Improving Facility Evaluation Skills

Benjamin G. Swan
University of Idaho
1134 West 6th Street
PO Box 442040
Moscow, ID 83844-2040
208-885-6358 (Office)
208-885-4039 (FAX)
bswan@uidaho.edu

Kattlyn J. Wolf
University of Idaho
1134 West 6th Street
PO Box 442040
Moscow, ID 83844-2040
208-885-6358 (Office)
208-885-4039 (FAX)
kwolf@uidaho.edu

Developing Facility Evaluation Skills (Innovative Idea)

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

Novice secondary agriculture teachers have many responsibilities their first year and are often overwhelmed with tasks and obligations (Mundt, 1991; Mundt & Connors, 1999). Agricultural teacher education is charged with preparing highly qualified and motivated teachers. When a teacher is hired the summer prior to beginning the school year, the entire agriculture department facility must be inspected, cleaned, sorted, and organized for any hope of maintaining order. Highly motivated, passionate teachers are more likely to have well organized and efficient facilities, and therefore, a positive learning environment. Classroom management has been identified as the strongest factor associated with student performance (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). It is difficult, if not impossible to successfully manage the learning environment without a high degree of order within your physical space. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" was an attitude fostered through the course and assignments.

Without the ability to identify and address issues in the laboratory facilities, the novice teacher will struggle to provide safe and meaningful instruction to their students. These laboratory facilities can include: agriscience, food science, aquaculture, agricultural mechanics (welding, small engines, construction, etc.), horticulture, plant and soil science, animal sciences, and natural resources (Talbert, Vaughn, Croom, & Lee, 2007). Hence, to develop the skill of identifying and addressing facility issues, the following assignment was created.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

Within the Facilities Organization and Management course at the University of Idaho, there were six local program visits. In addition to addressing Program Planning topics while on the visit, at the conclusion of the visit, teacher candidates complete an open ended evaluation form that assessed their perceptions of the facility. Teacher candidates were required to complete a detailed facility evaluation report including pictures illustrating areas of concern and an action plan to remediate those areas.

On the evaluation form, teacher candidates were asked to rate their first impressions of: grounds, building, classrooms, laboratories, and attitude of: host teacher, other teacher(s), students, and administrator(s) on a scale of 0 = *not impressed at all* to 10 = *extremely impressed*. The main concept of the evaluation form was to illustrate connections between the teacher candidate's impressions of facilities with the attitude of those who live and work within those facilities. After each assignment was turned in, a class discussion ensued to address all areas of concern.

The following list guided the evaluation process:

- Spatial & Educational – How well was space used for educational purposes?
- Visual – How well could the instructor keep an eye on all students within the facilities?
- Thermal – How were facilities cooled and heated?
- Sonic – What areas of noise concern you in this facility?
- Aesthetic – How did the facilities please your eyes?
- Audio-Visual – How was the A/V equipment and PA system utilized in facilities?
- Equipment – What condition was all of the equipment in?

- Maintenance & Safety – What evidence was there of a safety consciousness/program and a maintenance schedule?
- Do you see any glaring issues that concern you as an educator?

Results to date/implications

This evaluation form has been utilized for the past six years with teacher candidates. This form develops their ability to identify and address issues when they walk into any agricultural education facility by identifying concerns and creating an action plan to address problems. After the fourth program visit, teacher candidates' ability to identify and address areas of concern was greatly improved.

After completing all evaluations, candidates are more prepared to effectively address any issues they will face when they are fully responsible for their own facilities. When the teacher educator visited graduates who had experienced this evaluation process, a high level of facility management and organization was observed when compared with other novice teachers who had not experienced the evaluation process.

Based on classroom reflections and discussions, students noticed a definite connection between attitude of teacher(s), students, and administrators with the quality and organization of the agricultural education facilities. This finding reminds students that their attitude is very determinant of their performance as an agriculture teacher, including managing facilities.

Future plans/advice to others

This evaluation document has served a significant purpose in providing an opportunity for students to develop their facility evaluation skills. This experience prepares the students for inheriting any facility issues or problems and creating a plan to solve them. This assignment will continue to be an integral part of the Facilities Organization and Management course.

Costs/resources needed

During the student teaching block, the teacher educators and cohort visited 6 local programs on 5 trips, up to 30 miles from the university. Each trip was a maximum of 3 hours with travel. The approximate cost was $60 per trip for a total cost of $300.

References

Mundt, J. (1991). The induction year: A naturalistic study of beginning secondary teachers in Idaho. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 32* (1) 18–23.

Mundt, J.P., & Connors, J.J. (1999). Problems and challenges associated with the first years of teaching agriculture: A framework for preservice and inservice education. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 40* (1) 38-48.

Talbert, B.A., Vaughn, R., Croom, D.B., & Lee, J.S. (2007). *Foundations of agricultural education (2nd ed.).* Professional Educators Publications, Inc.: Danville, IL.

Wang, M.C., Haertel, G.D., & Walberg, H.J. (1993). Toward a knowledge base for school learning. *Review of Educational Research, 63*(3), 249-294.