Internship Reflection

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The College of William and Mary
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My name is Michael Riley and I am in the Master’s program at the College of William and Mary in the Educational Leadership program. At the successful conclusion of my internship I will receive my degree. I received my Bachelor of Science degree from Barton College in 1998. Since that time I have been a middle school Social Studies and Language Arts teacher at Saint Mary Star of the Sea School (SMSSS). During the 2010-2011 school year I began my first steps towards administration as I was made a part-time assistant principal. This school year I have left the classroom entirely and became a full-time assistant principal.

During my time at the College of William and Mary I have been tasked with many assignments, some of which I have selected to put into this portfolio. These selected assignments are designed to show my competence in the educational policy, planning, and leadership program. The extensive course work at the College of William and Mary increased my knowledge in the areas of educational and instructional leadership, assessment and evaluation, public relations, human resources, supervision and development, and school law. Throughout my course work I have worked both individually and as part of a group. I have chosen artifacts that showcase my abilities and preparedness for the workplace.

Some of the artifacts that have been selected highlight the work that I have done during my time at the College of William and Mary. I have included a school improvement plan that I worked on as part of a group to represent my knowledge in the area of planning and assessment. Instructional leadership is another major area of study for which I have included artifacts. My critique of a test in which I checked to make sure there was alignment between the text, instruction, curriculum and assessment is highlighted to show my readiness as an instructional leader. Also included is a project that was designed to show my ability in organizational management. Through this project I demonstrated how to integrate technology, facilities and
personnel to enhance instruction. Finally, in the area of communication and community relations I worked with a partner on a crisis management situation. This project allowed us to take a real life crisis in a school, evaluate it, and offer suggestions for how we would improve what was done.

The last two semesters have been dedicated to my internship at SMSSS in Hampton, Virginia. My experience was quite unique due to the fact that I recently became the assistant principal there. This inimitable situation has allowed me to experience every facet an administrative internship could have to offer. Having taught at SMSSS also made my placement very distinctive. The transition from teacher to administration had its difficulties. The most difficult was the notion that I had somehow become a different person after moving to the front office. Having knowledge of why and how decisions were made but being unable to discuss it with teachers I have known for years added to this difficulty.

One of the first duties I was assigned was to help my principal with end of year evaluations. On one hand I really enjoyed being able to go into other teachers’ classrooms to observe all of the wonderful things they were doing. Being able to see how each teacher interacted with their students and their teaching methods was beneficial to my teaching as well. On the other hand, now being responsible for the evaluations of teachers that I had worked with was daunting. Once I began however, I was pleased to find my new skills very beneficial. I was able to be objective and evaluate the teachers effectively. I then had the task of writing a formal evaluation for each of the teachers I observed. After the write-ups were handed out and gone over by the teachers, I had a meeting with each one of them. Again my new skills were very helpful as we discussed the results of their evaluations.
During the end of the school year I was also able to be very involved in interviewing potential candidates for various positions around the school including my teaching replacement in middle school Social Studies. I spoke with the principal and was able to create interviewing teams. After reviewing resumes with the interviewing teams, we would call those who were qualified for an interview. If the team felt the candidate was still qualified, a follow-up interview was made with the principal who had the final authority to hire the candidate. The creation of the interviewing teams was very beneficial not only because more than one person was able to ask questions and ascertain a candidate’s abilities but also because I was able to create teams that would be working with the candidate if they were hired. In two cases I was even able to have the teacher who was leaving be on the interview team. I felt this was also very helpful because they were able to bring their years of experience and expertise to the interview.

Being a private school, enrollment is essential to our survival. One of my main responsibilities over the summer was to give tours of the school to potential families. Each tour is different depending on the family and the potential student. Excellent communication skills are vital to this task. You have to be able to answer questions and give details about the school so that parents can make informed decisions for their students. This experience gave me the opportunity to use skills I learned in my public relations course. I felt confident in my ability to discuss each facet of the school with potential parents. I was fortunate that several families that visited signed up for the new school year.

The biggest task of my summer internship was the implementation of Edline. Edline is software that allowed SMSSS to create a new website so that we can communicate more efficiently with our students and parents. Each teacher also was given their own page for each of the classes they teach. I attended several webinars on how to set-up and maintain the website as
well as a new web-based grade book system. I had to set up several databases to align student, teacher and class identifications. Once everything was ready, I then led several professional development sessions to help the teachers utilize Edline to the fullest. I had several one-on-one refresher sessions as well. SMSSS also was able to purchase another software system called Teleparent. Teleparent serves as a mass communication system for SMSSS as well as one on one or direct communication system for the teachers to the parents. Each teacher has access to over 250 pre-recorded messages that can be automatically sent to parents to inform them of information regarding their student and/or school activities. Despite some initial push back from some of the faculty and staff, SMSSS now utilizes Edline daily. Most of the teachers have started to list their homework assignments, test dates, and grades for students and parents. We have also begun to send all communication from the office on the new site as well. This was a big change for SMSSS, but it has allowed us to be much more environmentally friendly and communicate more efficiently with all of our stakeholders.

Once the new school year began, I began work in the development office. My first decision was to plan an Alumni and Friends Weekend of events. With help from a parent volunteer, I planned a Friday night wine and cheese, a Saturday morning craft fair, Saturday morning golf tournament, Saturday night Gala dinner, and Sunday brunch after mass. This was the first time that SMSSS has tried something so ambitious. Overall this event was successful but it did have its challenges. The Gala dinner has traditionally been in the spring but was changed to coincide with the other events. Trying to change this dinner turned out to be the biggest challenge. In the end, I had to cancel the dinner and reschedule it in the spring. Just as I learned in my course work, changing the culture is very difficult. Despite formal invitations to the dinner, people told me they would just wait for the one in the spring.
The annual appeal was another major development responsibility. I had to create a case for support, have it printed, and send it out so that SMSSS stakeholders would have a chance to donate before the end of the year. Unfortunately, the database that SMSSS had when I began was out of date and was not usable, so I had to research and purchase a new database that could work with our word processing software. After purchasing the new database, I had to start adding names from our old database to the new one. This took quite a bit of time and energy but I know it is a vital part of SMSSS success. Although we charge tuition, it is not enough to cover the cost of operating the school; therefore, we depend on our stakeholders to allow our school to continue to run.

Being a private school, marketing also is vital to SMSSS survival; however, it is a challenge. SMSSS has never tracked their advertising monies, so we lack the data to know what is working. The marketing budget is very small at SMSSS so we have to pick when and how we advertise very carefully. Also, being a Catholic school we have to take where we advertise into consideration. We are not allowed to advertise in conjunction with media that go against the teachings of the Catholic Church. This year I have been able to advertise in the local newspaper and I am in talks with television, radio, and billboards in an attempt to find the best venue for SMSSS. I feel I am able to research the various methods of communication with various publics to ensure that our message will be directed correctly due to my public relations course. Of course the best marketing for SMSSS has always been word of mouth.

An area that I did not feel comfortable with my proficiency before I was in the program at the College of William and Mary was finance. However, during my internship I have had to test my knowledge of this area. I was on the finance council at SMSSS where we evaluated the budget and made decisions on various items from tuition increases to salaries and raises. I was
also responsible for preparing the deposit each week, looking over the schools bills and co-signing checks. I also had to tackle delinquent accounts and work with parents to find solutions to ensure that SMSSS received money owed while still allowing children to attend school. As part of the upcoming budget review, I have been able to come up with a proposal to charge each family at SMSSS a flat rate that would then allow the school to stop making bingo and fundraisers mandatory. We will discuss this proposal in January and I am hopeful that it will become part of SMSSS financial plan.

I am very grateful that I was able to be part of the leadership program at the College of William and Mary. I was so fortunate to be able to put my new skills to the test right away at Saint Mary Star of the Sea School which has also been a great experience. I feel the College of William and Mary prepared me very well for the day to day challenges that one faces as an administrator. One area that I think you can only learn once you are in a position is time management. The College of William and Mary helps students realize this very important skill with the internship course. Being a father, student and administrator over the course of my internship has shown me that time management is a very delicate balance that requires focus. You can easily be tempted to give all of your time to work or not enough and miss something that could be time sensitive. While I do not consider myself a time management expert, I feel that my internship has allowed me to work towards being much better than when I started.

The College of William and Mary’s school leadership program has put me on the right path and given me the knowledge to be a good instructional leader. However, I know there are still so many things that I need to learn. The internship is a great first step allowing me to put my new knowledge into practice. It has taught me that everything takes time and therefore you really have to prioritize. You also need to be able to delegate. It has taught me that decisions
need to be made every day and you don’t always have the luxury to stop and think about it from various angles. I have learned that being an administrator can be hard and lonely work. As an administrator, I have had information that cannot be shared with others that was crucial in making decisions. I see why it is important to have a good working relationship with your principal so that you can share concerns with someone who also knows what is going on. I am very grateful for what this opportunity has taught me and I know that I will continue to learn as I begin my new journey.