

BUSINESS TEACHERS GO TO WORK AND STUDENTS GET THE DIVIDENDS

By GERALYN E. STEPHENS

Teacher internships give business education teachers the opportunity to increase their industry skill proficiency levels. Such experiences can help business education teachers focus on developing relevant technical knowledge and skills to better prepare students for technically enhanced work environments and demonstrate competency on technical assessments covering industry recognized standards. Thanks to the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV), this professional learning strategy is becoming more common for business education teachers.

Perkins IV redefined professional development for business education teachers. Traditionally, the most common forms of professional development reported by principals are conference attendance and workshops (Stone, III, Kowske, & Alfeld, 2004). Such activities are discouraged under Perkins IV. No longer could professional development consist of one-day or short-term workshops or conferences (Perkins IV, Sec. 124, B). Therefore, identifying

effective and productive strategies to meet the new professional development standards became both a challenge and an opportunity resulting from Perkins IV. One option encouraged by language in the legislation is work-based professional development for teachers. Perkins IV resources may be used to provide work-based professional development to “ensure that teachers and personnel stay current with all aspects of an industry.” Funds can also be used for internship programs that provide relevant business experience (Perkins IV, Section 135, (b)(5) (B-C)).

Perkins IV supports professional development that allows secondary teachers, academic and occupational, to gain insight into what skills and knowledge students will use in the world of work. The legislation supports providing teach-





ers with opportunities to stay current with the needs, expectations, and methods of today's workplace. Funding for professional development for all faculty engaged in teaching occupational students encourages collaboration that will yield more rigorous integrated academic and business education curriculum. Such applied learning helps ensure students develop a higher level of academic and industry knowledge and skills in preparation for entry-level jobs.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

Work-based learning is the “integration of workplace experiences and career and technical education curriculum” (Brown, 2003, p. 1). Work-based learning is not new to business education. In fact, this is what differentiates career-focused education from traditional academic content areas. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 brought work-based learning to the forefront. The legislation requires that all business education students have planned experiences at business and industry worksites through work-based learning. To support those efforts, many teachers also participated in related industry-based learning opportunities.

Teacher internships are industry-based experiences where teachers are immersed in the operational priorities, challenges, and strategies of a host business (Lynn, Hales, & Wiener, 2007). Internships provide teachers the opportunity to become fully engaged in day-to-day operations as they work on relevant tasks for an extended period of time. McCarthy (2005) found that teachers want professional development that provides information for effectively connecting classroom learning to the world of work. Internships help teachers make their instruction more relevant to students through experiences that increase their knowledge of jobs, career fields, and job opportunities in the community. Teachers develop skills that meet industry requirements and form strong partnerships with local businesses. Internships provide teachers with hands-on experiences with new equipment and technologies used in the occupation (Luft, 1999).

Business and industry also benefit from teacher internships. Companies use the services of a worker who is knowledgeable and skilled in their industry. Teachers seldom need training beyond an orientation and are ready to work almost immediately. Internships give the host organization's employees a closer view of what is happening in schools and provides a platform for teachers to develop professional relationships outside of school. Researchers found that interpersonal networks developed in the workplace are vital to professional growth (e.g. Cho & Imel, 2003). Teacher internships provide the teacher and his or her work-based colleagues opportunities to develop such networks. Most often, these relationships continue beyond the placement when the host company provides other services and

LEARNING IN THE FIELD

By Arlene Gibson

I teach fashion marketing, and recently I participated in a four-week educator internship in the summer at an area Macy's department store. I hoped to be able to better integrate academics through school-based projects and build and strengthen business partnerships. I also hoped to transfer my learning of the world of work to the fashion merchandising classroom and assist students to develop their problem-solving, decision-making, and communication skills. I also expected to be able to encourage exploration of careers through academic lessons and experiential learning opportunities.

Given the externship model we use in our district, I was responsible for:

- Creating a learning contract with professional development goals with the career and technical education program coordinator;
- Contacting the Macy's store manager to discuss my goals;
- Developing a schedule with the store manager;
- Participating in scheduled workplace activities and observing organization operations, participating in meetings, interviewing staff, and completing tasks;
- Completing a daily reflection journal;
- Developing ideas for creating lesson plans that link academics and authentic work experiences;
- Thanking employers and sending evaluations;
- Developing new or revised lessons, new projects, and other changes to current teaching based on the internship experience;
- Teaching lessons to students; and
- Using a rubric to evaluate the education internship experience.

The experience of observing and learning more about the world of work and how academics can be applied to authentic experiences impacted my students' future careers in fashion merchandising. More than 50% of my students were placed in fashion related co-op experiences, and two students were promoted to retail managerial positions. One student even became a personal shopper after I shadowed a personal shopper and shared that experience. I'm proud that my experience led to such outcomes.

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resources such as career-day speakers and job-shadowing sites for students (Foncault, 2002).

ACADEMICS

Teacher internships that provide work opportunities for academic instructional staff help students in the long run. Academic instructional staff may include English, mathematics, or science teachers. Reese (2005) says that academic teachers must see and experience what the workplace demands. Academic teachers with an internship experience can make connections between their content, the skills emphasized in business education courses, and the expectations of the workplace. Teaching teams that include an academic teacher and a business education teacher participating together in a workplace internship has benefits for both the business and academic sides of the curriculum. Perkins IV clearly promotes this as a desired professional development approach. Ultimately, teaching teams will work together to create instruction for students that emphasizes application of new knowledge in business and industry scenarios. When team members share their work-based experiences, they can collaborate to plan and deliver academic content with real-world applications (Bidwell, 1997). Team internships also have the potential to help members create stimulating learning environments where students understand the importance of strong academics and are able to conceptualize how academic knowledge and skills can be applied to the world of work (Bennett, Milicevic, & Dolan, 1998). The relationships and mutual respect that these teachers develop are another benefit of such teaming.

TIMING AND OUTCOMES

Teacher internships usually happen during school breaks or summer. Summer internships have several benefits for teachers. Summer placements allow them to focus on internship duties without classroom responsibilities. The extended break during summers also gives teaching teams time to collaboratively design instructional units and lessons for the next year. When educators have determined the job sites and time frame, the next step is to outline outcome expectations for the teacher internship.

Ideally, business education teachers and their industry hosts will work together to detail learning outcomes to accurately match the teacher's needs with the host company's work. When a teacher has a plan for what he or she wants to experience and achieve during the internship, the host company can maximize its time and resources. For example, if the teacher would like to learn to use new equipment, the host may arrange for the teacher to attend an on-site training session and then work on a project where the equipment is used extensively. Panella (2007) learned to use a computerized numerical control machine to be able to later help carpentry students gain skills in this specialized equipment and exceed industry expectations for entry-level employees. The industry relationships in this case allowed the school to secure funding to purchase a machine for classroom use.

Business education teacher internships can lead to the teacher intern acquiring an industry credential. If there is an industry technical assessment that results in a license or certification, the teacher intern may choose to gain the knowledge or skills necessary to successfully complete the assessment. An example would be the Microsoft Office Specialist Certification. Business education teacher interns could perfect their skills by preparing documents and presentations needed by the host company using the software before sitting for the exam. Because Perkins IV requires career and technical education programs to prepare students for technical assessments in their programs of study, having teachers who have completed the assessments helps students. These teachers can outline expectations and share their experiences related to the assessments.

CURRICULUM

Journaling is a valuable component in the internship experience. An intern's journal captures new skills, attitudes, and technical information required by the job. The journal can become a source for teaching ideas when the teacher intern keeps track of work activities that can be integrated into teaching. The journal ensures that the teacher intern will keep track of the most significant concepts to use in instructional planning.

When teaching teams participate in an internship, they first review the academic and occupational curriculum to determine where natural links occur. Together, they review which working experiences best inform lesson planning. Questions to consider in curriculum planning include:

- Where does the new information fit?
- What aspects of the curriculum are no longer relevant?
- What teaching methods need to be changed to deliver the new concepts?
- What are realistic student performance outcomes?
- What additional supplies or equipment need to be secured to complement the lessons?

Next, teams identify where the new information is best integrated and develop instructional units and lessons using these new work-based experiences as foundations. When teachers put into practice the knowledge and skills gained in their internship placements, they are prepared to create exciting learning experiences for their students by teaching lessons that include their firsthand knowledge of industry expectations.

LEARNING INFLUENCED BY POLICY

Perkins IV has prompted a review of anything considered to be professional development. The legislation has also expanded how resources can be used to increase the knowledge and skill levels of both academic and occupational teachers. Business education teacher internships are an effective way to provide current and useful real world-of-work experiences.

Teachers with these experiences are better able to align content with relevant industry expectations. When they apply what

they learn in industry, educators are better able to help students understand how their classroom learning applies to business practice.

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