THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
Gustavus Adolphus College Teacher Education Program

TEACHING AS PRINCIPLED PRACTICE

The Gustavus Teacher Education Program conceptual framework undergirds our work. Initial structuring of the framework was based on the five attributes of a teacher education program knowledge base presented by Galluzzo and Pankratz (1991). This redesign was based on:

1) a set of beliefs that have guided the redesign process, (philosophy)
2) an organizing theme and conceptual framework,
3) program outcomes and complete evaluation procedures and processes which guide feedback to the candidate and the program,
4) a professional bibliography of source documents that contains essential knowledge for graduates plus works critical to the program and framework, and
5) the program model emerging from redesign efforts.

As the program has evolved under this framework we have restated these principles using the following NCATE structural elements: (NCATE Professional Standards, p.12)

• the vision and mission of the institution and unit;
• the unit’s philosophy, purposes, and goals;
• knowledge bases, including theories, research, the wisdom of practice, and education policies;
• candidate proficiencies aligned with the expectations in professional, state, and institutional standards;
• the system by which candidate performance is regularly assessed.

Vision and Mission

Our task of creating classrooms for the future is not an easy one, but it is a critical one, for children are precious and hold the keys to the survival and the well-being of this planet. They are indeed our future.

Our vision for teacher preparation is for all of us, faculty and candidates to be principled practitioners who access knowledge, plan based on that knowledge, apply their plan, assess its impact, reflect on student learning and use that reflection to reconceptualize our on-going teaching practices. To accomplish this task the education faculty engage in the following:

• modeling for our candidates the skills and attitudes of inclusiveness and collaboration we wish them to possess;
• encouraging our candidates to develop the mental, physical, and emotional habits necessary for a healthy self-esteem and lifestyle, as well as displaying those ourselves;
• providing opportunities for candidates to discover and demonstrate the pedagogical principles and content knowledge needed to become effective, caring teachers;
• giving candidates the opportunity to observe, participate in, and reflect on a variety of P-12 teaching experiences;
• expecting our candidates articulate their educational philosophies and examine their own and others’ teaching practices in light of it.

The Education Department mission, therefore, is to prepare preservice educators who implement “principled practice” – reflective, student-centered, democratic, and authentic teaching and learning. This mission is facilitated by the strong liberal arts and professional preparation of the candidates.

The mission of the department supports the mission of the college through teaching, advising, and mentoring roles that are supportive and consistent with the goals, values, and philosophy of the institution. Teacher Education candidates learn to take knowledge from all departments and experiences, and weave them into a personal and professional plan for contributing to the betterment of the world. We teach decision-making and problem-solving in complex interpersonal situations as well as a variety of communication skills. In addition, the department contributes in a variety of ways to the existing and developing teaching expertise of the campus. The department contributes directly and indirectly to the strong positive image of the college and to the soundness of the education of entering students.

Philosophy

The conceptual framework is grounded in a belief that learning is largely constructivist, that is, the learner constructs knowledge based upon background knowledge, cultural frames of reference, experience, instructional influences, and reflective processes. Action, performance, or experiences are then central to learning [and teaching]. These beliefs are founded in Dewey (1938) [a cycle of impulse, observation, knowledge, judgment, and purpose] and Kolb (1984) [a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation].

Purpose

Teacher education programs need a focus or organizing theme that reflects the ultimate purpose of the program. Like the set of beliefs [our vision statement] the organizing theme is a product of faculty collaboration. An organizing theme represents the essence of the set of belief statements, or as Short (1987) labeled it, “a unifying concept”. The organizing theme is the key idea that turns a collection of courses into a coherent program (Galluzo & Pankratz, 1991).

The Gustavus Department of Education has chosen as its organizing theme “teaching as principled practice.” In her description of an English Method’s class instructor, Grossman (1990) discussed “teaching as principled practice” in the context of his
strategies in the classroom, and the philosophy that undergirded his classroom practices. She depicts principled practice as:

…the need for teachers to understand the reasons behind their instructional choices, to be able to explain why they do what they do. “Principled practice” implies that while there are no absolute answers or sure solutions to most of the dilemmas of teaching, teachers must try to connect their choice of instructional activities to their understanding of the underlying purposes for the teaching of English (Grossman, 1990, p. 121).

Like the English teacher described by Grossman, we seek to foster in prospective teachers the ability to explain why they do what they do in the classroom. We would like them to exit our program with an ability to defend their instructional choices on the basis of pedagogical, moral, and ethical grounds. It is our goal to help them realize that we do not (nor does anyone else) possess “the correct answer” for their teaching dilemmas and challenges. Instead we strive to help them acquire the skills of analysis and reflection, a broad knowledge base, and an array of experiences that will enable them to articulate and examine their own beliefs about teaching and learning, as well as to set those beliefs into action. Like Tom (1984), we hold that teaching is not simply a technical enterprise, with a discrete set of skills to be acquired, but rather it contains a moral (and ethical we would add) basis as well.

We see three components contributing to and informing “principled practice”: our past, present, and imagined experiences, both inside and outside the classroom; our reflection on and analysis of our experiences, knowledge, and practices; and our conceptualization of knowledge/truth including that regarding the research on teaching/learning and theories of teaching/learning. Following the work of Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), we hold that knowledge/cognition (and activity) is situated in a culture (in this case most likely schools) that has its own set of values and ways of utilizing the knowledge or activities a participant brings to the setting.

Our application of the ideas of Brown, Collins, and Duguid (as well as those of Smith, 1990) are best summarized in the following model: (Figure 1).
The three components (knowledge and beliefs, experience, and reflection and analysis) interact (and in reality are inseparable from each other) with each other in a continual process to create or determine our classroom practices. As Brown et al. Note, “A concept, for example, will continually evolve with each new occasion of use because new situations, negotiations, and activities inevitably recast it in a new, more densely textured form” (p. 33). Likewise, classroom practices will evolve as a candidate’s knowledge base of theories and research is expanded through coursework, conferences, professional reading, etc.; tested in the crucible of the classroom, school, or some other setting; and examined and reflected on in terms of their principles and desired outcomes.

Our job as teacher educators is to insure that all three components of “principled practice” are engaged in by our prospective teachers, and that the principles held highest and used for the basis of judgment of outcomes and experiences are those outlined in foundational documents and in program curriculum.

Goals

This experiential and reflective model of improvement captures the process of learning, teaching, program management, and redesign. It is shaped and characterized by the nine goals listed below. The program outcomes and evaluation procedures and processes that guide feedback to the candidate and to the program are embedded in this model and in courses and experiences throughout the program. Furthermore, these broader program outcomes are specifically aligned with the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers (See Evidence Room). In 2003-2004 the unit updated the conceptual model to further reflect the dynamics of our work. In addition to the cornerstone components of our model; Know and Believe, Experience, Reflect and Analyze, we have added three additional and integrally related components. We believe that high quality teachers “plan” based on what they know and believe, “assess” those planned experiences, in order to “reconceptualize” after extensive reflection and analysis. The expanded conceptual framework is represented in the following graphic: (Figure 2).
The conceptual framework is shared in department literature and at various orientation points during initial advising, at pre-admission orientation meetings, at the celebration/orientation for newly admitted students, and in all education courses throughout the program. More importantly, the department crafts learning experiences as well as procedures and policies that model the knowledge base and beliefs expressed in the conceptual framework. Gustavus preservice teachers and teacher educators:

**Know and Believe:**
- 1. Understand and consider moral and ethical dimensions of teaching.
- 2. Make decisions about teaching and learning informed by sound pedagogical research and with refined pedagogical capability.
- 3. Rely on and advocate for sound liberal learning, extensive disciplinary learning, and interdisciplinary thinking.

**Plan:**
- Make decisions about teaching and learning informed by sound pedagogical research and with refined pedagogical capability.

**Experience:**
- 4. Rely on and advocate for sound liberal learning, extensive disciplinary learning, and interdisciplinary thinking.
- 5. Form nurturing relationships that foster inquiry, achievement, and cooperation for all learners.
- 6. Create inclusive and collaborative learning communities to enrich learning and stimulate reflective analysis.
- 7. Engage in reciprocal partnerships with learners, families, communities, and colleagues.

**Assess:**
8. Employ continual strategies of assessment to understand learning.
9. Provide honest and complete feedback to assist learning.

Reflect and Analyze:
- Employ continual strategies of assessment to understand learning.
- Create inclusive and collaborative learning communities to enrich learning and stimulate reflective analysis.

Reconceptualize:
- Anticipate the complexity and inter-relatedness of student development, curriculum, and the problems and challenges faced by tomorrow’s learners.

Knowledge Base: Theories, Research, Wisdom of Practice, Educational Policies

To simplify and focus the work of the education department, the conceptual framework is communicated in a three-part cycle of learning – knowledge > experience > reflection. This three-part model, based upon contextualized experience, reflection and analysis, and research and theory development is also supported by the works of Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989), Fosnot (2005), Gold (1986), and Smith (1990). In addition, the three-part cycle expresses not just a learning theory, but also a model of ethical and moral decision-making – orchestrating the success of learners in an informed and principled way. This cycle of learning applies to the work in teacher preparation of the Education Department; it is a process that continuously changes through experience, reflection, and reconceptualization and is organized under the theme of “teaching as principled practice.” Framework and other critical professional references are cited at the end of this section.

Candidate proficiencies Aligned with Standards

All courses have articulated course-level outcomes that have been aligned with state, professional, and institutional standards. The entire program approval process instituted by the State of Minnesota clearly delineates our programs’ standards. The PEPER I I-C (Professional Education Program Evaluation Report) forms are used to develop curricular maps that align program proficiencies to specific courses at three levels; knowledge, assessment, and primary placement. The alignment process ensures both breadth and depth of proficiency. Those courses that are designated as primary placements for program standards are also mapped on the PEPER I I-D matrix. The I-D Matrix not only aligns the standard to a course, but also to a particular activity, assignment, or assessment. In addition to the PEPER I forms that detail the specific standards of effective practice in education, our programs are also aligned to the content standards that have emerged out of the learned societies. The PEPER II matrices detail the alignment of content proficiencies to specific courses within the majors. Similar to the PEPER I matrices, the PEPER II-D matrices also detail the particular assignments, activities, and assessments that are used to accomplish the standard. Table 1.1 details the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice (also aligned with INTASC Principles) that we strive for as outcomes for our Gustavus Adolphus College Teacher Education Program.
Assessment of the Proficiencies

The assessment of the programs’ proficiencies is systematic and comprehensive. The assessment of specific course embedded proficiencies is detailed in the PEPER I and II matrices. In addition, the department assesses the candidates at many gates in the program, and gathers formative and summative data throughout a candidate’s program of study to guide candidates and inform our program. Additionally, all of the field experience assessments are aligned with the program standards, and candidates complete a rigorous portfolio process that evidences their competence on all of the Standards of Effective Practice. Furthermore, the content and pedagogy examinations (PRAXIS) required by the State of Minnesota ensure that our candidates are highly qualified to enter the profession. The assessment system is detailed in Standards 1 and 2 of the Institutional Report.

Shared Vision

The conceptual framework defines the work of the unit and has been developed, redesigned and shared with all its stakeholders. The most recent refinements of the framework were discussed at both the department and Teacher Education Advisory Council levels. The framework undergirds programs, courses, teaching, advising, mentoring, and candidate performance and is consistent with our mission.

Coherence

The conceptual framework and its related values embedded throughout our curriculum, field experiences, instruction, and aligned with our program standards, ensure a coherent preprofessional preparation model for our programs. All programs base their performance outcomes on established, consistent, and coherent program standards.

Professional Commitments and Dispositions

Our conceptual framework epitomizes what we know and believe to be true of committed teachers disposed to not only be professionals, but to also be ever-changing professionals. The conceptual framework informs all that is practiced and espoused throughout the program.

In Teacher Education Program at Gustavus Adolphus College candidates are introduced to what it means to be a teacher and to the knowledge and skills, and dispositions expected of teachers early in the program. The program continually monitors candidates’ dispositions until program completion. Candidates interested in our programs, meet with the Department Coordinator in the fall of their freshman year. Each candidate also enrolls in EDU 268 Career Explorations in the January-term of their freshman year. Throughout this month-long practicum based course, the instructors of the course facilitate discussions via Nicenet focused on what it means to be a teacher. The candidates also receive a Student Handbook that details the Professional Dispositions and Technical Standards expected by the department. As sophomores, candidates may apply for admission to the department through a selective admission process. As part of the
selective admissions process candidates must have recommendations from their major advisors, and they must interview with an admission committee. The rubric the committee uses to assess each candidate’s response, is designed, in part to assess the candidate’s disposition. Feedback regularly solicited from cooperating teachers is used to assess candidate dispositions as well.

An established monitoring system (Professional Behavior Plan (PBP) and Academic Performance Plan (APP)) enables our faculty to closely monitor and document concerns related to professional and academic performance. Information regarding teacher education candidates is used to plan and facilitate growth towards program outcomes, that is, the program’s conception of an outstanding beginning teacher. While serious concerns about the performance or growth of our candidates do not often occur, when a concern exists, it is best for the candidate and program to address it honestly and directly. For this purpose, the Professional Behavior Plan process (PBP) and the Academic Performance Plan (APP) have been created. PBPs document the interventions required of candidates who demonstrate inadequate performance on areas related to Professional Behaviors. APPs document the interventions for candidates who demonstrate patterns of inadequate academic performance in courses, and with regard to the Gustavus Teacher Education Outcomes/Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. Information provided during this process is designed to be of value to the candidate in planning for growth and to the department in facilitating growth. The information may also be important in decisions regarding Admission to Teacher Education, Application to Student Teaching, and Recommendation for Licensure.

**Commitment to Diversity**

The program continues to authentically engage itself in programs and experiences that change who we are and what we do. The conceptual framework provides the backdrop for considering what we know and believe about the community of the classroom. Specifically, program outcomes 3-5 advocate for an inclusive environment that acknowledges diversity and provides for a learning environment for all individuals.

3. *Diverse learners* – A teacher must understand how students differ in their approaches to learning and create instructional opportunities that are adapted to students with diverse backgrounds and exceptionalities.

4) *Instructional strategies* – A teacher must understand and use a variety of instructional strategies to encourage student development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

5. *Learning environment* – A teacher must be able to use an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create learning environments that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

All candidates within the unit receive coursework in the area of diversity and exceptionality within the general education requirements and in their program of study.
The Unit is engaged in many good faith efforts related to diversity and strives to create opportunities for candidates to interact with diverse P-12 students and professionals. The department has engaged itself in professional development activities focused on diversity issues. The activities have included a faculty retreat, book discussions, and involvement in activities of the Diversity Center. Additionally, the department has committed itself to two notable outreach initiatives: National Youth Sports Program (NYSP) and Chicano/Latino Youth Leadership Institute (ChYLI). NYSP provides underprivileged youth a five-week, on-campus academic and activity-based program, and the ChYLI program provides Latino youth with in-school and after-school programming designed to provide leadership and service opportunities.

Commitment to Technology

The Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers, specifically sub-standards 4D and 4K as delineated on the PEPER I matrices, expect candidates to be able to:

- Enhance learning through the use of a wide variety of materials and human and technological resources;
- Develop a variety of clear, accurate presentations and representations of concepts, using alternative explanations to assist students’ understanding and present varied perspectives to encourage critical thinking. Use educational technology to broaden student knowledge about technology, to deliver instruction; and

All candidates have access to computers and the Internet and to their home directories through the vast number of computer labs located around campus, and through wireless networks across campus. Teacher candidates receive technological instruction in the EDU 241 course, and continue to apply technology in the classroom throughout their program of study.

See Appendix A for conceptual framework references and professional bibliography.