

EPPL 586: Reflective Essay

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Reflective Essay

When I enrolled for the first class in the K-12 Administration program of studies, it was not with a true passion for becoming an educational leader. Simply put, I needed to maintain my full-time status so I would continue to be eligible for a graduate assistantship. Because I was not interested in becoming a school principal, I was not sure what I would gain from the program. However, the lessons I have learned in the past two years of study have been some of the most valuable in my time as a graduate student. I anticipate that, in some ways, these courses I originally pursued as an afterthought, will be more important to my success than the doctoral courses I have completed.

Leadership

Dr. Wagner's philosophies of supervision and professional development in EPPL 536 were easily applicable to educational technology supervision and professional development. Because I am unlikely to be in the position of evaluating teachers, I found the lessons on coming alongside teachers and modeling my own learning to be particularly helpful. This course also helped me refine my vision of offering differentiated technology professional development for teachers. The one-size-fits-all approach many schools offer is inadequate for the various types of learners and levels of technology knowledge present among most school staffs. I plan to follow a cycle of professional development that includes needs assessment, differentiated support, and frequent re-evaluations.

In EPPL 550, Dr. Constantino provided a broad, big-picture understanding of the mechanics of what it means to be a school leader. This course helped me appreciate the complexity of the principal's job. Because I hope to work alongside principals in developing and delivering technology professional development, it was essential that I understand how many

priorities each school leader is juggling. Without this perspective, it would be easy to become frustrated with the lack of emphasis or attention for my particular area of interest. Also, the insight I gained related to the practical considerations of budgeting helped me understand why many schools struggle to provide ongoing, job-embedded, individualized professional learning opportunities. There is only so much a principal can do with the funds available.

Teaching and Learning

Courses like EPPL 534 and EPPL 535 have helped me hone my philosophy of leadership. In EPPL 534, Dr. Gareis introduced the concepts of Curriculum-Instruction-Assessment alignment (C-I-A) and the principal as a learning leader. Both of these ideas resonated with me and I worked to apply them to the field of educational technology. I recognize that it will not be enough for me to serve as an expert in the field of educational technology for a school division—I will also have to be an expert learner in the field of educational technology. My ability to “posthole” will be crucial as I work with teachers from different content areas to help them effectively implement technology in the classroom.

In EPPL 535, Dr. Grant expanded on the C-I-A concept. I was able to apply my knowledge of making sound assessments in my internship. As part of my work on the school division’s technology strategic plan, I developed a survey for teachers and students. I applied many of the lessons learned in EPPL 536 when developing these tools. I wanted to make sure that the questions I asked actually elicited the information I needed. Further, in my critique of the division’s existing technology strategic plan, I applied the principals of logic modeling to find areas of needed refinement and improvement. I was able to see that, in some cases, the planned evaluation methods would not actually be an authentic evaluation of the particular goal—they

were not aligned properly. This is the kind of critical thinking I hope to continue in my future as an educational technology leader.

Policy and Law

Although I came into the program with a fairly solid understanding of Special Education laws and policies, EPPL 640 was a valuable refresher. It was helpful to revisit this topic and think about how it applies to my future work in educational technology. One reason I decided to pursue my doctorate in educational technology is because of my passionate belief in the ability of technology to level the playing field for those with special learning needs. This course served as validation that the work I want to do is possible, valuable, and needed.

Prior to taking EPPL 643, human resources administration was always a vague and mysterious concept. From this course, I learned how important a job description is and how I might parse job descriptions in the future to determine if I should apply for an advertised opening. I also learned how important a rubric is when interviewing candidates for a position. Similarly, the role of case law in determining policies at individual schools was completely unfamiliar before taking EPPL 660. Practices that had frustrated me in previous teaching positions (e.g., “Why do I have to stand at my door during class changes?”) suddenly made sense in terms of legal liability. However, the most valuable lesson I learned in EPPL 660 was that my presence in social media absolutely matters to my professional reputation and can definitely be used against me by potential employers. After the second day of this class, I drastically modified my social media profiles to reflect this new knowledge.

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

In EPPL 502, I practiced the tools a successful leader needs to use when confronting the myriad decisions each day presents. The Satisficing and Shared Decision Making models are

practical tools that can help bring order to the complex problems an educational leader handles. Additionally, the summative project in EPPL 502 helped me see how to build a plan and develop a vision to guide a school. Even more valuable than the project itself, though, was the opportunity to work with my colleagues in the program. Although we were likeminded on many aspects of the project, we still had to make many compromises to complete the project. This was a useful preview of what I will experience in my future career as an educational leader.

Organizational Management

Dr. DiPaola's perspectives on organizational dynamics in EPPL 501 dovetailed with lessons learned from both EPPL 550 and my internship experience. The single greatest takeaway for me is that complex problems can be viewed through multiple lenses. Occasionally, problems are isolated to a single or a few individuals. More often, they are organizational issues that are best examined from the perspective of a large, open, loosely-coupled system. This is especially relevant in my field of educational technology because technology increasingly touches so many different parts of the educational system. My role as part of an educational organization may not be limited to helping teachers use technology in the classroom; it may extend to helping the entire school system plan, implement, maintain, and retire rapidly changing technologies. This will be impossible to do well without a solid understanding of the organizational dynamics of the division as a whole.

Ethics and Values

There is a common thread of professional ethics that runs throughout the courses I have taken. Each course is built on an assumption of fairness and goodwill in the practice of school leadership. As Dr. DiPaola is fond of saying, "We learn from examples and non-examples." The professors in this program consistently provide examples of sound, ethical leadership. Knowing

that there is a way to do things right—a contrast to the many non-examples from both my personal experience and media depictions of school leaders—inspires me to be an intelligent, reflective, ethical school leader.

Leadership Goals

I plan to work as school leader in the field of educational technology. Ideally, I would like to work for a local school division, providing expertise and guidance in the development, implementation, and evaluation of their technology strategic plan and its associated components. However, I am also considering work as a consultant. There are several small school divisions and independent schools in the area that do not have the funds or infrastructure to support a full-time director position in my field, but who may be interested in contracting for my services on an as-needed basis. Whichever path I take, I will continue to develop my leadership skills through working alongside other talented school leaders, building my personal network, and my ongoing pursuit of continuing education opportunities.