicated as I saw myself to be; however, there were many teachers who were clock-punchers and were not there for kids." The disorienting dilemmas often were around parental behavior that they had not witnessed as teachers. Interns reported parents who would not pick up their children or who did not want to hear about poor academic performance as being disappointing and leaving them less hopeful about improving school performance.

Discussion and Implications

Through sociocultural learning, we sought to understand the extent of active engagement experienced by interns in the real-world setting of K-12 education, as opposed to the academic classroom experience. Some current interns surveyed for this study reported they were delegated menial tasks and spent their internship experience shadowing administrators, engaging very little in leading activities akin to those ascribed to school leaders. Many interns were provided with the opportunity to assume leadership in some areas. Overall, we found that current and recent interns, like the alumni who preceded them in the program, indicated they had exposure to managerial tasks during their practicum experiences. However, unlike the experiences of prior groups, interns were increasingly provided with leadership opportunities in the areas of instruction and staff development.

Research has clearly confirmed the significance of the principal's role as an instructional leader in improving teaching and learning for every child (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPoint, & Meyerson, 2005). As demonstrated in the instrument results, interns in this educational leadership preparation program often assumed some leadership for or directly participated in certain instructional areas, preparing them to become leaders in these areas as future administrators. Interns specifically indicated that they had these opportunities in the areas of staff development, planning and supervision, and evaluation of instruction. Many of the activities in which interns from this program most frequently engaged, including analyzing data, conducting faculty meetings, and facilitating professional development, also closely aligned with areas of instructional leadership.

Evidence from this program of students' participation in, and, in some cases, leadership of, instruction during the internship actually runs counter to previous research. In a survey of 61 university preparation programs, Fry, Bottoms, and O'Neill (2005) found that a third of university programs required interns to lead activities that contribute to improving student achievement, and less than one-fourth required interns to lead activities in which they implement good instructional practices. As one specific example, this team found, "Fewer than half require aspiring principals to lead activities in which faculties analyze schoolwide data and examine the performance of subgroups within the school" (p. 5). Many of the respondents to the instrument in this program did participate in or assume some leadership for activities that foster instructional leadership. A number of factors could have led to this surprising result. First, administrative interns in this university program complete their internships during the summer months, between May and August. The instrument through which data was gathered on intern experiences was distributed in the months of August and September, immediately following students' completion of the internship. It is possible that the types of activities in which aspiring leaders engaged will correlate with the administrative activities occurring during the summer months. For instance, schools commonly organize full days for staff learning in June, following the school year's completion, and in August, in preparation for the upcoming year. Much of the work that is completed by administrators during the summer months would qualify as "planning," whether planning for the school's summer school program or planning for the upcoming school year. Additionally, as this university program aims to place every intern, to the degree possible, in a setting in which summer school will be held, it would be probable for interns to acquire experience observing and providing feedback on instruction. In contrast, it is less likely for special programs, guidance and counseling services, and budgeting tasks to be completed during the summer timeframe.

Another factor that may have led interns to benefit from experiences in instructional leadership is the program's mentor/intern placements. This university-based leadership preparation program maintains strong relationships with specific nearby school districts, facilitating the placement of interns in these districts year after year. The school districts with whom the program partners are aware of the university's internship requirements and aim to place interns in settings where they will acquire these experiences. The university also frequently places summer administrative interns with graduates of this same program who have also often reflected on the internship experiences that best prepared them to assume administrative roles. In this way, the university partner helps to ensure that the administrative intern will be provided with leadership experiences that will contribute to his/her growth as an administrator. This model should be considered by other preparation programs as it highlights the importance of school-university partnerships.

Further, while administrative interns in this university preparation program are required to complete internship hours in at least two types of school settings (i.e. public v. private; Title I v. non-Title I; elementary v. secondary), a number of interns completed their internship with either a current or a former supervisor as their mentor. Even though being paired with a mentor previously unknown to the intern could lead the intern to acquire new leadership skills, working with a mentor with whom the intern already had a trusting relationship could have contributed to the opportunities that interns had to assume leadership in instructional areas. In the comments gathered on the instrument, other interns indicated that they specifically aimed to communicate their skills to their administrative mentors, which some believed contributed to the positive experiences they gained during the administrative internship.

While it is not possible to determine from the instrument results which specific factors may have led more administrative interns to assume responsibilities in areas of instructional leadership than is typical during the administrative internship, other administrative preparation programs that facilitate aspiring leaders' completion of administrative internship requirements on part-time bases may want to consider the types of administrative activities they require to be completed at certain times of the school year. For example, it may be most probable for interns to gain experience in the areas of budget and hiring in the January – April timeframe, in which courses focusing on these leadership topics, as well as administrative hours completion, could be targeted for this timeframe. Aspiring leaders who do have the opportunity to participate in a full-time administrative practicum may have the flexibility to gain more varied experiences whenever they arise, with little additional planning by the university.

Moreover, regardless of whether the aspiring leader participates in a full or part-time practicum, results from this study further confirm the powerful impact that the mentor/intern relationship has on the administrative intern's experience. Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) found that active engagement by mentor principals leads the intern to have an authentic experience. Using sociocultural learning to understand this sheds light on the myriad learning, which is possible through context-based learning. In this case, the mentor principal, through socialization with the intern, provides extensive learning opportunities that may, in fact, go beyond the task list used in this instrument and include skills and dispositions more challenging to measure. Internship preparation programs, therefore, must consider how to select, pair, and prepare current administrators to be effective mentors.

Still, despite their involvement in areas of instructional leadership, only some interns in this university-based preparation program, as evidenced by the mean ratings displayed in Tables 1 and 2, assumed direct leadership for administrative activities at their school sites. Fry, Bottoms,

and O'Neill (2005) similarly found that few programs offer a “developmental continuum of practice” in which the aspiring principal first observes, then participates in, and then leads school reform work (p. 5). Offering a continuum of experiences over time, as this university program was designing and preparing to implement at the time this study was conducted, would likely better prepare interns to assume leadership roles, as opposed to observational and participatory roles, during their final full-time administrative practicums. It is possible that structuring internship activities in a continuum format may be more essential for some aspiring administrative interns than others, since prior leadership experiences may have prepared some students to assume these responsibilities earlier in the program.

Future Research

Future research of university-based administrative preparation programs is needed for two specific purposes: (1) to determine which specific factors contribute to interns’ opportunities to lead activities during their internships, and specifically to lead in instructional areas, and (2) to understand the factors that contribute to the strength of the mentor/mentee relationship and its impact on the internship experience. First, while program requirements will certainly have some influence on the types of activities and the degree of leadership for activities that aspiring administrators assume, many program-related supports and situational factors also influence interns’ abilities to lead administrative tasks during their internships. Reviewing the experiences of administrative interns in programs in which: (1) specific internship requirements are expected to be completed at certain times of the school year; (2) a continuum of experiences are offered; and (3) interns have certain degrees of leadership experience prior to the internship would reveal which of these factors, if any, influence interns’ opportunities and abilities to assume roles as instructional *leaders* during the internship experience.

Further, as the significance of mentor trust and interactions emerged as a key factor that contributed to the value of the internship in this study, future research should be conducted to understand the factors that contribute to the strength of the intern/mentor relationship and its impact on the intern’s opportunity to lead during the administrative internship. Possible influential factors may include the preparation that mentors receive to act in their roles. A mentor handbook, in addition to web-based supports for mentors, and required in-person training sessions for both mentors and interns, may be tools that university-based administrative preparation programs consider in preparing current administrators to be mentors in the districts with whom they partner. However, the impact of these types of preparatory experiences on the intern/mentor relationship has not been fully examined in the literature.

Additional factors that may influence the effectiveness of the intern/mentor relationship, and the intern’s ability to assume leadership tasks during the administrative internship experience, should also be examined in future research so that key factors can be discussed with aspiring administrators and their mentors in preparation for the internship experience. As numerous interns referenced the importance of trust in the mentor/intern relationship, how trust is established during part-time administrative preparation experiences should be examined in future research. Understanding how an intern can quickly earn the trust and respect of the mentor may contribute to greater opportunities to lead administrative tasks during the internship. The mentor’s prior experiences with mentoring and his understanding of the mutual beneficence of this relationship may also influence the effectiveness of the relationship that develops with the intern. Additional factors such as compensation for mentors and the level of commitment and

interest that mentors have in their roles to prepare future administrators may influence the relationship that develops with the administrative intern and his opportunity to lead. The degree to which these factors, if any, have an effect on the intern/mentor relationship will need to be explored in future research studies to be more clearly understood.

Conclusion

As we continue to examine the experiences of administrative interns, it is important to have a clear understanding of what administrative interns actually do during their practicum experiences and importantly, in what context they learn. Often, interns are dispersed to schools to work with a site mentor with little oversight or input from university faculty. In doing so, it becomes critical to collect data, interact in site visits, and review interns' journals to identify challenges and issues that may need to be addressed. As shown through the results gathered by this university-based leadership preparation program, interns' experiences may be influenced by the timing of their experiences and by the efforts taken by the university to establish productive intern/mentor partnerships. This instrument allowed us to examine the experiences of two cohorts of students to understand their levels of leadership during the internship experience and the leadership opportunities in which they were permitted to engage.

Interns engaged in activities classified as instructional leadership more than those in prior studies or than were reported by program staff. Still, in some cases, interns had intense responsibilities and a plethora of hours in managerial activities and sometimes even support staff level activities. Leadership preparation programs need to work together to engage in improvement of the administrative internship and to ensure multiple opportunities for interns to engage in learning opportunities that approximate the realities faced by school leaders. As summer school programs and other special programs historically associated with internships dissipate with budget cuts, collaborative and creative approaches to the internship experience will be required to ensure a well-prepared leadership pool.

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Appendix A

Intern Survey Questions

1. Responses to the following demographic questions will be used to describe the characteristics of the individuals who participated in this study in the aggregate, and will not be tied to specific question responses. Your response is appreciated but is not required.

Gender

- a. Female
- b. Male

2. Age

- a. 21-30
- b. 31-40
- c. 41-50
- d. 51-60
- e. 61-70

3. My race is best described as

- a. Unspecified
- b. American Indian
- c. Asian
- d. Black
- e. Hispanic
- f. White
- g. Hawaiian

4. What is the title of your current position?

5. How many years of experience do you have in your current position?

- a. 1-5
- b. 6-10
- c. 11-15
- d. 16-20
- e. 21-25
- f. 26 or more

6. Please describe any other full-time positions you have held in education.

7. How many years of experience do you have in education?

- a. 1-5
- b. 6-10
- c. 11-15
- d. 16-20
- e. 21-25
- f. 26 or more

8. How would you best identify the type of school or educational setting in which you currently work?

- a. Urban
- b. Suburban
- c. Rural
- d. Charter
- e. Private
- f. Educational Organization
- g. Other (please specify) _____

9. Please tell us about the type of school or Central Office setting in which you completed your internship for 6287B. Which of the following would best describe your setting?

- a. Elementary school
- b. Middle school
- c. High school
- d. K-8 school
- e. Central office location
- f. Other, please specify _____

10. Which of the following descriptors best identifies the type of school or educational setting in which you completed your internship for 6287B?

- a. Urban
- b. Suburban
- c. Rural
- d. Charter
- e. Private
- f. Other, please specify _____

11. Please indicate the degree to which you observed, participated in, and/or led activities in each of the following internship activity categories.

	Did not participate	Observed, but did not participate	Participated in activity	Led activity (ies)
Planning				
Staff Development				
Curriculum development and assessment				
Special programs (gifted and talented, art and music, etc.)				
Scheduling				
Staffing				

	Did not participate	Observed, but did not participate	Participated in activity	Led activity (ies)
Supervision and evaluation				
School-community relations				
Stakeholder relationship building and interaction (parents, community members)				
Discipline				
Budgeting				
Student activities				
Food service				
Transportation				
Care and maintenance of facilities				
Substitute teacher procedures				
Publications (policy and guideline handbooks)				
Guidance and counseling services				
Technology				
Safe school plans				

12. Please rate your level of involvement in each of the following specific activities during your administrative internship in 6287B.

	Did not participate	Observed, but did not participate	Participated in activity	Led activity (ies)
Analyze data on a need for school or division				
Plan and/or facilitate professional development				
Prepare annual school or district improvement				
Conduct informal observations of classrooms or learning walks with other staff				
Conduct formal evaluation of teacher				
Prepare master schedule				
Coordinate committee or team meeting				
Coordinate community event or initiate community partnerships				
Participate in PTA/PTO activities				
Create newsletter for distribution				
Conduct program evaluation				
Facilitate IEP meeting				
Design or implement new curriculum or assessment system				
Manage school building facilities and/or transportation				
Interview and/or hire new staff				
Facilitate vision, mission, or other school reform activities				
Perform budget-related tasks or analyses				
Redevelop districtwide plans				
Develop safety and security plans				
Design technology plan				

13. Other than those listed in the two previous questions, what other experiences did you participate

in as an intern in 6287B, if any?

14. Which of your experiences in 6287B did you find most beneficial to your preparation as a school leader? Please explain why this experience(s) was most influential.
15. What factors facilitated your development of a productive relationship with your site mentor?
16. Did you encounter any specific challenges in working with your site mentor? If so, please describe.
17. If you were provided with the opportunity to lead certain activities as an intern, to what would you attribute your mentor's willingness to delegate this responsibility to you?
18. What aspects of your activities as an intern did you feel well prepared to complete? What aspects did you feel unprepared for?
19. What were your expectations of the internship experience? Were your expectations met? Why or why not?
20. What specific aspects, if any, of the internship process and/or experience at GWU could be improved? Please be specific.