

**Doing the Right Thing: National Implications of Equity,
ELCC Standards and the 21st Century Educator**

Donna Charlton

PhD Student in Educational Leadership

The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Prairie View, Texas

Assistant Principal

Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District

Houston, Texas

William Alan Kritsonis, PhD

Professor and Faculty Mentor

PhD Program in Educational Leadership

Hall of Honor (2008)

William H. Parker Leadership Academy

The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education

Prairie View A&M University

Member of the Texas A&M University System

Prairie View, Texas

Visiting Lecturer (2005)

Oxford Round Table

University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Distinguished Alumnus (2004)

Central Washington University

College of Education and Professional Studies

Ellensburg, Washington

ABSTRACT

America has not realized the “melting pot” concept envisioned by idealists. Instead, racial, ethnic and cultural groups have remained largely distinct, separate societal entities that come together only by design, a phenomenon known as Balkanization. Students who mimic this behavior within the educational setting may do so to their

academic peril. Educational leaders must be purveyors of change in terms of acknowledging diverse student demographic groups and developing diagnostic and prescriptive strategies to address their needs. Educational leaders may begin the transition through critical evaluation of the ELCC Standards and by tailoring the standards to address diverse demographic student populations.

See: www.nationalforum.com

Introduction

“Melting pot” was first used by Rabbi Samuel Schulman, who spoke of America as ‘the melting pot of nationalities’ around 1907. According to WikiAnswers.com, the term didn’t truly become part of the American vernacular until 1908 when playwright Israel Zangwill opened *The Melting-Pot*, a drama whose plot involved the triumph of cross-cultural love over the prevalence of anti-Semitic sentiments. The young man, and suitor in the play, explains the concept to his true love thusly: “because everybody kind of came here and we didn’t judge them for it. Think of cooking or something. if you have just one kind of stuff would it taste good? No. If you try things and add all sorts of different spices and mix them all together, you have a masterpiece!” (WikiAnswers.com)

Prominent figures from all segments of American society have since used the term to connote the spirit of acceptance upon which this country was founded. Politicians have incorporated its rhetoric into political platforms to gain voter support; patriots embrace the term as a form of self and group valuation; and educators have naively used its premise of unity and “sameness” as a foundation for developing generic teaching and learning strategies. The truth of the matter is that America has never quite actualized the benevolent, heterogeneous utopia envisioned by idealists. Instead, racial, ethnic and cultural groups have largely remained distinct, separate entities, a phenomenon known as Balkanization. Evidence of societal Balkanization is easy to identify and presents itself in the form of predominately homogeneous neighborhoods, churches or areas of a city. Recent trends in America’s social network (within the last thirty years) demonstrate that various diverse groups outwardly promote their differences as reasons for continued separation and distinction. In the school setting, these trends may present themselves as homogeneous peer/social groups or the fractured, territorial racial and ethnic groups that may materialize in the school cafeteria. Ultimately, the physical disconnect that defines Balkanization can increase the ever-widening and much lamented achievement gap between minority and non-minority students. Educators of underperforming students must be ever cognizant of anything that could contribute to learning deficits. The “melting pot” theory is partly to blame; political correctness aside, the fact is that students of diverse backgrounds bring myriad needs to the table that 21st century educators must address. As such, the “one size fits all” approach is ineffective. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council offers seven (7) standards that school administrators must employ to meet the crucial needs of all students through a framework of vision, school culture, management, collaboration, integrity, influence and practical

application. The standards have been incorporated into educational leadership preparation programs for a number of years and are comprehensive in scope. Furthermore, leadership candidates *must* demonstrate competency in these areas as partial requisite for certification. Why, then, do some students continue to fail? The issue is that many educators have remained staunchly modernistic in terms of how they address student concerns. Perhaps the answer lies in the post-modernistic declaration that students who continue to fail truly *are* different and deserve a different intervention to provide them with equitable learning opportunities.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to analyze the seven ELCC Standards in terms of their applicability to diverse populations; to consider student equity as an additional standard; and to offer a model for a personal Standard of Ethics that incorporates ELCC Standard 5.0.

Applicability of ELCC Standards in Diverse Settings

The Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards were created to establish a consistent skill set among established educational leaders and leadership candidates across the fifty states. They contribute to the overall portrait of an ideal educational leader and are as follows:

Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by:

Standard 1: facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

Standard 2: promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

Standard 3: managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Standard 4: collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

Standard 5: acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

Standard 6: understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

Standard 7: through substantial, sustained, standards-based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit.

A *prima facie* perusal of the standards, as written by the Educational Leadership Constituent Council, reveals all-encompassing wording that appears to address every possible aspect of the school administrator's leadership development and practice. Each standard contains a word or combination of words with which educators at every level are familiar and can be unquestionably identified with educational jargon: "*school community, best practice, effective learning environment, collaborating,*" etc... Because these standards are used to validate leadership preparation programs, educators are somewhat justified in believing that their appropriate application of these standards within the school setting makes them completely competent and fully prepared to interact with the 21st century student. In Chapter 6 of *The Art of Educational Leadership*, by Fenwick English (2008), the author mentions the idea that often, what is stated is not as important as *what is not stated*. Based on this consideration and a second perusal of the standards, the words take on a more generic tone and reveal themselves to be somewhat static and one-dimensional in terms of their viability for and applicability to students with diverse backgrounds. For example, if considering Standard 2, an effective educational leader would need some intimate knowledge, so to speak, of the diverse cultures that represent the students who attend her school in order to "promote a positive school culture." An "effective instructional program" for one student demographic may not look the same as an "effective instructional program" for another. Despite some universal aspects, "best practice(s) for student learning" may include nuances deemed necessary after observation of the particular student group in question. And "designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff" is diagnostic, prescriptive and highly specialized based on the individual educator and student needs. This enhanced perspective of Standard 2 demonstrates that *what is not stated* is the factor that actually gives it substance and represents the thought process that dynamic, student-focused educational leaders invoke. Such innovative thinking is the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Educators who are talented, creative, who are not afraid of change and who can think "out of the box" can turn a generic standard into something meaningful that maximizes every student's potential.

Equity: The Eighth Standard

The above argument dismisses the assumption that it is appropriate to apply the ELCC Standards exactly as written. The test is whether the standard articulates equitable actions for the school administrator and equitable opportunities and outcomes for the student. If the answer is that it does not, the administrator must revise and tailor the standard to address the unique needs of campus learners. The revision process infuses the generic standard with enough specificity to make it valuable and meaningful for the educator and the learner. If educators refuse to acknowledge student diversity and the inherent differences in the educational challenges they represent, they run the risk of contributing to the cycle of student failure. ELCC Standards should, therefore, be viewed as frames of reference from which the educational leader develops personalized

substantive strategies. It is critical for educational leaders to balance standards and practices with equity to ensure that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or cultural background, enjoy equitable experiences and learning opportunities.

A Personal Standard of Ethics: Post-Modernity at Work

Career educators must consider the impact they have on the students they serve. To that end, they must contemplate and constantly re-evaluate whether the objectives they've set for themselves are being met. When the educator frames parameters for her own professional development, she should look to areas of need that the ELCC Standards do not articulate. From here she should develop a guiding principle that shapes her personal Standard of Ethics. For example, if an educator accepts the premise discussed in the previous section, she would construct personal standards that incorporate equity as a central theme that may be written as follows:

In the interest of preserving integrity, fairness and ethics for all students, I am committed to:

PS1: treating every child with equitable care, concern and consideration.

PS2: ensuring that all children have equitable opportunities to learn and that they recognize those opportunities as such.

PS3: beginning every student-focused inquiry from the perspective that possible equity issues exist and modifying the approach to eliminate those inequities.

It is important to note here that the educator's personal Standard of Ethics must reflect the influence of ELCC Standard 5.0. For obvious reasons, anything that educators use to impact and interact with students must first preserve integrity and be fair as well as ethical.

Concluding Remarks

The 21st century educational leader is faced with issues that educators heretofore never had to contemplate. Students are constantly evolving and educators must evolve as well if the two are ever to be in sync. Diversity is one aspect of student socialization that continues to increase the divide between the success rates of various student demographic groups. Educators must learn to recognize student differences as indicators that personalized interactions need to occur. To that end, educators must synthesize competency guides such as ELCC Standards to compensate for student differences that the standards, in generic form, do not specifically address.

References

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**See: National FORUM Journals: www.nationalforum.com
Dr. William Allan Kritsonis**