

PRACTICUM MANUAL

Revised March 2009

What is a Practicum?

What is the Academic Legitimacy of “Learning by Doing?”

How Do You Select Ministry Practicum?

Examples of Ministry Practicum

How Does It Work?

Teaching Practicum

What is a Practicum?

A practicum is an educational opportunity based in “learning by doing.” It allows you to learn through participation in substantial ministry responsibilities. A practicum takes advantage of the unique match of the learning environment (e.g. a church) and the learning objectives (e.g. ministry training). Since all Antioch School students are based in ministry situations, there is ample opportunity for them to learn by doing. In fact, it is often a natural dimension of their participation in church because they view ministry at the core of what it means to be part of a church. A practicum is based on a “learning contract” with a supervisor who monitors your service, but also helps you learn from it.

A practicum is not “credit for experience.” It is not simply acknowledgment that lots of previous experience necessarily means that you deserve credit. Many of us haven’t learned very much from most of our past experiences. A practicum is not credit for current experience, as if mere activity is the same as learning. It is not credit for “time on task.”

Rather, credit is given for experience where there is evidence of three things:

1. Preparation. Is there a plan for making the experience an effective learning opportunity?
2. Experience. Is there a report about what actually took place in the experience?
3. Reflection. Is there assessment of what was accomplished and learned through the experience (including what was learned about what you still need to learn)?

Each Antioch School program includes practicum requirements in order to take advantage of the church-based situation of students. We think that experiential learning turbocharges education, but situated learning (where the context and the content match) turbocharges experiential learning! A practicum is a tangible way for students to maximize the benefit that can be derived from their church-based condition.

What is the Academic Legitimacy of “Learning by Doing?”

Many people associate academic integrity with traditional courses in classrooms on a campus. Increasingly, academic legitimacy is being recognized as the evidence of “learning,” not just “teaching.”

A foundation of the academic legitimacy of educational practicum is found in the work of a leading scholar named David Kolb. His book, *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984) is a classic in educational research. Kolb’s model is not just about experiential learning, but “the central role that experience plays in the learning process” (p. 20). The essence of the chart below shows the ongoing progression of the cycle of Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation (with the various forms of knowledge created and the intellectual processes through which knowledge is created).

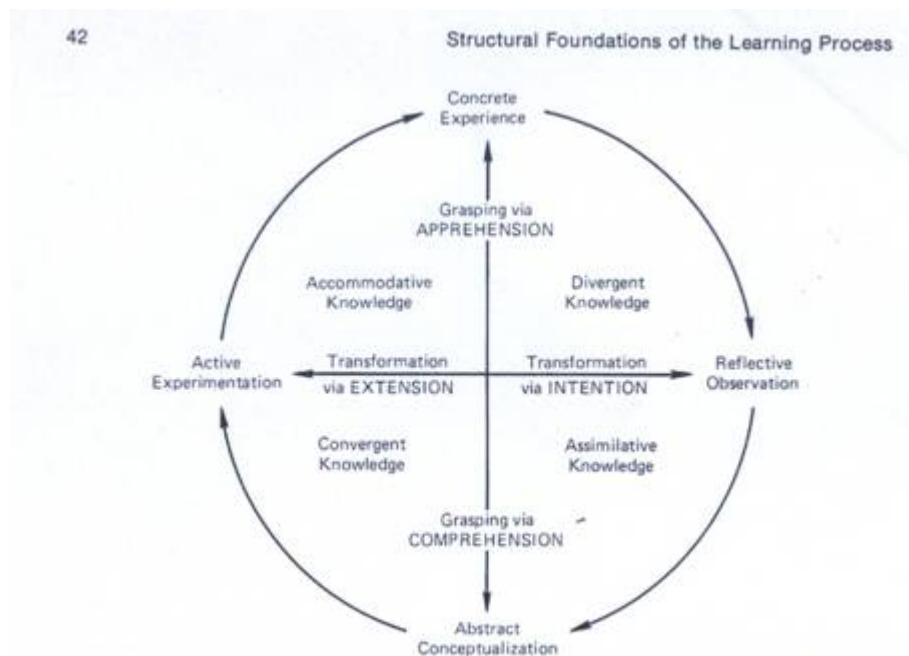
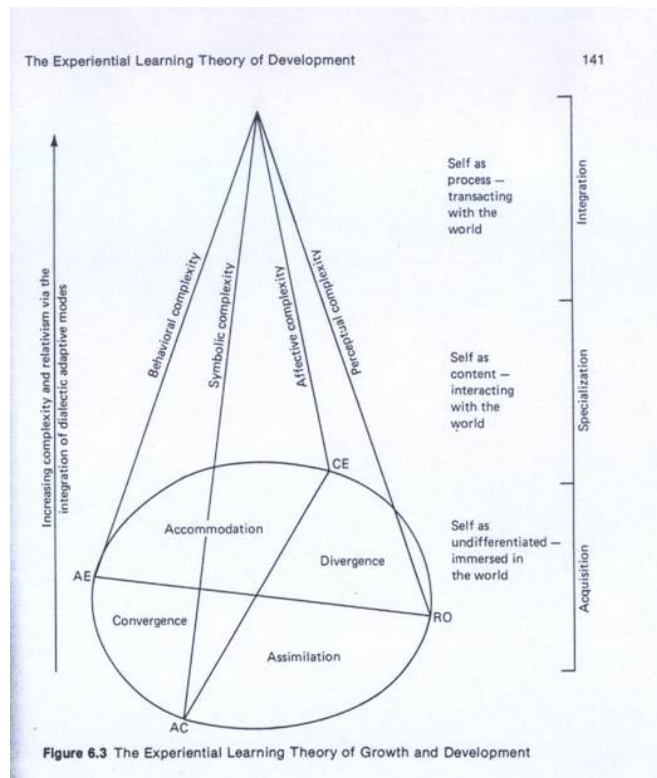


Figure 3.1 Structural Dimensions Underlying the Process of Experiential Learning and the Resulting Basic Knowledge Forms

Kolb is quite well-known for his work on experiential learning, but less well-known for his work on comprehensive human development. The chart below shows how experiential learning relates to the maturing process as one engages more completely and effectively in one’s world.



Kolb's work focuses on the powerful developmental role of experiential learning. Others have built on Kolb's foundation and focused on the relation of experiential learning with contexts. The most noteworthy contributors are Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, particularly through their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge, 1991).

Lave and Wenger have popularized the term "situated learning" which essentially means that educators pay attention to the context as well as the content to make sure that they match in a manner to optimize development. A few technical terms help us to understand this concept. "Legitimate peripheral participation" refers to the substantial, yet not fully integrated position of a learner, particularly an apprentice. The learner is recognized to have a legitimate place in the situation, even if it is still somewhere on the periphery (or away from the very core of the context). "Zone of proximal development" refers to the attempt by mentors and students to find the places where optimal development can take place. It often means getting more closely involved than one might think is appropriate, but not too closely involved that it is completely overwhelming. Rather, it is finding the right match between challenge and comfort.

The academic legitimacy of practicum is made particularly clear in the work edited by Barbara Jacoby, *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Concepts and Practices*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996). "Service Learning" is the term for learning that is connected to service. Several years ago, the American Association of Higher Education commissioned a series of nearly 20 books to be written on service learning in the various disciplines of traditional higher education.

Two crucial factors stand out in terms of the academic legitimacy of service learning. First, the learning must be planned with academic objectives in mind. Usually there is a learning contract in place that defines the objectives, the experience, supervision, and the assessment process. Second, there is serious reflection on the experience. It is the looking back on what was accomplished in terms of learning that transforms experience into learning that endures (and takes you toward further learning that builds on the experience).

A thorough literature review of experiential learning, situated learning, and service learning was done as part of the dissertation research by Stephen Kemp, Academic Dean of the Antioch School. It is called *Experiential learning and the role of primary social relationships as context for situated learning in distance education courses of evangelical theological education institutions* (Loyola University/Chicago, Ph.D. in Higher Education, 2007). This research concludes that although Christian distance education programs allow students to “study where they are,” the programs focus on the academic learning community (students and faculty in institutional contexts) and don’t take advantage of the incredible potential for students to benefit from their God-given learning communities (family, church, neighborhood, workplace).

In Kemp’s *Learning Communities in Distance Education*, he makes the case for the biblical priority of primary social relationships as contexts for learning. He also gives practical examples of how families, churches, and neighborhoods can be easily engaged to help accomplish traditional academic objectives in powerful and enduring ways.

How Do You Select Ministry Practicum?

Ministry Practicum experiences are closely connected with a student's relationship with a local mentor. The choice of experiences is driven by three perspectives:

1. The perspective of the mentor (and/or Certified Leader).

Although some students may want to start with what they want to do or learn, it is advisable to start with what their mentor wants them to do or learn. In fact, one of the realities of ministry is that we often must do what needs to be done, not necessarily what we prefer to do. A mentor (and/or Certified Leader) should be paying close attention to the ministry needs of the church or other ministry context. Perhaps even more important than the lessons learned from the actual ministry experience is the deep recognition of the sacrifice that is often necessary in ministry. However, there is also ample opportunity to learn from even the least desirable ministry experiences.

The mentor may also have special perspective to know what the student really needs. While the mentor should consult with the student, it is often the wiser mentor who sees the type of experience that the student needs in order to develop in particular ways or for particular purposes.

2. The perspective of the student.

A good mentor will be alert to what students feel that they want or need. In fact, often some ministry practicum experiences should be catered to the perceived needs or desires of the students themselves. Often, this will result in a heightened level of commitment and engagement in the experience. However, the final decision regarding ministry practicum should stay with the mentor who is supervising and helping the student learn from the experience (and develop into what is needed for the church or ministry context).

3. The perspective of the church (and/or church network).

In many ministry situations, there are distinct requirements for ordination, licensure, or other commendation. It may be important that the Antioch School ministry practicum experiences to be tailored to fit these requirements.

Further, students and mentors should be looking beyond their immediate ministry contexts to see what may need to be done in terms of ministry practicum experiences in order to equip the student for the larger endeavors of a community or church network.

Lastly, you may want to identify ministry skills that you consider to be “standard” for your church or church network. These would be requirements for everyone in your program. Thus, students may take part in a standard rotation of ministry experiences as part of their Ministry Practicum.

Where do you start in selecting ministry practicum?

1. Start with what you consider “requirements” for commendation or ministry focus of everyone in your group. You may wish to customize the ministry practicum experiences for each of your students. However, if you have common expectations or want to have common competencies among your students, you may want to mandate required ministry practicum experiences for each of them.
2. Then move to the unique compelling needs of your situation. Identify the things that need to be done because of the exigencies of your actual ministry context. Not only are these “real ministries,” but they may be providential learning opportunities for students.
3. Then move to the unique developmental needs of individual students. Hopefully, a student’s ministry practicum experiences won’t be composed entirely of serving the compelling needs of your situation. Some of the experiences should be designed out of the personal mentoring that is being done with each student (e.g. built into the student’s Personal Development Plan).

Examples of Ministry Practicum

Here are several examples of ministry practicum that are organized around traditional ministry areas of a church:

- Preaching
- Teaching
- Counseling (bereavement, marriage, conflict resolution)
- Working with a board or committee
- Evangelism
- Church Planting
- Youth ministry
- Nursery

You may want to pick several of these or let students focus on just a few. In these cases, you are focusing on the development of ministry skills that are specifically related to these traditional ministry areas.

Here are several examples of ministry practicum that are organized around areas of character development as a ministry leader:

- Faithfulness
- Punctuality
- Compassion
- Leadership
- Sensitivity
- Boldness
- Teamwork
- Communication

The context for these ministry practicum experiences may be the same as the traditional ministry areas above. However, the focus is not on the specific ministry skills, but on the development of character through the experiences.

How Does It Work?

Here are several steps in the fulfillment of ministry practicum.

- **Set Goals (broad).** Make sure that your goals are related to the student's Personal Development Plan and/or the church's ministry plan.
- **Select Ways to Prepare.** This may include interviewing others who already have experience, observing others in ministry, or doing research through books and websites about the ministry or area of development.
- **Identify Ministry Experiences.** Connect the learning goals with specific ministry experiences in your context. These may be new experiences that have to be manufactured or it can be taking advantage of existing experiences.
- **Determine Objectives (specific, measurable).** The "learning contract" should include specific, measurable objectives for what is to be done and what is hoped to be accomplished through the ministry practicum. This includes the details of the experience itself as well as the learning outcomes.
- **Plan for Means of Assessment.** Who is going to determine what has been learned and how is the learning going to be assessed?
- **Engage in Ministry Experiences.** Although the bulk of time is spent in the actual ministry experiences, it is the preparation that really makes it ready to be a powerful learning opportunity.
- **Review and Reflect.** This should include reflection by the students, as well as supervisors and other participants in the experience. Often others are going to be more aware of what has been learned than the students themselves. However, it is reflection that is the key to transforming experience into true and learning.
- **Prepare Report.** The preparation, experience, and reflection needs to be captured in a form that can be reviewed by Certified Leaders and validated by Associate Faculty. It should include a description of the "learning contract," the ministry experiences themselves, but most importantly, the actual learning outcomes, including those beyond what was expected and clarity on what still needs to be learned.
- **Post Report in the E-Portfolio.** Technically, in the Antioch School, credit is not earned until evidence of competency is posted in the e-Portfolio, approved by a Certified Leader, and validated by Associate Faculty.

The number of credits earned is directly related to the quantity of time spent on the ministry practicum. One credit hour on the bachelors-level is earned for each 45 hours, including

preparation, experience, reflection, and reporting. One credit on the masters-level is earned for each 60 hours.

Teaching Practicum

We have all heard someone say “it is the teacher who always learns the most, not the students.” In the Antioch School, we believe this so much that we have incorporated “learning by teaching” into each of our programs.

The purpose of a teaching practicum is to learn core ideas through teaching. It is not primarily a teacher-training exercise, though it is likely that students will develop as teachers through the experience. Rather, our teaching practicum are designed to be learning experiences, placed fairly early in the programs of most students, in order to reinforce and deepen one’s competencies regarding the basics of the program.

The venue for teaching can be chosen by students and/or Certified Leaders. The Antioch School does not need to be notified in advance of the venue. Further, the venue does not necessarily have to be a formal teaching setting. Teaching practicum can be done with small groups, family devotions, and one-on-one discipleship. The intensity of the teaching may be different in various venues. For instance, you don’t need to insist that everyone read every article and do every project in a Leadership Series course. The intention is that students learn through a process of helping others to learn. Students should focus on helping others understand the big ideas and take steps forward based on those big ideas.

Note that Certified Leaders or others who are actively facilitating courses may satisfy their Teaching Practicum while they are working through the courses themselves with the groups they are facilitating. Like we stated above, we believe that those who teach tend to learn the most.

Teaching practicum should be evaluated in order to take advantage of the power of reflection in experiential learning. The evaluation should take at least three forms:

- Ministry leaders should evaluate the student’s teaching to identify strengths and weaknesses related to the course content (not necessarily teaching skills).
- Participants should evaluate what they thought was accomplished in terms of their own learning, as well as what would have been helpful in better accomplishing the course goals. This may be a key indicator of areas that the student doing the teaching may still need to develop.
- Students should evaluate themselves in terms of what they accomplished, including what they identified as areas that still need further development.

A report of the experience, including what was done to prepare for it and how it was evaluated should be posted in the e-Portfolio. It should include learning goals for the experience, details about the experience itself, and identification of learning accomplished (or still needing to be

accomplished). Credit will be granted when the report is initially approved by the student's Certified Leader and validated by an Associate Faculty member.