

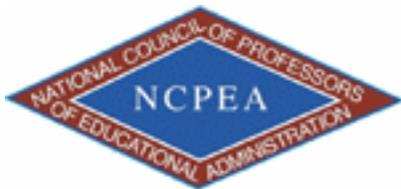
CROSSING THE LINE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ADMINISTRATIVE INTERNS' EXPERIENCES*

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Abstract

Internships serve as the bridge that spans the divide between being a teacher and an administrator. Most research on internships has emphasized the technical aspects of this experience, such as benefits and limitations of internships. The overall impact an internship experience has on an intern has been studied less extensively. This research study probes interns' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions about administrative or leadership positions to determine how these change as a result of the internship experience. Researchers analyzed sections of interns' monthly journals, which had been submitted six times during their two-semester internship. Four major themes emerged from the content analysis of interns' journals: Vision for the Internship/Career, Communication, Relationship with Faculty, and Relationship with Administration. A major finding was the strength and pervasiveness of the negative tone. The researchers were surprised how often the interns described an oppositional culture. One implication is to improve training in communication, organizational theory, and implementation of change/improvement processes for administrative interns. Today's environment of accountability places significant demands on novice administrators, which should compel us to strengthen the internship experience.



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1 Sumario en español

Los puestos de interno sirven como el puente que atraviesa la línea divisoria entre ser un maestro y a un administrador. La mayoría de las investigaciones en puestos de interno han acentuado el aspecto técnico de esta experiencia, como beneficios y limitaciones de puestos de interno. El impacto general que una experiencia de puestos de interno tiene en un interno ha sido estudiado menos extensamente. Este estudio de la investigación tiente las creencias de internos, las suposiciones, y las percepciones acerca de administrativo o posiciones de liderazgo para determinar cómo éstos cambian a consecuencia de la experiencia de puestos de interno. Los investigadores analizaron secciones de diarios mensuales de internos, que había sido sometido seis veces durante su puestos de interno de dos-semester. Cuatro temas mayores surgieron del análisis contenido de los diarios de internos: La visión para la Puestos DE INTERNO/Carrera, la Comunicación, la Relación con Facultad, y con la Relación con la Administración. Un hallazgo mayor fue la fuerza y la omnipresencia del tono negativo. Los investigadores fueron sorprendidos con qué frecuencia los internos describieron una cultura oposicional. Una implicación es de mejorar la instrucción en la comunicación, en teoría organizativa, y en la implementación de procesos de cambio/mejora para internos administrativos. El ambiente del hoy de lugares de responsabilidad demandas significativas en administradores de principiante, que nos debe obligar para reforzar la experiencia de puestos de interno.

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2 Introduction

Internships serve as the bridge that spans the divide between being a teacher and an administrator. These important field-based clinical experiences have been characterized as rites of passage, a means of occupational socialization, and the litmus test for leadership capabilities. The administrative internship is all of these and more. For many, it is the final proving ground for tomorrow's educational leaders. Internships allow aspiring school administrators to test their skills and resolve in over 95,000 schools nationwide. In today's high stakes, high accountability environment it is more important than ever for interns to cross this well-traveled bridge and exit the internship experience with the knowledge and potential to become highly skilled transformational leaders for tomorrow's schools.

University training programs have relied on the internship to immerse students in real world experiences for over a century. By the early 1960s Ramseyer (1963) noted that 117 universities offered internships as part of their programs. Murphy (1992) reported that more recent studies indicated 65% of administrative training programs required some form of field study. The administrative internship has become an important component of leadership preparation programs (Wylie & Clark, 1994). Today, the majority of the university programs ranked in the top ten by U.S. News and World Reports require an internship experience.

The variables prompting this growth, particularly in the past three decades, can be gleaned from numerous sources. One is the need to prepare qualified educational leaders. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2008) estimates that by 2018 there will be a need for an additional 90,000 building administrators.

Of far greater importance, than simply supplying a workforce, is the profound realization that school leadership is an important contributor to improving student achievement. Leathwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) reported that, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 2). This means that the next generation of leaders must be better prepared to lead school improvement. A primary objective of the administrative internship is to develop school leadership attributes and dispositions (Wilmore & Bratlien, 2005). Jean and Evans (1995) reported that due to the need for administrators to improve skills and abilities to meet the challenges of school reform, university programs have expanded internship experiences to enhance classroom learning. This has also contributed to the increase in the number of internships.

There is general agreement that educational leadership students need to spend significant time in authentic school contexts, working alongside well-prepared mentor principals, to be adequately prepared for

complex leadership roles (Williams, Matthews, & Baugh, 2004). Aspiring administrators can benefit greatly by participating in a well-designed and rigorous internship program. It is the university's responsibility to insure that this opportunity exists. It is evident that higher education has to do a better job of relating theory to practice. It is imperative that universities, in collaboration with public schools, design, develop, and implement programs that enable future administrators to select productive and proactive postures. Chance (1990) asserted that effective preparation of school administrators is an essential and inescapable component of public school reform. Levin (2005) reported that over one-third of administration alumni believe that the preparation curriculum should require more clinical experience, but that, "school leadership programs offer little in the way of meaningful clinical or field-based education" (p. 41). Kersten, Trybus, and White (2009) argued that professors of educational administration are expected to ensure their graduates are well prepared to assume sophisticated leadership positions.

According to Cunningham and Sherman (2008), "Internships are powerful learning tools for our students and, as times change, we are called to raise the level of these experiences; to continue to provide the best opportunities for our future educational leaders to develop, test, and improve their skills; and to ensure the pipeline of future educational leaders" (p. 216). Chance (1990) pointed out that the internship is critical to the process of preparing school leaders because it provides a vehicle for the melding of theory and practice. It affords interns an opportunity to lead in the role of a practicing professional. Research suggests that well planned internship activities prove to be valuable learning opportunities (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). Sparks (2000a) stated that observers of university academic-oriented training have noted the need for programs to be supplemented by job-embedded learning experiences. Sparks (2000b) advocated for the development of principals to "be standards-focused, sustained, intellectually rigorous, and embedded in the principal's work day" (p. 2). Stanton (1992) emphasized the importance of having accurate information to make superior decisions. This need is better met in clinical experiences found beyond university classrooms.

According to Armstrong (2010) "The transition from teacher to vice-principal is an important professional and organizational passage that carries significant dreams and transformational possibilities for new administrators and their communities" (p. 686). If this statement is accurate, it is imperative that successful internship experiences be designed and implemented. An internship should not be expected to solve or even anticipate all of the challenges of school administration. With additional and appropriate hands-on experiences, the prospective administrator should become more capable of successfully stepping into a position (Mullen & Cairns, 2001).

3 Literature Review

Even though internships have been studied extensively, most research on the topic has emphasized the technical components of this experience, such as structure, benefits, and limitations of internships (Crow & Pounders, 1996). The overall impact an internship experience has on an intern has been studied on a limited basis. The literature review that follows will focus on research that attempts to establish a better understanding of the definition and parameters of an internship and the internship process. This approach will enhance the understanding of how powerful the internship is in shaping the beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions of aspiring school administrators.

3.1 Definition and Parameters of Internships

Stanton (1992) defined an internship as a fixed-term work experience with clear learning objectives. Internships can be full-time or part-time. Part-time internships are more common. Interns commonly perform their duties in the schools in which they teach often during preparation periods or before or after school. The duration of the internship is most often for two sequential semesters. It is typically standards-based. Students are generally visited by their university supervisor two or three times each semester and must submit project plans for approval. The primary source of guidance is the on-site mentor. All too frequently this mentor receives limited training for this important role. More often than not, students are required to maintain a reflective journal. There is wide variation in the number of credit hours awarded (Wilmore &

Bratlien, 2005; Williams et al., 2004).

Students routinely complete a variety of tasks during an internship. Cunningham and Sherman (2008) provided evidence that internships have typically centered on tasks such as scheduling, budgeting, student discipline, faculty meetings, home-school communication, laws, policies and procedures, developing reports, school plant concerns, testing, facilitating school community relations, arranging substitutes, and monitoring extracurricular activities. McKerrow's (1998) study found that the majority of an intern's time was spent in attending meetings, doing office work, and supervising students. Unfortunately for the intern, these actual experiences run counter to those found in effective programs. Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) discovered that effective intern programs are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between the program and area schools. Fortunately, research of effective internship programs has led to leadership education program revisions (Orr, 2006).

3.2 The Internship Process

As noted previously, research on this subject has traditionally focused on the technical aspects of the internship. This is a narrow and limiting perspective. During an administrative experience, interns discover what they know and what works. They encounter many professional and organizational unknowns (McClam & Puckett, 1991). According to Greenfield (1985), the process by which teachers learn to become administrators is a lengthy one that can begin well before the person commences formal preparation to assume the role and includes formal and informal dimensions. In its initial phase, teachers contemplating a decision to become administrators learn about the role through observations, cues, and feedback. They use this filter to make career decisions (Valerde, 1974). According to White and Crow (1993) an internship is a significant rite of passage that involves "a paradigm shift that is personal, professional, and philosophical." (p. 12).

Socialization is the process of becoming a member of and identifying with a profession. For teachers it begins when they consider becoming administrators and internalize the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support professional membership (Hart, 1995; Heck, 1995). Socialization into the ranks of administration is a foundational internship experience (Armstrong, 2010). The socialization process informs the intern of the rites, rituals, and ceremonies that establish parameters for approved administrative behaviors and reinforce organizational roles and structures. Socialization can be formal or informal, not helpful or very helpful, moral as well as technical (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992; Greenfield, 1985).

According to Thomas (1980), the path to administration is haphazard and progresses through four definitive stages of socialization: anticipatory, "getting-in", "settling-in", and outcomes. Kersten et al., (2009) pointed out that administrative groups use investiture tactics to affirm desired administrative dispositions and behaviors, and divestiture tactics to discourage teaching practices and attitudes that are perceived to be undesirable in administrative roles. According to Crow and Pounders (1996) interns experience a tension between cultures of administration and teaching. Prior to the internship experience, teachers perceived the administrative role through their teacher lenses and the path to administration appeared to be simple and predictable (Armstrong, 2010). White and Crow (1993) found that interns were no longer viewed as expert teachers, but rather as rookie administrators who found themselves immersed in an unknown set of norms and nomenclature.

The process of reflection is an important internship practice. Reflection is a cognitive activity that, when integrated with experience, provides depth and clarity to new knowledge. Schon (1983) stressed the importance of reflection in the workplace. By reflecting on practice, interns evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and acquire problem-solving skills (Williams et al., 2004).

Many researchers who advocate for internships stress the significance of the process of reflection on field experiences. Cordeiro and Smith-Sloan (1995) stated that a well-designed internship, incorporating opportunities for reflection, could enhance the acquisition of leadership skills. They pointed out that theory would impact practice only if there is opportunity for reflection on that practice. When interns hear or tell stories, they learn to diagnose problems, reinterpret experiences and perceptions, fashion an identity crucial to full participation in the practice, and learn to talk (or be silent) like a full practitioner (Williams

et al., 2004). Reflection and action is a form of inquiry that can lead to better, fairer decisions (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995). McKerrow (1998) warned that the value of the practice of reflection is dependent on the quality of the internship experience.

3.3 Summary

The U.S. Department of Education's (2004) *Innovative Pathways to School Leadership* called for increased fieldwork in leadership preparation programs. Cunningham (2007) described successful internships as those that improve, expand, and deepen the leadership capacity of future educational leaders. A viable internship experience can be the source of new insights, theory-to-practice transitions, and an opportunity to receive feedback and direction regarding effective administrative behaviors (Cunningham & Sherman, 2008).

The procedures and parameters that describe internships and the resultant benefits and limitations have been the topic of extensive research. Studies exist describing intern socialization, dispositions, motivational needs and perceptions of supervision (Hart, 1991; Heck, 1995; Martin, 2009; Johari & Bradshaw, 2008; McClam & Puckett, 1992). The overall impact an internship experience has on an intern has been studied less exhaustively. The research described in this article attempts to expand the understanding of how interns react to this significant field-based experience.

4 Research Question and Methodology

Do interns' beliefs, assumptions, and perceptions about administrative positions in education change as a result of the internship experience? If changes occur, is the tone of these changes favorable or does the experience result in discouragement?

Student reactions to their internship experiences in educational leadership at this Midwestern public university are the catalyst for this study. This internship experience follows the completion of five prerequisite graduate level courses in educational leadership and is designed to immerse aspiring school administrators in leadership experiences under the tutelage of an onsite mentor and university supervisor.

The internship is two semesters in duration, part-time, and consists of six distinct projects that must demonstrate leadership. Three projects may be completed in the building to which the intern is currently assigned. Three projects must be completed at a building where the intern is not assigned and has a grade span different from the one in which the intern is currently working. All projects must be aligned with the Interstate School Leaders Consortium Standards for school leaders. Each project must focus on a specific standard although learning may encompass additional standards. Once the projects are developed and approved, students, through a monthly log, document a commitment to spending a minimum of five hours per week throughout the school year internship.

Leadership projects are designed by the intern in collaboration with the on-site mentor. Inherent in the design is the goal of demonstrating leadership by the intern and completing a project that advances the school improvement plan. Both the on-site mentor and the university supervisor must approve all projects. Documentation for evaluation includes the project plan, project artifacts, monthly journal, on-site mentor feedback, rubric-based self-assessment, and the completion of a reflective essay for each project.

The monthly journals provided the source of data for this study. Each journal must contain answers to four reflective questions. Responses to these questions have prompted ongoing dialogue among faculty and interns. It has served as a catalyst for questioning numerous assumptions about what constitutes legitimate preparation for the internship experience and ultimately a readiness for the first administrative role.

This study is a descriptive content analysis with a stated goal of discovering more information about the impact of the internship experience on the intern by analyzing intern responses to one specific question: How have your assumptions and beliefs about school administration changed as a result of this month's internship experiences?

To examine the potential for changing beliefs and assumptions, the researchers designed an exploratory study to determine what themes would emerge from interns' journals. During the 2009-2010 academic year 126 graduate students participated in building-level internships during the fall semester and 111 students

completed internships during the spring semester. Although students served their internships primarily in schools throughout Indiana, several from sites in Ohio, Illinois, South Carolina, and Florida were included in the analysis. From this pool, the researchers used documentary and content analysis to extract general and unique themes from two sections (21 students) of archived journals to address these research questions:

1. How do interns' assumptions and beliefs change during their internship experiences?
2. What themes emerge from the students' voices as they begin the transition from their roles as teachers to building-level administrators?

Of the 21 students represented in this initial study, 14 were male and seven were female. These candidates served their internship in eight urban school sites, nine suburban sites, and four rural school sites (one which represented a private school). Interns completed six monthly journals during the two semesters of their internship. The researchers analyzed content from the journals for each of the 21 subjects, analyzing the interns' responses to the reflective questions at the end of each journal. Later studies will address other aspects of the interns' journals, but this study primarily focused on the first open-ended journal question: How have your assumptions and beliefs been changed?

During the internship orientation, supervisors framed journal assignments so as to promote open and honest communication. Faculty informed interns that their journals might be used for research purposes, but only in a way that completely de-identified the data. Broad grading criteria for interns' journals support "stream-of-consciousness-type entries" and, for example, do not reflect grammar or typographical errors, which are important criteria for other assignments.

Interns' written responses were analyzed using QSR NVivo₇ software. The content analysis entailed a clear set of rules for each node, supported when possible by the literature review. Text was coded at selected nodes. After common themes were identified, the researchers further delineated subthemes from the predominant themes.

Past evidence, from student program satisfaction surveys and the general success of program graduates to secure administrative positions, led the researchers to expect a more positive tone as they analyzed interns' journals. Therefore, the focus for this initial research report shifted more towards the strong negative tone of interns' journal narrative. The analysis of text units revealed 53% to 57% of the major themes were coded as negative tone; whereas, those text units comparatively coded as positive were 43% to 47%. Through the negative tone of interns' voices, principal interns illuminated their changing assumptions with greater clarity.

5 Findings

The analysis of the journal entries initially yielded 30 different categorical responses. As the data were subjected to further scrutiny, four major themes emerged: Vision for the Internship/Career, Communication, Relationship with Faculty, and Relationship with Administration. The results are described by graphical representation and narrative discussion in the following sections.

5.1 Vision for the Internship/Career

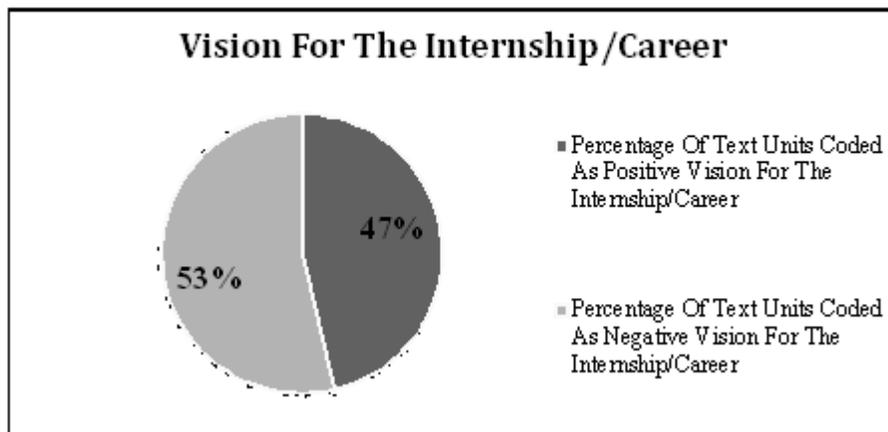
Focus or direction on what the intern wants to accomplish during the internship is one part of the working definition for this theme. This thought process unfolds prior to implementation and is associated with the intern's recognition that adaptations to the project may need to occur. For example, an intern wrote:

5.1.1

I continually fought through the entire project not seeing where the outcome would be found. I was able to see that in administration where there is a will there is a way and there is always some small part that can be started. In this case I found that sometimes the best way to start a project is to step back and realize will everyone understand what you are trying to get everyone to understand? If they are not going to understand the project then just give the staff the knowledge so they can make informed decisions. I realized

that there are lots of things that administration has to begin and it is very important to make sure it is started correctly or the battle may be even harder than it should have been. I also realized how important it is to involve many stakeholders and get many peoples' opinions when you start a new project. I believe that if I had reached out to more people earlier on in the project I would have been able to get a better start on the project and go more accomplished.

Simultaneously, our research suggests that as the internship unfolds, interns begin reflecting about their future careers and what strategies they would employ to accomplish their goals when they become principals.



2

Figure 1. Vision for the Internship/Career

The analysis of intern's responses under this theme resulted in two distinct subcategories. First, during the internship, candidates quickly learned of the need to prioritize, delegate, manage time, organize, and acquire a wide array of skills and a broad knowledge base. Veteran administrators realize early in their careers that good management and good leadership are very different (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2011). The following quote illustrates how one intern wrestled with this challenge:

5.1.2

The sad realization that I have encountered is all of the managerial work that can bog down the ability for the principal to be able to function in the role that they are intended, teacher leader. The managerial duties can become so severe that they are blocking all of the leader's time and leave none for the principal to spend working with the teachers he needs to be helping. This made me realize how important the support staff can be for a principal. If the support staff is not helping the principal manage the numerous managerial jobs effectively, this leaves the burden to the principal. The issue facing the principal is that if the support staff does not do their job effectively, the blame ultimately falls to the principal.

The second subcategory under this theme pervaded intern voices in every category of this study. Interns continually faced resistance to change at all levels. This simple truth reinforced the need for fostering productive working relationships, and for establishing effective communication. This series of quotes from interns magnifies this point:

5.1.3

I also realized that even if you go out of your way as an administrator to help out and try to be proactive, there are still naysayers.

²<http://cnx.org/content/m41121/latest/lehmanfigure1.png/image>

Sometimes I think supervisors, managers, and administrators get too comfortable in their jobs (no matter what career field) and forget why it's so important to make the personal connections with people whenever possible.

One thing that I learned while working on this last project is to make sure that your expectations are made clear. I made assumptions with the staff that they would know exactly what to do and found that was not the case.

. . . I knew that communication is the key for a school to be successful.

It was also common for interns to mention the importance of documentation, adherence to policies, and the use of data. The intern quotes that follow substantiate these perspectives:

5.1.4

I have also realized the importance of journaling/documenting as an administrator. Keeping records of all that you have done could prove to be very valuable in the future.

I learned that I cannot assume anything. I need to remember that just because it is said that it is being done in the handbook doesn't necessarily mean it is happening.

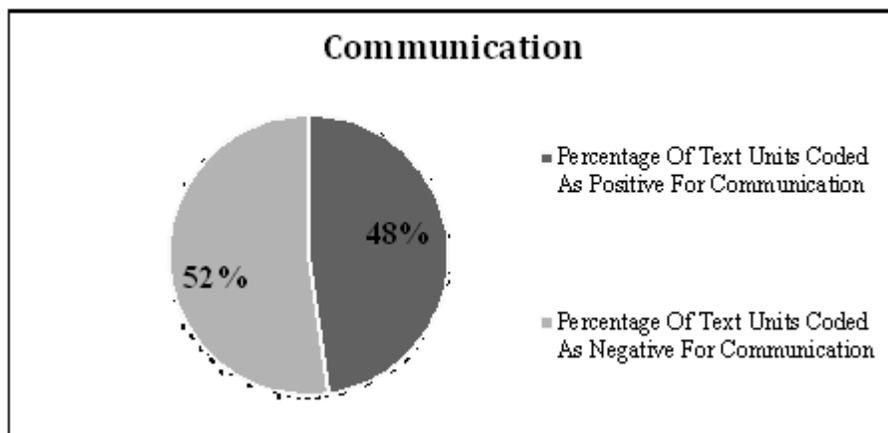
. . . However, the data had proved me wrong.

The responses in this category reflect a transition from the imagery of an intern's perception of school administration to becoming immersed in the tasks associated with the position. For many, this is the first factual glimpse of the demands and challenges of building leadership and becomes a valuable learning experience.

5.2 Communication

The theme of communication is defined as understanding the necessity of effective communication, the pitfalls of miscommunication, or ways of improving communication. Interns routinely cited negative responses centered on their efforts to communicate with their peers and others on whom the success of the project depended. This frustration was prevalent regardless of the form of communication utilized. For example, one intern mentioned only a 14% survey response rate. Others noted inconsistent replies to emails, either delayed or disregarded. The amount of communication required was also a common theme. According to one intern, "I never would have guessed how much . . . communication done over email there actually is."

This quote typifies one intern's frustration to the challenges of soliciting responses: "If you ask your teaching staff to do something that could potentially help them out in numerous ways, you would think they would be happy to take 10 minutes to accomplish the task [complete a survey]."



3

Figure 2. Communication

Interns also discovered that timeliness and encouragement can influence an outcome: “If I had shared a general email to all staff at the onset, highlighting some of the great things that we are doing, I think there would have been a quicker buy-in to professional learning communities.”

As the data in Figure 2 suggest, there were also heartening and rewarding interactions. Interns cited examples of effective communication in their journal entries such as: “Teachers were willing to talk and have conversations about their attitudes” and “I have noticed that . . . [the principal] makes an attempt to communicate with everyone.” Additional examples of encouraging practices included an acknowledgement that teachers . . . were open and candid and the realization that, “it’s so important to make the personal connections with people whenever possible.”

5.3 Relationship with Faculty

For the purposes of the study, relationship with faculty is defined by how the intern relates how he or she is collaborating with the school faculty, or in conflict with the faculty. Interns’ responses depicted relationships with faculty during their internship experience as more negative than positive. The most often cited negative responses focused on an organizational culture that impeded the work of the intern. Interns frequently described faculty behaviors that stymied their efforts. The following quotations illustrate these experiences:

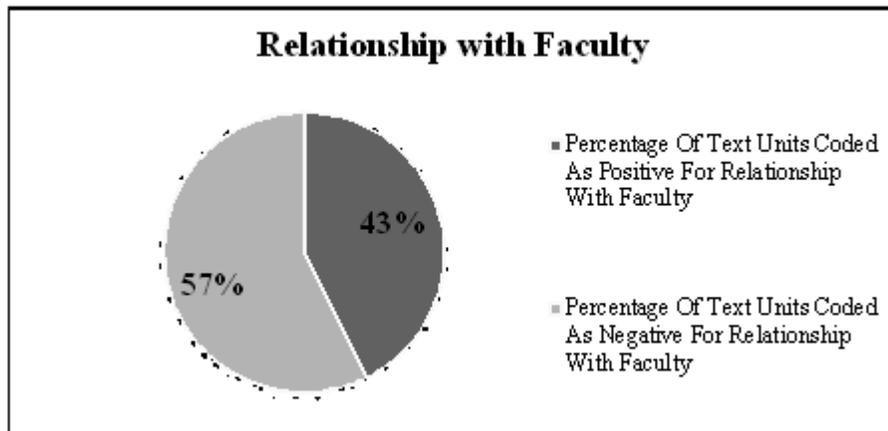
5.3.1

The big assumption I had was that all teachers would be willing to go the extra mile if it meant helping students. I am very saddened to say that this assumption was dead wrong.

My assumptions of the entire on-level internship have changed dramatically. I thought people would be willing to help me and would encourage my academic and professional growth. I am still surprised at how many people were almost disgusted with me and actually stayed that way for the entire semester. They would not say things, they would just ignore me or kind of just cut ties with me.

Another assumption that I had was that teachers would be willing to participate and help the school in any possible way. I have often heard teachers complain about problems in school and how we needed “real” change. I have learned that though many teachers are quick to complain and point fingers, not many are willing to help.

³<http://cnx.org/content/m41121/latest/lehmanfigure2.png/image>



4

Figure 3. Relationship with Faculty

One intern wondered if the lack of student motivation was grounded in low teacher expectations. Another mentioned being shunned by the faculty while completing internship projects. Perhaps related to the changing relationship between the intern and the faculty, the second most often cited hurdle for interns to cross was a faculty's resistance to change. Interns are required to work with field supervisors, usually administrators in the building where the internship is taking place, to develop projects that add value to the school. An intern wrote, "[I] was amazed to find out that teachers are unwilling to change." From another intern, "[It] is not easy to convince teachers that new procedures will work." This logical reflection was posed by an intern, "One assumption that I had was that when a teacher . . . had a good idea to positively impact students that everyone would agree with it."

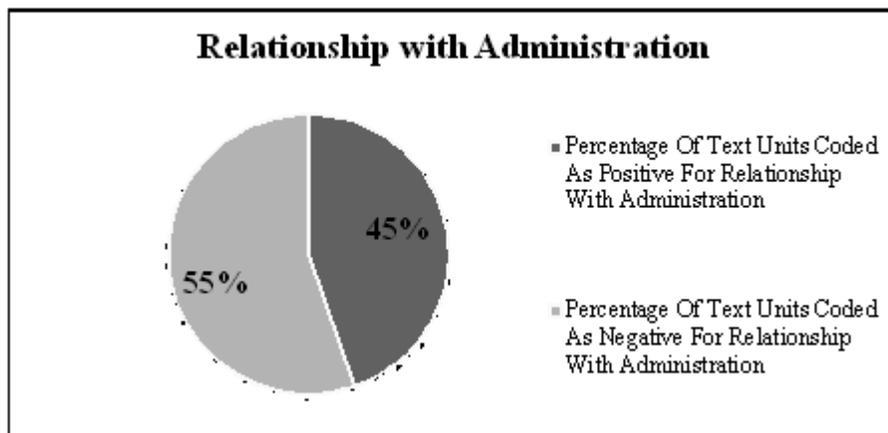
There were also genuinely positive experiences. One intern expressed admiration for a staff that embraced the intern and the changes being implemented. Another stated, "They [teachers] still continue to ask questions and want training to become better."

5.4 Relationship with Administration

The relationship with administration is defined as collaboration (positive tone) or conflict (negative tone) with administration (disagreement/agreement with decision or support/lack of support). This relationship can be between the intern and the school administrator or the faculty and the school administrator.

The relationship with administration received more comments than any other topic. Statistically, interns reported a higher percentage of negative interactions. It is important to mention that these negative experiences were derived from two distinct sources: first, the relationship between the intern and the administrator and second, the relationship between the faculty and the intern. Both sets of experiences focused on matters of leadership.

⁴<http://cnx.org/content/m41121/latest/lehmanfigure3.png/image>



5

Figure 4. Relationship with Administration

The relationship between the faculty and the administration is important because it influences the intern's effectiveness. Interns reported instances where no action was taken when district policies or sections of the negotiated agreement were violated. Another questioned why nothing was being done when instructional time was, at least in the opinion of the intern, being wasted.

Other questioning responses asked why administrators didn't expect more of teachers, were administrators simply too comfortable in their jobs, and is there too much blame passed on to the district office? One particularly negative experience is portrayed in the following response:

5.4.1

A second assumption I had was that all teachers at least respected the principals. I know some teachers did not like them, but I was shocked to see the disrespect that was shown. This simply caught me off guard. The way they would refuse or would take their sweet time to do something that an administrator asked them to do and the way they would try to get me to tell them information about the principals was completely disgusting.

Regarding concerns about direct interactions between the intern and the building administrator, lack of mentoring time was the most frequently cited problem. Others reported not being involved in meetings that might be beneficial. One intern specifically described a lack of administrative support.

While the percentage of responses favored a negative majority in the category, the positive responses are uniquely powerful. Responses frequently documented and complimented an administrator's hectic schedule, required depth of knowledge, understanding legal and policy parameters, challenges of gaining faculty buy-in, and the hours required to successfully perform in a complex role. The value of a positive intern/mentor relationship cannot be overstated. For example: "I love how the principal lets me experience anything that she is involved in. I feel as though I am getting a really good idea of what elementary administration is like." One intern in particular noted the gratification of working with the principal and conveyed respect by describing the principal's enjoyment for attending events and characterizing the role as, "it is just a way of life – more than an job . . ."

5.5 Intern Reflection

The importance of reflection as a process and practice in building leadership capacity was established earlier. Intern reflection was evident in all areas. Significant comments about process, examples of problem-solving, and applications of classroom knowledge were written about and wrestled with. Through this process,

⁵<http://cnx.org/content/m41121/latest/lehmanfigure4.png/image>

interns quickly cited the importance of involving numerous stakeholders when planning and making decisions, the need to delegate, the importance of seeking council, and learning the value of clear and effective communication.

Interns also proposed strategies for dealing with issues such as ineffective parental communication, setting clear expectations, and establishing positive relationships. They remarked about the value of setting deadlines, holding frank conversations, and dealing directly with the source of information. Some interns struggled with time management and warned about making assumptions.

With specific regard to administration, interns frequently mentioned surprise, if not shock, at the challenges facing school administrators. As mentioned previously, examples include the required depth of knowledge, the demands of the role, the skills required to gain support, and finally as one intern remarked, “The leader must be willing to work twice as hard as anyone in the school.”

6 Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

6.1 Conclusions

The major finding in this study was the strength and pervasiveness of the negative tone. Most interns in this study were still serving in teacher roles. The researchers were surprised how often the interns described an oppositional culture. Fiore and Joseph (2005) describe this as the “Us and Them Philosophy.” The challenge for the interns was to attempt to create an “us” situation. This is one in which both parties strive to attain a common goal and will compromise or, if necessary, concede to achieve this goal. Interns’ assumptions also changed regarding their vision and career outlook. This intern’s quote captures the essence of this transformation:

6.1.1

Well this has been a very interesting semester learning to become a future administrator. I view and evaluate things much differently than I ever have previously. I am trying to make the transition from being more of a teacher mindset to that of an administrator. I believe that administration is still a very complex job, and you have to determine what is important and what is not important. You also have to learn to trust people and delegate when appropriate. I guess the hardest part of administration besides time management would be getting your staff to work together towards a common goal.

Many interns did not anticipate how difficult it would be to implement change. Armed with projects and data that addressed the school’s academic and operational needs, interns were surprised at the resistance to change from the faculty, their colleagues. In many instances, change would be a direct benefit to students and teachers. Frequently, the source of the proposed changes was derived directly from the school improvement plan, yet resistance was the most often cited reaction.

Early on, interns learned what many seasoned administrators already know, that establishing effective communication is challenging. What reaction is most appropriate when emails are not responded to or when surveys are not completed? This was a new experience for many interns who, because of their professional behavior, did not anticipate this sort of noncompliance. Interns quickly learned that the task of administration is more challenging than it appears.

6.2 Implications

To capitalize on the results of this study, we must ask ourselves, what internship experiences serve as catalysts for facilitating documentable change in administrative leadership? What factors of the internship experience have a direct and indisputable relationship to becoming a successful building leader? How can aspiring administrators, many not yet in positions of leadership, rise above the minutia of administration and acquire the skills necessary to foster and sustain meaningful and measurable change? The responsibility of university training programs is to find those answers and design internship programs around a shared research-based skill set.

The negative tone conveyed by the results of this research is unacceptable. Casting blame on the organizational culture only serves to perpetuate the status quo. Using the program from which these responses are derived, it is easy to discern the need for more effective training in communication, organizational theory, reducing implementation gaps, and gaining commitment toward school improvement goals. Communication training must be more deliberate and focus on form, timing, intent, and impact. Transferring organizational theory into practice must become an essential disposition so that interns naturally analyze complex problems from a variety of perspectives. Interns possess the knowledge base for dynamic leadership, but lack the savvy to rally key stakeholders around the vision and mission of their schools to better serve students.

For any progress to be made, a breakthrough must soon occur. Today's environment of accountability places significant demands on novice administrators who are often thrown into roles that would challenge veteran leaders. This fact alone must compel us to strengthen the internship experience.

7 References

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⁶<http://cnx.org/content/m41121/latest/ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/ep/ind-occ.matrix/>

⁷<http://www.ed.gov/admins/recruit/>

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