

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

Teacher Education Program

Conceptual Framework

The institution's performance based, well defined, articulated, and defensible conceptual framework for the preparation of professional educators that incorporates the Wisconsin Standards and includes the research base for program design and improvement

Historical Overview

The UW-Eau Claire beliefs, central intellectual processes and conceptual framework emerged from numerous self-study efforts (e.g. the Chancellor's Task Force on Teacher Education for the 21st Century and articulation of common core curriculum elements) and completion of program alignments based on the University baccalaureate goals and the WTS. Teacher Education faculty and staff met in a series of activities designed to brainstorm conceptual models, metaphors and mechanisms for representing our existing program priorities. Between fall 1999 and fall 2002, a series of work groups convened to articulate connections among programs, map program elements to PI 34 and identify strengths and gaps in our program development and evaluation processes.

During the process, an important shift in perspective occurred. As we worked and made our own perspectives more clear, we moved away from a "compliance" mentality towards a "this is what we strive towards" stance. In particular, we made explicit the ways in which our programs were sound, and used those statements to establish a set of beliefs that represent our mission and vision. Our debates proved to be a reflective mechanism that clarified both our existing program strengths and gaps, but more importantly helped us revisit our own identity. Our conceptual framework is thus a work in progress. Our belief statements now act as an explicit rolling horizon that is focusing our program development in ways that will truly enhance our identity

All faculty associated with programs also began a cross-departmental series of self-studies in 1993 that clarified some common program themes, articulated important knowledge bases and theoretical orientations and spurred program development activities.

The common set of beliefs across the Teacher Education Program provides a framework that guides our:

- classroom practice
- programs
- assessments
- evaluations
- program improvements
- faculty

- governance decisions

Overall all we are committed to a best practice model requiring "end-in-mind" thinking which is then acted out through the belief system.

Our belief statements illustrate the unique character of programs in the Teacher Education Program at UW-Eau Claire. The belief statements are derived from existing documents generated during the development of conceptual framework language, review by the Teacher Education Program faculty and the perspectives of our partners in the PK-12 settings.

Conceptually, we are committed to the notion that our beliefs about the development of educators are enacted in programs through four central intellectual processes, including:

- **reflecting** on professional growth
- **developing** knowledge and skills
- **applying** knowledge and skills
- **integrating** knowledge, skills and dispositions

The intersection of beliefs and central intellectual processes, which are grounded in the research and professional literature, shape the selection and organization of learning experiences and assessment processes. They also sharpen our program evaluation and development efforts. The diagram below illustrates the relationship of the central intellectual processes, beliefs and knowledge, skills and dispositions.

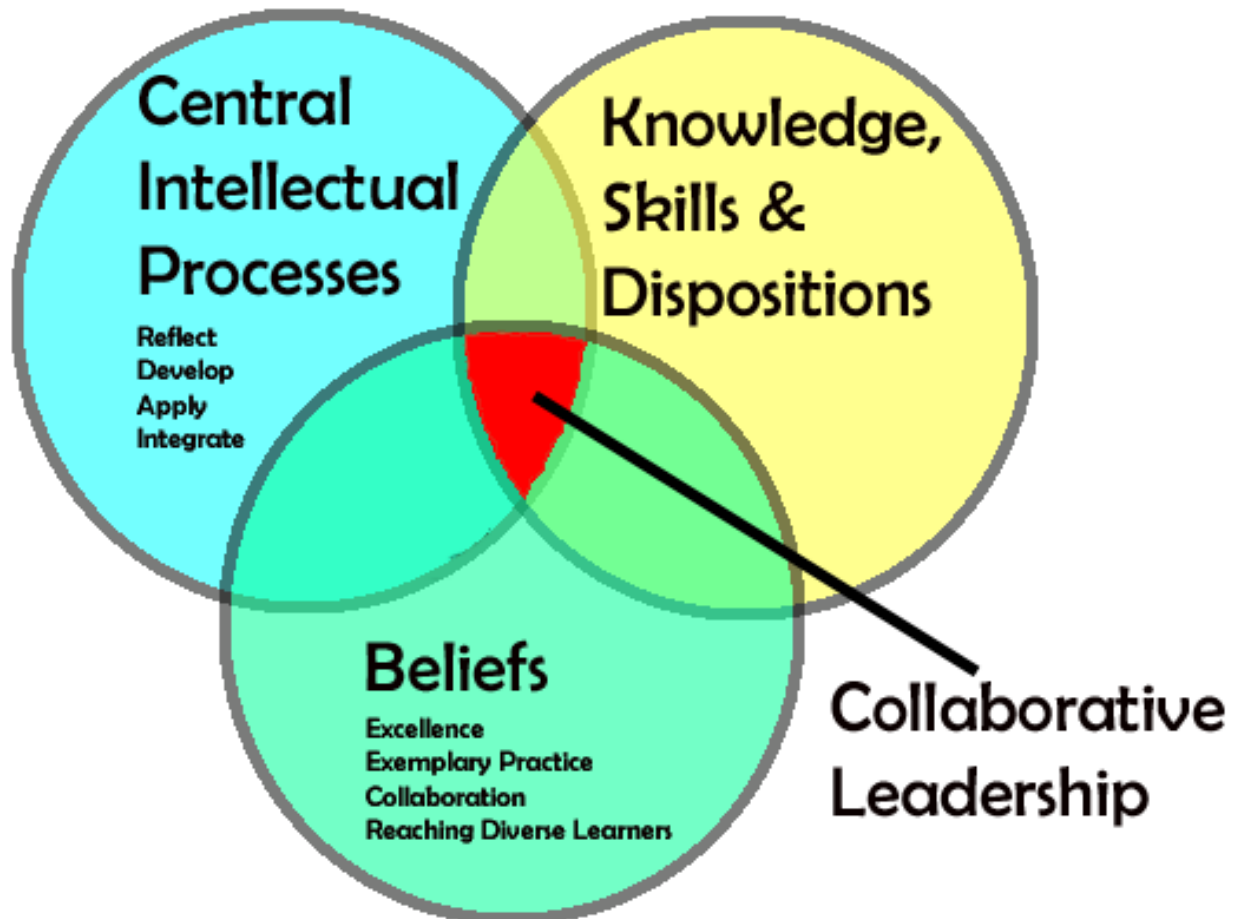
The Teacher Education Program's mission of preparing quality professional educators is inspired by its vision to cultivate collaborative leaders in education. Collaborative leadership resides at the central intersection of the Conceptual Frameworks' central intellectual processes, the shared beliefs and the WTS based knowledge, skills and dispositions that are the core of the assessment process as depicted in the diagram below.

Beliefs

Excellence as a journey: We believe that excellence is a process whose direction changes as new or different situations or needs arise. As educators we need to strive constantly to improve the teaching/learning process. The complexities of teaching in increasingly complex environments require highly talented and successful individuals committed to life-long learning. Candidates in our programs are encouraged to view themselves as continual learners, to analyze critically data about their students' learning and their teaching for developmental appropriateness, to develop essential relations with their peers and cooperating teachers, and reflect on their own practice through continual professional development. All of these efforts, the program faculty hope, will help our candidates focus on the ongoing nature of learning throughout the program and beyond to their students' learning rather than just their own teaching performance. We see the process of exceeding the standards for entry into the teaching profession as but one of many important steps in the journey towards

excellence. We believe that selective recruitment, rigorous admission and advancement standards and continuous assessment of candidate progress will ensure that UW-Eau Claire graduates model quality professional practices and dispositions on their journey to excellence.

Collaborative Leaders for Today and Tomorrow at UW-Eau Claire



Exemplary Practice: We believe that educational leaders are expert designers of learning environments that are models of best practices in the art and science of teaching. Education programs at UW-Eau Claire immerse candidates in environments that emphasize the integration of theory with practice; pedagogy with content; and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions with the knowledge, skills and dispositions of the liberal arts. Learning experiences are designed to be performance based, to emphasize developmentally appropriate practices and include authentic, continuous and cumulative assessments. Teacher preparation programs at UW-Eau Claire strive for continuous improvements that are based on program evaluation and research and are guided by ongoing efforts to evaluate emerging and developing priorities in education.

Collaboration: Collaboration requires that members of the teacher education community work with multiple stakeholders to achieve commonly established goals. We believe that the development of professional educators is substantively enhanced when PK-12 personnel, university personnel and candidates examine professional problems of practice through collaborative disciplined inquiry. The synergistic quality of collaboration assures that collective insight outweighs individual and segmented group insights. Collaborative disciplined inquiry provides participants with a heightened sense of awareness about diverse possibilities, enhances connectivity with each other and to the realities of the "real world" and helps sustain responsible efforts to seek improvement in student learning and program design. Teacher preparation at UW-Eau Claire promotes the broad development of collaboration through partnerships within and outside of the campus community and by seeking to maximize the use of all available resources. A range of partnerships with educational constituencies fosters a variety of quality experiences for our candidates.

Reaching Diverse Learners: We believe that collaborative leaders nourish learning environments that celebrate the richness of the full range of cultural and individual similarities and differences. Teachers must be prepared to reach learners who come from complex cultural backgrounds and individual students with particular exceptionalities. Individual complexity includes many levels of diversity which include, but are not limited to, emotional, physical or developmental needs, socioeconomic status, non-traditional families, ethnicity, religious upbringing, gender, sexual preference and primary language use. As population demographics change, as people become more mobile and as communication technologies increase our ability to interact with other cultures and individuals, educators are more likely now than ever before to work with heterogeneous groups of students in and out of their classrooms. We believe, therefore, that we must assure that our candidates will acquire knowledge, skills and dispositions to ensure human dignity, equity and social justice for all learners.

Central Intellectual Processes

Reflecting on professional growth: Reflection requires continual analysis of the complexities of teaching and learning and the ability to bring focus to problems of professional practice, identify alternative solutions to the problems and evaluate the success of solution strategies. Reflection also includes an important element of creativity that encourages and values consideration of alternate ways to approach professional problems. Reflection involves the thoughtful, honest examination of instructional practice, human interactions, practice or experiences and personal belief systems. Reflection includes both formal and informal actions, conscious analysis and non-conscious habits of mind. Because careful reflection enhances professional efficacy and provides a mechanism for examining interactions among knowledge development,

application and integration, it is an essential component of participation in change processes.

Examining one's professional practices and knowledge base is central to reflection. We expect, therefore, that candidates will develop knowledge about the characteristics of reflective activity and learn to apply reflective strategies to their own professional activity. We also expect them to be life-long learners who will develop the disposition of valuing reflection and seeking professional resources to improve their professional practice.

Reflection additionally provides the groundwork for the scholarship of teaching by requiring continual analysis of the complexities of teaching and learning and the ability to bring them forward into professional conversation and debate. Reflection also leads to the development cornerstone and forms a continuous cycle in the development of a life-long reflective scholar.

Developing Knowledge and Skills: Professional educators develop, refine and maintain excellence in educational practice through ongoing learning. They draw meaning from experiences in general education, related areas and professional courses that contribute to their development as effective teachers. Professional educators use justifiable, appropriate instructional methodologies, grounded in the knowledge about the capacity of all students to learn and in the desire to help them develop to their fullest potential. They can discuss *stages of development* from pre-kindergarten through adolescence and apply this knowledge to develop appropriate instruction for students. They can discuss and use a variety of *instructional methodologies* and address their implications for teaching. They learn about students and teaching both in and outside the classroom.

Professional educators can demonstrate *knowledge of the discipline* to be taught by meeting specific performance criteria. They are able to make connections among theories applicable to their respective field(s), the research base that underlies the theories and current practice. Professional educators also understand how *media and technology* are used effectively as a tool of inquiry to support and enhance learning, and how technology changes teaching and learning, including the contexts in which learning may occur.

Applying Knowledge and Skills: Professional educators creatively and effectively use knowledge and skills developed through program experiences in ways that result in:

- effective learning on the part of PK-12 students
- responsive accountability to stakeholders
- appropriate participation in professional activities

The knowledge and understanding of *technology, creating learning experiences, assessment and evaluation, communication with developing learners, instructional methodologies and decision-making* are applied within the classroom setting. Through the reflective process, professional educators refine

their knowledge and understanding. Developing professional educators have early, frequent and multiple opportunities to apply their knowledge and understanding in a variety of instructional environments.

Integrating Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions: Professional educators develop and value connections among personal and public philosophies, theories, models, goals and assessment in their field of study. Integration results in enhanced ability to identify and construct connections between the learner, content and application in the real world. Integration is the dynamic process that represents how form, manner and order of learning occur. It is reflected in the emerging, merging and re-emerging changes that occur through planned and unplanned learning activities. Professional educators must constantly integrate their knowledge of information literacy, diversity, theory and practice, and personal philosophy with knowledge of subject matter, instructional methodologies and children to develop, establish and maintain an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

These opportunities for integration of knowledge and understandings are distributed across the teacher education programs. Each change represents learning and leads to ever expanding and deeper discoveries. This reflects the professional educator's progress from pre-service education to becoming a "master teacher" and characterizes the approach that professional educators will take toward the identification and solution of teaching/learning problems throughout their careers. Each new discovery is greater than the sum of its parts, creating an active learning process that promotes an inquisitive and motivated life-long reflective scholar.