

## Reich College of Education Conceptual Framework

The Reich College of Education's teacher education program is a high quality professional education program. As such, there is a "framework" in place that guides professional preparation in the teacher education program at Appalachian. Our conceptual framework, as it is called, provides a basis for our program. It is knowledge-based, is based on research, has a philosophy and purpose, and provides a rationale for our coursework and field experiences. The teacher education program's framework is available in a written document that is shared with and articulated among all faculty working in teacher education programs at Appalachian. Our framework reflects the current literature on the social nature of learning and is based on a "community of practice" model of teaching and learning which reflects multicultural and global perspectives and cuts across all program areas.

Our conceptual framework is based on what is termed a **social constructivist** perspective. We see the preparation of teachers as essentially a social activity which includes a period of apprenticeship. Becoming a teacher requires the novice to participate in the communities of practice both in the Reich College of Education and in public schools and other professional settings. Learning to become a teacher involves the transition from partial to full participation in the community. Becoming a teacher requires the mastery and acquisition of enormous amounts of knowledge and extensive experience in applying and testing that knowledge in practical settings.

Becoming a truly accomplished teacher requires that one continue to master and acquire knowledge throughout one's entire professional life. It is within this theoretical and practical framework that the Reich College of Education prepares its teacher education candidates to become full-fledged members of the community of practice known as teaching.

## **AN OVERVIEW of the RCOE Conceptual Framework\***

*“In Pursuit of Knowledge: A Community of Practice Linking the Past and Present to the Future”*

The RCOE Conceptual Framework provides the basic set of principles that govern interactions among and between faculty and candidates in the professional education programs at Appalachian State University. The five core principles are:

- *Learning occurs through participation in a Community of Practice (CoP).*
- *Knowledge is socially constructed, and learning is a dynamic activity within the Community of Practice.*
- *Learners proceed through stages of development from Novice to Expert under the guidance of more experienced and knowledgeable mentors in the Community of Practice.*
- *An identifiable knowledge base that is both general in nature and also specific to program areas emerges from the Community of Practice. This knowledge base falls into three categories: knowledge of learners, knowledge of subject matter and curriculum, and knowledge of teaching.*
- *All members of the Community of Practice develop a set of dispositions that reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and values common to the Community of Practice.*

As a result of work in programs of the professional education unit at Appalachian State University, graduates and faculty will:

- **Provide positive professional contributions within the various CoPs of which they are members;**
- **Embody the view that learning and teaching are active, social, and transformative processes that are enhanced when new learning is linked to prior knowledge;**
- **Use theory and research to inform practice and use experience from practice to inform theory and research;**
- **Become adaptive experts by proceeding through stages of development from Novice to Expert under the guidance of more experienced and knowledgeable mentors in the CoP;**
- **Plan and adapt teaching and learning experiences, assessments, and interventions with reference to the learners’ diverse needs and characteristics;**
- **Demonstrate a commitment to three key dispositions:**
  1. **Meeting the needs of all learners;**
  2. **Engaging in ongoing reflective practice and lifelong learning;**
  3. **Embodying the highest standards of professional and ethical practice.**

*\*The Reich College of Education (RCOE) serves as the designated unit at Appalachian State University with the responsibility for managing or coordinating all programs offered for the initial and continuing preparation of teachers and other school personnel, regardless of where these programs are administratively housed. Consequently, the terms “RCOE,” “unit,” or “professional education unit” should be viewed as synonymous in references within the RCOE Conceptual Framework. An executive summary and the full text of the Conceptual Framework can be found at [www.ced.appstate.edu](http://www.ced.appstate.edu).*

## THE RCOE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK\*

### In Pursuit of Knowledge: A Community of Practice Linking the Past and Present to the Future An Executive Summary\*\*

In the Reich College of Education [as the professional education unit], we see faculty and students coming together as a community of inquirers to examine the aims of education and the nature of teaching and learning for achieving worthwhile educational goals. We view teaching and professional service as dynamic, goal-oriented, social activities which reflect our commitment to both the value of cultural diversity, and to the identification and solution of social problems. Learning is seen as an active process of acquiring, assessing, and producing knowledge in an environment of care and respect for others. We embrace the exploration of new forms of teaching and learning through experimentation with emerging technologies, and we are committed to the promotion of areas of excellence in the study of teaching, learning, and professional service. (RCOE Vision Statement, 1990).

The RCOE Vision Statement is reflected in all programs within the professional education unit and serves as a focal point for ongoing development for the unit's programs. Underlying this vision is the unit's conceptual framework which is based upon five principles, each supported by a rich theoretical and research base.

#### PRINCIPLE 1: Community of Practice

##### *Learning occurs through participation in a Community of Practice*

The knowledge required to be a successful educator is acquired through active participation in a Community of Practice (CoP). Preparation of educators occurs in at least two overlapping CoPs: the university, college or department where prospective and experienced educators are prepared, and the public schools and/or agencies where they engage in teaching, administration or other service and eventually their life's work. Entrance into a CoP is by "invitation," informal or formal; members come together because they are engaged in common work to reach agreed upon goals. While technical knowledge is important, it is always embedded in a complex set of social relationships. Out of such relationships emerges a set of shared knowledge, skills, values, and other characteristics that define the CoP.

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\*\*The full text of the unit's conceptual Framework can be found at [www.ced.appstate.edu](http://www.ced.appstate.edu). Wenger (1998) proposes that CoPs progress through stages of development (see figure above).

### *Learning in a Community of Practice*

The knowledge an individual must possess to gain full membership in a CoP takes two forms: one comes through *acquisition*, the other through *learning*. The process of *acquisition* focuses more on active participation than what is learned; an example of this is the young child who learns the basics of language without any formal grammar instruction in order to become an active participant in a community. Learning involves direct teaching and conscious reflection and is most typically found in formal schooling; for example, learning multiplication tables, the technical names for chemicals, the elements of leadership, or those of clinical practice. Membership in CoPs requires both kinds of knowledge, and the unit strives to provide an environment in which both processes take place and complement each other.

### *The Importance of Language*

Language is the critical tool in the balancing of acquisition (social participation) and learning (formal instruction). Dialogue becomes an essential tool in the traditional learner-expert relationship but also the process of dialogue is the means for identifying and defining problems, exploring alternative solutions, monitoring activity, and evaluating results. A healthy CoP is always concerned with an open flow of dialogue. Members must feel that their ideas are taken seriously and should never feel threatened that they will be rejected on the basis of their dialogue.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: Social Construction of Knowledge**

***Knowledge is socially constructed and learning is a dynamic activity within the Community of Practice.***

Learning does not occur in isolation but requires interactions among people and is, therefore, shaped and transformed by one's social and cultural environment. Diversity in the cultural, socioeconomic and sociopolitical contexts in which teaching and learning occur contributes to different practices, experiences, and outcomes. Individuals *appropriate* the practices, knowledge, skills, dispositions and values of their social groups. In other words, participants in the CoP have experiences "outside" themselves that create new meanings and understandings "inside" themselves.

Through such a transformation process, our aim is to educate candidates who seek to understand the views and experiences of those with whom they will work, to engage candidates in co-creating knowledge, and to make their learning relevant to real world situations. From this viewpoint, candidates learn and educators model the concept of *praxis*, the intertwining of theory and practice in the service of the reflective transformation of the individual's participation in the world (Freire, 1970).

## **PRINCIPLE 3: Novice to Expert**

***Learners proceed through stages of development from Novice to Expert under the guidance of more experienced and knowledgeable mentors in the Community of Practice.***

Expertise in a profession results from absorbing the knowledge gained from theorists and research that frames perspectives about that profession. Experts clearly have "acquired extensive knowledge that affects what they notice and how they organize, represent, and interpret information in their environment"; such knowledge later "affects their abilities to remember, reason, and solve problems" (Bransford et. al. 2000, p. 19). Hence, for experts, knowledge is not merely a list of isolated facts but rather knowledge comes to exist within a highly organized and contextualized structure.

In the case of teaching, for example, teachers must decide about the goals for instruction; identify their students' instructional needs, learner characteristics, and individual differences; decide what to teach and how much time to allocate to instruction; identify appropriate instructional levels; choose appropriate instructional materials and strategies; group students for instruction; decide how to measure the effects of instruction; monitor the lesson as it is taught; interact with students; make decisions about providing further instruction based upon student achievement; provide students with feedback; and, ultimately, analyze and reflect on the overall results and effectiveness of instruction.

The expert has to evaluate the novice's readiness to take on greater responsibility for the cognitive work necessary to move from novice to expert. The unit's faculty views its interactions with novice candidates in terms of the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) or the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under...[expert] guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Members of CoPs often assume interchangeable roles; at one point they may be novices acquiring or learning new knowledge and skills; at another time, they may be experts teaching others who assume the role of novice. An example of this can be found in the area of information and communication technologies; frequently supervisors will report that candidates have such an advanced level of knowledge and skill in this area that they have taught the supervisors how to handle a technological problem that otherwise would have remained unresolved. Consequently, we see the unit's classrooms and internship settings as a community of practitioners with distributed expertise, and we value settings that are populated with candidates and faculty who are in different zones of proximal development.

Experts also possess the license to interpret and evaluate the performance of novices who are undergoing an apprenticeship in relation to the expected practices of the community. The apprenticeship provides an environment of trust in which novices and experts can co-construct mutually recognizable and desirable social roles. To this end, we rely upon performance assessments centered on critical concepts and activities embedded in actual educational and social service contexts, and we employ a variety of approaches to document the transition of candidates from novice to expert.

#### **PRINCIPLE 4: Knowledge Base**

***An identifiable knowledge base that is both general in nature and specific to program areas emerges from the Community of Practice.***

One of the defining characteristics of a profession is a scholarly knowledge base (Shulman, 1998). Beginning teachers, for example, need knowledge in three general areas to be successful in the classroom: knowledge of learners, knowledge of subject matter and curriculum, and knowledge of teaching. Professionals in all fields develop a personal knowledge structure that guides their activity, but candidates also need "to both understand and move beyond their personal knowledge and experiences to bring to bear a wider set of understandings on the problems of helping others learn" (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p.12).

##### ***Knowledge of Learners***

A number of fundamental concepts about learning will provide teachers and other practitioners with a foundation for their continued professional growth. These concepts include:

- *Learning as a constructive process—*

“Learning is an active knowledge construction process emphasizing context, interaction, and situatedness.” (Salomon & Perkins, 1998, p. 4);

- *The zone of proximal development*—  
"The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86);
- *Metacognition*—  
“...how people learn to monitor and regulate their own learning and thinking.”  
(Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005, p. 8);
- *Cultural competence*—  
The ability to...  
(1) develop curriculum representative of the myriad individuals in our global community”  
(Banks, 2003);  
(2) select materials inclusive of the contributions and perspectives of different groups  
(Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2002)  
(3) develop an awareness and responsiveness to the particular cultural context within which one lives and teaches  
(Irvine & Armento, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1999; Banks, et. al., 2005).

### ***Knowledge of Subject Matter and Curriculum***

Educators need to become diagnosticians of learners’ interests and ideas. This leads to engaging students in the study of subject matter in ways that encourage a deeper and richer understanding of how the content they study relates to their lives and needs. To be able to lead such study, educators must have a deep understanding of the content for which they have responsibility as well as knowledge and ability to represent that content in meaningful ways for all students and clients (Shulman, 1987). We place a premium on knowledge related to all of our majors in the unit. Such knowledge is addressed through program standards at either the state and/or national levels. All of our programs are built on these standards and are held accountable for demonstrating their candidates’ performance in relation to the standards.

### ***Knowledge of Teaching***

Subject matter knowledge must be synthesized with pedagogical knowledge. The latter is defined by Shulman (1986):

The most regularly taught topics in one’s subject area, the most useful forms of representations of these ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, ways of representing and formulating subject matter that make it comprehensible to others. Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult; the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons (pp. 9-10).

Candidates will not leave with all the skills and knowledge necessary to perform effectively throughout their careers without further study. Instead, the unit's faculty help candidates develop the core understandings and skills that will prepare them for a lifetime of learning from their experiences in professional contexts. The unit’s purpose is to develop “adaptive” experts who are capable of making the

complex judgments they will have to exercise daily in practice but who also understand that education is a lifetime commitment.

### **PRINCIPLE 5: Dispositions**

*All members of the Community of Practice develop a common set of dispositions that reflect the CoP's attitudes, beliefs, and values.*

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defines *dispositions* in the following way:

The values, commitments and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. (NCATE, 2002)

What habits of mind and behavior are essential to candidates in the programs of the unit? Three key dispositions are generalizable to all program areas:

1. Candidates exhibit a commitment to meeting the needs of all learners.
2. Candidates exhibit a commitment to reflective practice.
3. Candidates exhibit a commitment to professional and ethical practice.

For the behaviors associated with these dispositions to emerge and be strengthened in candidates, faculty work collaboratively to insure that every candidate is offered situations that evoke the appropriate dispositions and related behaviors. Candidates must have multiple opportunities to display the key behaviors associated with each disposition so that both candidates and observers reach the conclusion that the candidates will be likely to display the dispositions in the future in similar situations. The presence of these three dispositions for all candidates does not in any way suggest that program areas do not also have other dispositions that may be governed by levels, subjects being taught, or other factors for which candidates may be held responsible by their respective program areas.

### **A SUMMING UP**

Our conceptual framework is based on a "social constructivist" perspective. We see the preparation of candidates in the unit as essentially a social activity, which includes a period of apprenticeship. To become a graduate from the unit requires candidates to participate in the communities of practice both in the unit and in public schools and other professional settings. Learning to become a participant in the unit involves the transition from partial to full participation in the community of practice. Becoming a graduate of the unit's programs requires the mastery and acquisition of large amounts of knowledge, and extensive experience in applying and testing that knowledge in practical settings.

As a result of their work in the unit's programs, graduates and faculty of the professional education unit at Appalachian State University will...

- Provide positive professional contributions within the various communities of

practice of which they are members;

- Embody the view that learning and teaching are active, social, and transformative processes that are enhanced when new learning is linked to prior knowledge;
- Use theory and research to inform practice and use experience from practice to inform theory and research;
- Become adaptive experts by proceeding through stages of development from Novice to Expert under the guidance of more experienced and knowledgeable mentors in the COP;
- Plan and adapt teaching and learning experiences, assessments, and interventions with reference to the learners' diverse needs and characteristics;
- Demonstrate a commitment to three key dispositions:
  - a. meeting the needs of all learners;
  - b. engaging in ongoing reflective practice and lifelong learning;
  - c. embodying the highest standards of professional and ethical practice.

Becoming a truly accomplished professional requires that one continue to learn and acquire knowledge throughout one's entire professional life. Within this theoretical and practical framework the unit prepares its candidates to become full-fledged members of the community of practice appropriate to their major field of study.

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