

Teacher Internships as Professional Development in Career & Technical Education

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ABSTRACT

The Carl D. Perkins Act of 2006 creates a need for secondary school administrators to plan differently for professional development activities for Career and Technical education (CTE) teachers. No longer can professional development activities be comprised of short-term workshops or conferences. The legislation calls for professional development activities to be sustained and directly related to the instruction being provided by the CTE teacher. Teacher internships can provide a viable option for ensuring teachers participate in this level of professional development. This article explores how CTE teacher internships, in occupationally related workplaces, can be used to satisfy the requirement. A review of related activities that incorporate Advisory Committees and Cooperative Education placements is discussed. The concept of work-based Teaching Teams that include academic teachers is also explored.

Introduction

In-service teacher training more commonly referred to as Professional Development (PD) is a critical part of education especially in career and technical education (CTE). CTE programs have rapidly changing technological foundations (Panella, 2007; Cho & Imel, 2003) and CTE teachers' primary focus is to prepare students for entry-level positions in their occupational areas. As such, CTE teachers must ensure that their own technical knowledge and skills remain current in order to adequately prepare students for these technically enhanced work environments. This becomes even more critical now that the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) links funding to student outcomes. Students must now demonstrate proficiency on technical assessments covering industry-recognized standards.

Perkins IV requires that secondary administrators carefully examine how and what professional development opportunities are provided for their teaching professionals. Traditionally, the most common forms of PD reported by principals were conference attendance and workshops. (Stone, Kowske & Alfeld, 2004) Such activities are discouraged in Perkins IV. No longer can professional development activities be comprised of "1-day or short term workshops or conferences". (Perkins IV, Sec. 124, B) Administrators are now challenged to identify effective and productive strategies to meet the standards outlined in Perkins IV. An option encouraged by language in the legislation is work-based PD for teachers. Perkins IV resources may be used to provide work-based PD opportunities 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)). This essay explores how work-based learning opportunities can satisfy the PD requirements of the Perkins legislation.

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. There were three (3) required components in the School-to-Work Act of 1994 (STW): School-based Learning, Work-based Learning and Connecting Activities. In the Work-based Learning component, the legislation required that all CTE students have planned experiences in business and industry worksites (STW, 1994). In support of those efforts, many CTE teachers were also permitted to participate in related industry-based learning opportunities.

Work-based learning includes a range of worksite instructional activities such as job shadowing and internships. Such experiences can provide CTE teachers with valuable experiences related to the skills required for the career pathway in which they teach. Job Shadowing is the most common work-based experience. It is used primarily with students. Job shadowing involves students or teachers simply visiting a worksite and observing the activities carried out by its workers. It can take place for any duration of time usually a day, but rarely extends more than one week (Gray & Albrecht, 1999). Unfortunately, Job Shadowing experiences do not satisfy the Perkins IV PD requirements because these are often a one-time experiences and are not designed to provide teachers or students with extended industry exposure (Perkins IV, Sec. 124 (3) (B)).

Teacher internships are work-based experiences where teachers are immersed in the current operational priorities, challenges and strategies of the host business (Lynn, Hales, & Wiener, 2007). Internships meet the Perkins IV PD standards. Internships provide teachers the opportunity to become fully engaged in day-to-day operations. They are able to work directly with employers, gain an appreciation for the business viewpoint and practice work skills that are required in their roles as teachers (Brown, 2000). They are assigned tasks to contribute to the work being undertaken by the host company for an extended period of time. McCarthy (2006) found that teachers want PD opportunities that provide information for effectively connecting classroom learning to the world of work. Internships provide real-life experiences for teachers. They help teachers make their instruction more relevant to their students by using these experiences to increase their knowledge of jobs, career fields, and job opportunities in the community. They are able to 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). All of this can be applied to student learning by teachers integrating workplace scenarios to increase the realism of their lessons.

Business and industry benefit from teacher internships, as well. They receive the services of workers who are knowledgeable and skilled in their industry. Teachers seldom need training beyond an orientation and are ready to work almost immediately. Internships, especially those involving teaching teams, are an effective way for businesses to influence curriculum and teaching methodology (Blassingame, 1999). Internships provide 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.

Cho & Imel’s research (2003) found that interpersonal networks developed in the workplace are vital to professional growth. Teacher internships provide both the teacher and

his/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 resources such as Career Day speakers and job shadowing sites for students (Foncault, 2002). Perkins IV grant resources can be used for compensation; therefore, the host company may not incur salary expenses for the guest teacher. Surprisingly, Reese (2005) found that compensation was not a motivating factor for teachers to participate in industry-based internship placements.

Work-based learning opportunities may be considered to address the PD needs of academic faculty. Oftentimes, core academic teachers have limited work experiences beyond the field of education. They seldom possess first-hand knowledge of how their content is applied in the real world. Work-based experiences may provide academic teachers with concrete connections to the content.

Including Academics Faculty

Teacher internships that provide opportunities for academic instructional staff will help CTE students in the long run. Academic teachers need to see what is being demanded in the workplace. Providing academic teachers with work-based experiences helps them to make connections between their content, the skills taught in the CTE program and the expectations of the workplace (Reese, 2005). Creating teaching teams that include an academic teacher and a CTE teacher, is one method used to provide common work-based experiences for secondary teachers. Perkins IV clearly promotes this as a desired PD activity. It reads that funds can be used for activities that provide for the: “effective integration and use of challenging and career and technical education provided jointly with academic teachers” (Perkins IV, Section 135, (5) (A) (i)). Ultimately, teaching teams will work together to create instructional opportunities for students that emphasize application of new knowledge in business and industry scenarios. By sharing common work-based experiences, team members may be better able to collaborate as they plan, prepare and deliver academic content with real-world applications because they have seen it in practice in a real-world environment (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). Another benefit of encouraging academic teachers to participate in teacher internships is that they may develop a new respect for CTE teachers and their programs. Ashford (1996) found that teachers felt that learning to work as instructional teams was a benefit of internship programs.

A first step towards creating teaching teams would be to encourage academic faculty to participate on CTE Advisory Committees. This provides an avenue for them to engage the local business community and gain clear insight into their workforce needs. CTE Advisory Committees can be used to begin the search for teacher internship placements.

Involving Advisory Committees in Work-Based Placements

Advisory Committees are required for all Perkins IV funded CTE programs. These committees are comprised of local business and industry leaders in the occupational area that they support. The committee’s primary function is to offer advice and make recommendations.

Typically, they are familiar with the CTE program's curriculum, textbooks, facilities and equipment (Rosencrans, 2003). Most often, members have developed comfortable working relationships with teachers in the CTE program. Research conducted by Smith and Betts (2000) supports that the effectiveness of work-based learning is directly related to the quality and effectiveness of the relationship between school and industry partnerships. Therefore, it would be easiest to approach this ready pool of business professionals to identify possible internship sites.

Another possible source for teacher internships could be within the worksites where cooperative education students are placed. Cooperative education (Co-Op) is a student learning activity that combines classroom learning with work-based experiences. Students receive academic credit and are compensated by the employer for their work. There are usually strong relationships between the school-based Co-Op coordinator and employers where students are placed. It is highly possible that these businesses would welcome teacher internships. Such placements would provide teachers with detailed information about the worksite, such as the working conditions, supervisory procedures and expectations of what their co-op students actually do in the placement. Teachers would learn, first-hand, what the co-op jobs within these businesses entail and could use this knowledge to better prepare students for that particular worksite. Successful teacher internships with employers of their school's Co-Op students could also provide encouragement for other businesses to participate in the local Co-Op program.

Local businesses are generally willing to support education through teacher internships. However, the logistics of these experiences can be challenging. Questions such as, when is a good time to host a teacher intern? What is expected from the industry hosts? What tasks will be given to the teacher intern? Such questions must be addressed in the planning stages to maximize the experience for all involved.

Planning Teacher Internships

Teacher internships are at a minimum one-week in duration. They usually occur during school breaks and/or during the summer. Summer internships have several benefits for teachers. Summer placements may allow them to focus on the internship duties without classroom responsibilities, such as preparing for substitute teachers or other school related tasks. The extended break during summers may also provide teaching teams with time to collaboratively design instructional units and lessons for the fall semester implementation. However, it should be noted that Gibbons (1999) found that internships as brief as one week have benefit.

Once sites and timeframes have been identified, the fundamental next step is to outline outcome expectations for the teacher internship. Teachers and their industry hosts should work together to detail explicit learning outcomes. Teachers need to be specific when identifying the skills they wish to learn or upgrade. Then, the host company can more accurately match the teacher's needs with projects planned or currently underway. A clear purpose and plan for what the teacher wants to see, experience and achieve during the internship is essential to maximize the time and resources of the host company. For example, if the teachers would like to learn to use new equipment, then the host may arrange for the teacher to attend an onsite 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 help his carpentry students exceed industry

expectations for entry-level employees. He was also able to secure funding to purchase a machine for the classroom as a result of his industry relationships.

Teacher internships can often lead towards 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 wish to concentrate on acquiring the knowledge or perfecting the skills necessary to successfully complete the assessment. An example would be the Microsoft Office Specialist Certification (MOUS) in Microsoft Office applications for teachers in the Business, Marketing, Management and Technology Career pathway. Teacher interns would perfect their skills by preparing documents and presentations needed by the host company using the software before sitting for the MOS exam. Perkins IV requires CTE programs to prepare students for technical assessments in their program of study; it would be most beneficial if their CTE teacher had successfully completed the assessment.

Such first-hand experience can be used to update lessons and related classroom activities. As teachers move through the internship, a focus on the curriculum is most important. Teacher internships provide an avenue for ensuring the curriculum remains current and relevant to the local business community.

Updating the Curriculum

“The real purpose of a teacher internship program is to raise students’ academic, technical, intellectual, and personal skills” (SREB, 1998, p. 5). To begin this process, teacher interns should keep a journal of their experiences. The journal can be used to record new skills, attitudes, technical information learned during the internship. The journal may also be used to record changes in what is now taught along with illustrations or ideas of how the content could be enhanced by a related work-based activity. Journaling helps keep new ideas fresh and remembered. Using the journal in the curriculum design process will ensure that none of the most significant concepts learned are forgotten or inadvertently overlooked when instructional units and lessons are created. Daily journaling was found to be a central component for the success of the Colorado State University study (CSU, 1971).

If teaching teams participated in the internship, first, review the academic and occupational curriculum to determine where natural links occur. This review can be done simultaneously. Using this as a starting point, revisit the work-based learning journals. Reflect on how the experiences might be used in the classroom to support the curriculum. Questions that may lead the review include:

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

Next, identify where the new information may be best integrated. Then, begin to 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 first-hand knowledge of industry expectations.

Curriculum enhancement can be a benefit resulting from teacher internships. However, one of the major challenges facing school administrators is finding time for teaching teams to work together to translate their learning experiences into curricula and instruction. This and other obstacles are identified in models from the STW era (Reese, 2005; Bidwell, 1997; Bennett, Milicevic, & Dolan, 1998).

Obstacles to Avoid

Teacher interns will need time to integrate what they learned into lessons. Not only will lesson plans need to be created or enhanced, time to locate and secure new tools and equipment may also be needed. Administrators may not allocate enough time for teaching teams to collaborate in the instructional design of lessons and activities that incorporate what was learned (Bidwell, 1997, Maurer, 2000). Administrators, in an effort to ensure academic teachers gain a thorough understanding of their roles, provide them with more PD opportunities relative to curriculum integration than CTE teachers working under their leadership (Stone, 2004).

The Utah model (Utah, 2002) indicated that administrative buy-in was a potential problem for the success of teacher internship programs. In order for the benefits of teacher internships to be maximized, time and effort required for the integration and implementation of new material must be factors for consideration by all school-based participants involved in the teacher internship planning process. It is important that teacher interns and their administrators understand and accept the time commitment involved (Blassingame, 1999). Once the visits are complete, teachers must be flexible and willing to use afterschool hours, weekends and holiday breaks to work on curriculum. Administrators may need to identify times within the school day for teaching teams to collaborate and design learning activities which spans the curriculum by creating lessons that can be taught in CTE and academic classrooms.

Industry hosts may encounter obstacles to overcome. In an attempt to not overload their employees with additional responsibilities, many may choose to use soon-to-be-retired employees as industry hosts. Once they retire, there is no longer a direct connection for the teacher intern. New partnerships will need to be formed to keep the momentum going (SREB, 1998). When strong working relationships are developed between the industry host and the teacher intern, a conduit for sharing of information and ideas is formed. Using current technology such as email, instant messaging and other electronic forms of communication, the sharing of information can be ongoing and continual. Another obstacle related to industry hosts centers around program outcomes and expectations (Utah, 2002).

Industry hosts may not fully understand the internship outcomes. Asking them to identify examples of academic applications is problematic because their employees take those applications for granted and cannot identify them offhand (Bidwell, 1997). When provided with specific expectations, businesses are better able to tailor internship activities and assignments to

meet those particular needs. They become more aware of what the teacher intern is attempting to accomplish and will provide experiences to support those efforts.

Conclusion

Perkins IV has given secondary administrators a clear reason to review what activities are considered 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. It supports teacher internships and the creation of teaching teams for work-based placements. Teacher internships are an interesting and cost effective way to provide current and useful real world of work experiences. This information may be used to help meet the need to align content with relevant industry expectations. If the information acquired is applied, then teacher participants will be better able to provide students with realistic illustrations of how the content is actually used in practice.

Industry hosts benefits as much from the experience as their guests. Teacher internships provide public education with a human face. Businesses learn what is being taught in schools, how it is being taught and become advocates for the process. Industry hosts are more willing to participate in other school functions, such as Career Days, following teacher internships. They feel more engaged in the local education system as a result of the relationships.

Teacher internships are a viable means of providing PD opportunities for CTE staff. The task is not overwhelming when you establish realistic outcomes and start by tapping into ready resources within your community.

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