

ELECTRONIC EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PORTFOLIO  
And  
REFLECTION PAPER

Approved *Dr. Wally Inelini* Date: May 1, 2009

Paper Advisor

ELECTRONIC EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION PORTFOLIO  
And  
REFLECTION PAPER

Educational Project

Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education  
Education Administration

By  
Patrick B. Connors  
Year of Graduation 2009

In the reflection process, the practitioner is asked to analyze and apply lessons learned from an experience. This reflection paper, based on my experiences in Cohort Five of the UW Platteville Educational Administration Certification program, is my attempt to synthesize two years of instruction. My reflection is divided into two segments: reflections on the seven administrator standards and on overall program reflection.

The first of the seven Educational Administrator standards states, “The administrator has an understanding of and demonstrates competence in the ten teacher standards.” The first teaching standard is centered on content. As an educator it is important to understand the major concepts and tools of educational inquiry. One of the lessons I have learned in the past two years is that relevance and application are necessary features of any successful curriculum. To make material meaningful, teachers need to continually keep pace with new developments in their discipline. With this in mind, I developed two Advanced Placement Curriculums. AP course offerings have seen a significant growth across the nation in the past decade. With this growth, schools started to use the AP course title not AP level textbooks or curriculum. To solve this problem the College Board required all schools to electronically submit a course syllabus for each course offered by June 1, 2007. Upon review the College Board certifies the course and only then can student transcripts use the title “AP.” Along with my AP United States History course I also gained approval for my AP Government and Politics course.

I had many reasons for encouraging my school to offer these courses. However, for me personally I wanted the professional challenge. Over the past five years the number of my students passing has been over 80% (national average is 50%).

As a principal I would encourage and support my schools AP program. In the era of open enrollment, a strong AP program can make your school a competitive and attractive option.

The second teacher standard calls for teachers to understand how children grow. I understand the broad range of abilities that my students possess. As a father I appreciate how important it is to support my children both developmentally and emotionally. Two of my children have learning disabilities. This fact has made me understand and relate with children and parents of children with learning disabilities on both a professional and personal level.

A young child with a learning disability needs to value their strengths and develop a strong sense of self-worth. When constantly facing failure a child needs to have parents and teachers who do not permit a label to define a person. Seeing the pain failure brings to your child makes you realize that as a teacher we should not define a child solely by their level of performance on an assessment but also on their effort and improvement. As a principal I would foster a school culture that would respect and encourage academic growth in all children.

The third teacher standard states teachers must understand that students learn differently. One of the challenges of teaching history is incorporating opportunities that take advantage of a variety of learning styles. It is easy to just lecture, assign reading/writing activities, and evaluate on a written assessment tool. Following Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, I challenge students through different approaches and give a number of avenues to show their skills and abilities.

As a part of my masters program, in the summer of 2008, I completed a course on learning strategies for students with a learning disability entitled "Strategies for Effective Inclusion." From this course I learned various adaptations and modifications in curriculum, instruction, and assessment for students with various exceptionalities.

A restatement of teacher standard four could be; a teacher needs to know how to teach. As a part of my administrator certification program I have learned the importance of using a variety of instructional strategies to encourage my student's development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills. In 2007 I was assigned an eighth grade civics section and I used this opportunity to incorporate some of the strategies I was exposed to in my certification program. As I developed this course, I first started with this basic vision statement, "Civics is a subject that needs to be applied in order to be learned." With this as my guide I introduced the following elements into the course: each class would start with a "lesson starter" that incorporated current events, students would write a journal, and each quarter a project based on the application of knowledge would be completed. To incorporate current events, most lessons are started with a CNN Student News report that I download daily from iTunes. Journal writing and reflection on the "Lesson Starter" is completed each day. During the first quarter (and again in the fourth quarter) students are to complete a student learning project that includes three hours of community service. Students were responsible for finding their community service activity and recording their experience in their journal.

As I compared civics curriculums, I decided I did not want a traditional memorization and recall strategy. I decided application would be my theme. As a principal I would challenge, when needed, my teachers to break their instruction into short segments of instruction (around ten to twelve minutes) that culminate in an application based assessment.

As a twenty-eight year veteran teacher, one of the most important lessons I learned from the past two years is that I must continually engage in self reflection. I thought I had all the answers but what I did not realize was that I was not asking all the right questions. To achieve excellence in the classroom a teacher must consistently seek professional growth.

Teacher standard five focuses on classroom management. I think it is important to create a positive, safe, supportive and orderly classroom. I emphasize and often return to the “Golden Rule” of “do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” All world cultures have some form of this rule. From my certification program I learned that classroom procedures must be consistently practiced and enforced.

Students appreciate knowing behavior expectations. Students need to understand that our focus is instruction. Classroom management is centered on respect, procedure and consistency. I demonstrate respect by interacting with all students fairly. I have found procedures must be vigilantly followed. When students enter my room they realize there will be little “down” time. We start when the bell rings. I eliminate fumbling around to find lesson related material by organizing my materials and equipment. When a procedure is not followed I have students repeat the task correctly. When it comes to discipline it’s the small details that lead to an orderly classroom.

Classroom environment is enhanced by making the task of learning interesting, relevant and enjoyable. By understanding that classroom management is a multidimensional task, I create an effective classroom environment and a positive learning environment.

The sixth teacher standard stresses effective communication. Understanding the roles that gender and cultural differences play on teacher-student communication is critical. Understanding how to ask an open ended Socratic Method question can allow students to become active learners and not just fact recall machines. One of the keys to help students go beyond rote memory (which is easily forgotten) and to attain a working knowledge of material presented is to relate the subject matter to the real world. Many students find the reflection process and journaling very meaningful.

Standard seven of the ten teacher standards focuses on the need for teachers to organize and plan learning experiences that are relevant to the learner. In 2003, I developed an Advanced Placement Government and Politics course. This process included interviewing teachers who already taught this course, attending two College Board sponsored seminars and researching Internet/College Board resources. During this process I came across a field trip program used by Janesville Parker High School. As a part of this process I have students present their trip to the School Board for approval.

Many former students have told me the value of this trip. We take this trip around April 1<sup>st</sup> and upon our return we start our AP test review. During our test review students relate their experience in Washington DC to the review material.

In standard eight, teachers are required to use valid and reliable assessment tools to test for student progress. I feel the construction of an effective evaluation tool begins before the unit starts, should be adjusted as necessary during the unit, and needs to be practiced throughout the unit. As a football coach I quickly learned the importance of practice. First, never practice something you will never use. Second you must learn it the right way the first time. It is very difficult to correct learned misinformation. Lastly, practice and review is a continuous process. You cannot assume that previously “learned” material is previously “mastered” material.

Early in my teaching career I learned the need to create your test prior to the start of the unit taught. You do not want to waste effort on material that will not be evaluated. Next, your adjustments to the assessment tool should be ongoing. I tell my students that tests are the performance part of the course. Just like a concert, play or game is performed after practice so is a test.

I have learned tests do not have to be difficult, boring or a tool to determine winners and losers. Instead tests can foster creative learning and critical thinking. With practice, students who sometimes struggle can find test success. As a principal I would impress on my teachers that the purpose of a test is to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction. Failure on a test reveals a failure of instruction. Testing is not a separation procedure, turning students into winners and losers. Acceptance of failure must not occur.

In standard nine, teachers must develop the ability to evaluate their performance. Self-reflection and self-assessment based on current research encourages professional growth. During my recent studies I was first introduced to the reflection process. I have learned that reflection is a retrospective self-analysis that takes place after experience. It must be an ongoing examination of a teacher's performance. Taking place after every lesson, reflection requires teachers to adapt to new findings, ideas and practices. Reflection is an acceptance of the fact that every teacher can improve. To achieve excellence everyone in the school, including the principal, must model a willingness to change and seek improvement.

The tenth teacher standard calls for teachers to be connected with other teachers and the larger community. Throughout my teaching career I have had a good working relationship with my School Board. I have served on a variety of committees, including two building committees. I recently worked with a Vision Committee that was composed of parents, citizens, students, teachers and board members. While working with this committee I came to understand that many members of our school community do not know what our school offers. One of the major changes our school has made in the past two years is communication. As a principal I would stress the importance of communication tools such as parent email lists, school websites and newsletter, and the use of local media outlets.

The core of a leader's mission is a vision. Standard two of the administrator standards require a school leader to develop, communicate, implement, and evaluate a school vision. The essential tools of the mission statement include demographic data and strategic planning.

An overall vision plan must be broken into components, that are then developed with objectives and strategies clearly articulated and defined. An administrator must not only believe in the educability of all students and a vision of academic excellence, but must also be able to devise and implement practical policies to make this vision possible.

A key basic element of any school is a plan of discipline. In the fall of 2007, during my Student Learning Module, I developed a philosophy of student discipline. The process of developing a philosophy of school discipline not only reinforced some of my beliefs but expanded my view of discipline from that of a teacher to that of a principal. While I control all the factors that influence my classroom discipline, total building discipline has some factors that I cannot always personally control. This delegation of discipline authority requires that I instill a vision of what I believe are the most important elements of discipline.

In short my vision of discipline is based on respect, defined expectations, incremental consequences, and communication. Many discipline problems can be prevented by an effective communication of expectations and a consistent application of consequences when expectations have not been met.

The characteristics of a successful school include treating all individuals with fairness, dignity and respect. The third administrator standard spotlights school culture. A collaborative atmosphere is enhanced when students and staff feel valued and important. In a successful school, climate must be maintained by an ongoing assessment procedure; a school culture of high expectations for administration, students and staff can only be established and maintained

by persistent assessment. This evaluation can be used to identify and help address any barriers to student learning. A school climate survey is an important tool used to promote a safe and supportive school atmosphere.

The second stage of any survey, developing a strategy to address identified needs, is often overlooked. A plan to address the findings of the survey should include; accountability, stressing successes as well as solving weaknesses, providing resources and time needed to improve school climate, and looking outside the school for resources to help improve school climate. Having some experience with this process, I find the most important part is accountability. A timeline with measurable benchmarks, along with the names of people who are accountable, will make the goal of maintaining and improving school climate a reality.

Schools are a complex mix of often conflicting priorities and expectations. The fourth administrator standard concentrates on management decisions. The management decisions made by a principal do not start with predetermined answers or solutions. The decision making process entails identifying, clarifying and resolving the conflicting needs of all the stakeholders involved. In the allocation of resources a principal needs to confront conflicting desires and needs. The resolution of this conflict is best centered on “what is best for teaching and learning” and “will this best help achieve our vision?”

The concept of power can be divided into two types: *power over* (coercive) or the *power to* (shared and consensus building). The *power over* concept relies on threats and fear while the *power to* concept depends on teamwork, ownership and common goals. The *power to* system therefore is based on expertise and respect.

A key ingredient in the collaborative process is the ability to authentically listen. Instead of debate we need to have directed discussion. A debate is competitive and a discussion is

cooperative. In a debate you approach a topic with a conclusion and you must defend your position. A discussion is open to new ideas. It has no winners or losers. To authentically listen demands discussion by all participants. I enjoy debate. I enjoy finding the weaknesses and strengths in an argument. As a principal I need to direct discussion and not turn discussion into debate.

In my Systems I class I developed a checklist as a starting point for a new principal. This practical list emphasized school-wide communication, understanding procedure and collaboration among school personnel. As a starting point, this list would be a working document. Additions and subtractions would come with experience, but it would emphasize organization and system management.

A school leader needs to understand the needs of the community. Administrator standard five addresses the necessity of support from the entire school community. I have learned that a principal must encourage and seek out a positive interaction between school and community. The effective school leader provides opportunities for community members to come into the school and engage in meaningful interaction. A school leader supports members of the school engaging in the community at large. Encouraging teachers to design activities that enhance classroom instruction while engaging the entire school community helps generate much needed school support.

In the spring of 2007, I investigated the one such possibility. As the National Honor Society Advisor I helped to start a blood drive. In the investigation process, I discovered the possibility of a \$250 dollar scholarship, if we sponsored two blood drives annually. The combination of a community service project, the absence of any sponsoring group, and the scholarship, made for both an excellent service learning experience and an opportunity to create a positive interaction

between school and community. This partnership of school and community resources has resulted in a successful collaborative project. As a principal I would actively promote the concept of community-school ownership.

A school leader must embody and model a sincere sense of personal and professional integrity, fairness, and ethics. The sixth administrator standard pivots around the concept of ethics. This ethical behavior must be demonstrated in my personal activities outside, as well as in, the school. An effective school leader creates an atmosphere of personal dignity of all. I understand that taking an ethical stand can come with a price, but in the end, so does the alternative.

As an educator, whether as a teacher or a principal, we influence children every day. I realize that when I treat others with respect, honesty, and integrity I am modeling the behavior I want to pass on to my students.

In the seventh administrator standard the principal is directed to coordinate school policies, changes in school environment and law to benefit the students and families of the school. A leader must keep members of the community aware of any changes in the school environment and the impact these changes will have on teaching and learning. These changes could include the closing of a major local employer or state funding cut. A principal must understand how laws and policies can bring about change to the school community. Two online resources that I frequently utilize are Legal Clips and AWSA's Marshall Notes.

I believe it absolutely necessary for an administrator to understand the general parameters of the law. The most important lesson I learned from my experiences is that I have enough knowledge to know what I don't know. In other words, when faced with a legal decision, you need to act in a deliberate and logical manner. Emotion and biases have no part in a legal

decision. Seek the advice of professionals when you have any doubt. It is better to make the right decision the first time than to try to correct a mistake later.

As I complete this program I am struck by the amount of professional growth opportunities I have experienced in the past two years. Whether it was the Rick Smith's presentation on classroom management at the AWSA School Leadership Academy, the Academic Imperative program of Pecatonica High School presented by Dave McSherry, or the TEAM Dynamics presentation by Dale Henze, I was always challenged to rethink my past practices. During my course of study I found myself thinking more as a principal and less as a teacher. Instead of my world ending at the classroom door I viewed issues on a school wide basis.

A principal can be viewed as the teacher of the teachers. In this role I feel I have gained the expertise to be a leader of my potential school's team of educators. As a principal I am confident that I can assist a struggling teacher.

This program has made me a "renaissance teacher." I have been professionally reborn and reinvigorated. My challenge now is twofold. First I must continue to grow as a teacher. Through self reflection and taking advantage of professional growth opportunities I must continue to seek improvement. Second I must also strengthen my credentials as a potential principal. While I do not intend to become a principal this coming year, I could see this as a possibility in the next few years.

In the end the biggest resource I gained from this experience is the team of students that made up Cohort Five. The relationships that we have developed will serve us well in the coming years.