

Guided Field Experience: A Must for Instructional Developer Preparation

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ABSTRACT. Successful product marketing in business and industry is always preceded by appropriate "field testing." Trainers of instructional developers could well follow this lead by incorporating into their training programs guided field experiences for aspiring instructional developers. The success of supervised interaction with real-life tasks while still in school has been documented in other fields. Trainers of instructional developers will ensure students' success and enhance their own reputations if their students have had experience in putting theory in practice.

Introduction

I am what I am, because I have been doing
what I have been doing.
(Author unknown.)

This short poem could serve as a motto for all trainers of instructional developers, for it is the essence of what we do. No matter how sound the theoretical training of budding instructional developers, a significant measure of their success will be the field experience they have undergone during their training period.

The purse from which educational institutions have received and continue to receive funds is not as well-filled as in previous years. Institutions are being asked to set priorities in terms of long-range goals. High on the list of priorities are goals and objectives that focus on student

learning or student outcomes (North Carolina Central University, 1978). In an effort to ensure student outcomes, particularly in areas where the mastery of theory and the application of theory to practical situations are important, many educational programs are incorporating laboratory experiences and internships or guided field experiences as part of their curricula.

Guided field experiences refer to specified periods of time during which the student developers engage in a variety of supervised activities. It is not the intent of this article to point out the benefits to be derived by the experienced developer who will supervise the students or by the agencies in which the students and the experienced developers are to function. Instead, this article will point out the values of guided field experiences for students pursuing degrees in instructional development.

Values of Guided Field Experiences

Curricular experiences provided for students while they are in graduate school usually result in excellent preparation in terms of theory. However, certain academic areas also require practical application of the theory. Too often, educators provide "book learning" for their students and assume that mastery of the theory will assure success in a real-life situation. As there is little support for this assumption, we must provide guided field experience in areas where field experiences and practice are paramount. Imagine where the medical profession would be if medical students were not provided with opportunities to gain practical experience before becoming licensed physicians.

A review of the literature revealed little information related directly to guided field experiences or internships for students pursuing degrees in instructional development. There are, however, studies which point out the value of internships in other areas. Davies (1976), in writing about internships in Educational Administration,

remarked that an internship is designed to achieve specific objectives. After surveying the literature, he compiled a three-category list of objectives: those applicable to the intern, those applicable to the sponsoring field agency, and those applicable to the cooperating agency. Our focus is on those objectives which pertain to the intern. The objectives were as follows:

ance function of internship. Like the automobile road tests, it assures the basic soundness of the product. It is pointed primarily at correcting details of design and manufacture—and estimating the probable market.

Although these objectives were written for students in educational administration, they are also applicable to students in

development with opportunities to learn how to:

1. Create an atmosphere of mutual trust with the client. The student developer should learn that this atmosphere is necessary if a successful working relationship is to be established. He or she should also learn that confrontations and highly critical behavior can interfere with these relationships.

2. Ask probing questions of the client. These questions should lead the client and the developer to understand what has to be done and should provide insight for both as to the nature and source of the educational problem.

3. Develop good listening habits and skills. The intern will learn to provide ample time for the client to fully describe his or her perceptions of instructional problems, especially in the early stages of curriculum revision.

4. Avoid the use of "instructional development jargon" since clients may not understand this jargon.

5. Value interpersonal communication skills and realize that face-to-face communication is superior to other forms of communication (Duncan, 1978).

6. Develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nature, scope, and intricacies of the instructional development process. By becoming directly involved, the student should enhance his or her abilities to:

- a. state instructional problems in a clear and concise manner.
- b. identify the complexities inherent in instructional problems.
- c. analyze instructional objectives in terms of types of learning.
- d. match media with objectives.

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1. To enable the intern to develop a more comprehensive view of educational administration. The difference between what is taught in the professional schools and what actually occurs in the day-to-day practicing situation can be substantial. The reasons are many: the time-lag between theory and practice; gaps in the professional curriculum; nuances of operations dealing with real people that are difficult if not impossible to explain in the classroom; and effects of community pressures for specific changes. These and other extensions of the on-campus part of an intern's professional preparation are provided by the internship.

2. To provide the intern with the experience of carrying real administrative responsibility. The purpose here is to offer direct experience as a teacher rather than relying on the various experiences of the campus classroom. Administration involves certain skills. By studying these skills, trying them, and eliminating those which do not work, the intern learns how to perfect his or her skills while carrying responsibility.

3. To enable the intern to benefit from lessons learned by the sponsoring administration during long professional experience.

4. To provide a testing ground for the beginning educator where the adequacy of training, his or her probable success as an administrator, and the type of position for which he or she is best suited can be determined. Just as automobile manufacturers need proving grounds and road tests to check the dependability and performance of their laboratory-designed and factory-built products, professional schools need a safety check on their selection and developmental processes. This is the guid-

instructional development. Guided field experiences or internships have proven useful in student teaching, nursing, other health related professions, and counseling (Brunson, 1965; Rodin, 1975).

Guided Field Experience in Instructional Development

A guided field experience should be arranged on a contractual basis. The student developer, a developer from the institution in which the student is enrolled, and the liaison person who will provide on-site supervision of the field experience, should agree to a written contract. The contract should specify the length of the field experience, the activities in which the student will engage, and the procedures which will be employed to evaluate the field experience. The contract should also

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include a schedule of conferences: (1) between the university developer and the intern, (2) among the liaison person, the developer, and the intern, and (3) between the intern and the liaison person. The purpose of these conferences should be to discuss the instructional problem under consideration and the progress of the student.

The guided field experiences should provide graduate students in instructional

- e. provide alternative solutions to problems.
- f. evaluate instructional development efforts based upon field testing.

This integration of theory and practice during the guided field experience provides a testing ground for the student developer in which theory can be utilized in a real-life situation.

Guided field experiences in instructional

development may be varied and may take place in such diverse settings as: elementary, middle, and senior high schools; community colleges; colleges within major universities; learning resource

information should prove useful for program planning or in curriculum revision. In a course such as an Instructional Development Practicum, these problems could be included as simulation

affording experiences far beyond those available in the classroom. It is our belief that, through guided field experiences in instructional development, students will gain important practical experience and will be able to say, "We are what we are, because we have been doing what we have been doing."

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centers; central administration offices of public school systems; business and industry; and federal agencies.

While involved in these guided field experiences, students deal with the day-to-day instructional problems they encounter by applying the principles which they have learned in the classroom. They thus experience real-life problems with the comfort of knowing that their professor is available to assist them if problems arise.

The institution providing the setting for the guided field experience is also afforded a guarantee that the instructional development work completed for them will be of top quality. This is the case because the professor in charge of the guided field experience checks and evaluates all of the work performed by the student developer.

Role of the University Developer and Liaison Person

The university developer and the liaison person serve a very definite role in the field experience. The university developer assumes the leadership role in determining the experiences for the intern. The university developer and the liaison person, working together, supervise all of the field experience activities. They assist the student by providing a sounding board, by sharing their experiences, and by offering alternative solutions to instructional problems. The liaison person, working in close proximity with the student developer, may be in a better position to supervise his or her activities than the university developer if the field experience is with an off-campus agency.

The guided field experience should also prove useful to the university developer and the liaison person. The university developer, by being involved in the internship, becomes aware of the kinds of instructional problems which surface in public schools, specialty schools, federal agencies, and business and industry. This

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activities. In addition, the university developer would be establishing contact with agencies that are hiring graduates

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from their programs, thereby increasing the chances that students will find employment after graduation. The liaison person would establish close ties with the university and with individuals who may be employed by his or her agency. Additionally, the guided field experience would serve as a refresher course for the liaison person about current practices and principles of instructional development.

Commentary on the Guided Field Experience

We have not mentioned the length of the field experiences, i.e., a semester or a quarter, or how many hours per week the student should be involved. Nor have we mentioned how many semester or quarter hour credits a student should receive for the internship. We recognize the importance of these considerations, but realize that they should be dealt with on a university-by-university or on an individual student basis.

There are many lessons to be learned by the student developer while engaged in guided field experiences. The experiences should approximate reality and should be developed in a systematic manner, thus

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