

Conceptual Framework: Preparing Educators as Leaders

Mission of the University

The University of Kansas is a major comprehensive research and teaching university and a center for learning, scholarship, and creative endeavor. KU is the only Kansas Regents university to hold membership in the prestigious Association of American Universities (AAU), a select group of 62 public and private research universities that represent excellence in graduate and professional education and the highest achievements in research internationally.

Instruction. The university is committed to offering the highest quality undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs, comparable to the best obtainable anywhere in the nation. As the AAU research university of the state, KU offers an array of advanced graduate programs and fulfills its mission through faculty, academic, and research programs of international distinction and outstanding libraries, teaching museums, and information technology. These resources enrich the undergraduate experience and are essential for graduate-level education and for research.

Research. The university attains high levels of research productivity and recognizes that faculty are part of a network of scholars and academicians that shape a discipline as well as teach it. Research and teaching, as practiced at the University of Kansas, are mutually reinforcing with scholarly inquiry underlying and informing the educational experience at undergraduate, professional, and graduate levels.

Service. The university first serves Kansas, then the nation and the world through research, teaching, and the preservation and dissemination of knowledge. KU provides service to Kansas through its state- and federally funded research centers. KU's academic programs, arts facilities, and public programs provide cultural enrichment opportunities for the larger community. Educational, research, and service programs are offered throughout the state, including the main campus in Lawrence; the health-related degree programs and services in Kansas City, Wichita, and Salina; the Edwards Campus in Overland Park; and other sites in the Kansas City metropolitan area, Topeka, Parsons, and Hutchinson.

International Dimension. The university is dedicated to preparing its students for lives of learning and for the challenges educated citizens will encounter in an increasingly complex and diverse global community. More than 100 programs of international study and cooperative research are available for students and faculty at sites throughout the world. KU teaching and research draw upon and contribute to the most advanced developments throughout the United States and the world. At the same time, KU's extensive international ties support economic development in Kansas.

Values. The university is committed to excellence. It fosters a multicultural environment in which the dignity and rights of the individual are respected. Intellectual diversity, integrity, and disciplined inquiry in the search for knowledge are of paramount importance.

Mission of the Unit

Founded in 1909, the University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences educates future educators, administrators, psychologists, and health and sport professionals. As stated in the School Code:

Within the University, the School of Education and Human Sciences serves Kansas, the nation, and the world by (1) preparing individuals to be leaders and practitioners in education and related human service fields, (2) expanding and deepening understanding of education as a fundamental human endeavor, and (3) helping society define and respond to its educational responsibilities and challenges.

The components of preparing educators as leaders that frame this mission for our initial and advanced programs are Integrating Research, Theory and Practice; Educating Diverse Learners; and Demonstrating Professionalism. These integrated themes build our Conceptual Framework. Within the framework, our programs combine a strong liberal arts and sciences education with field-based pedagogical experiences that together foster thoughtful inquiry about schools, classrooms, learners, and the enterprise of schooling.

Our unit-wide perspective on the educational process views the learner as active in the development of constructing meaningful knowledge and ensures that systems of education are thoughtfully analyzed and critiqued. At the completion of their initial programs, our candidates: know *what* they are teaching, know *how* they should teach it, understand *whom* they are teaching, and possess the *skills* to teach effectively. Our candidates also possess dispositions that demonstrate care and acceptance of others and are well prepared to establish inclusive and enriching learning environments. Candidates know how to continually assess student understandings, attitudes, and abilities and make instructional decisions about which opportunities might improve student learning. While recognizing that competence in such matters as content, human development, health, curriculum, assessment, psychology, and cognitive science are essential components in the preparation of competent teachers, we place integrating research, theory and practice; educating diverse learners; and demonstrating professionalism at the core of our program.

At the advanced level, our candidates move beyond essential entry-level professional practice knowledge, skill, and competency to more advanced and focused graduate degree and certification programs. The advanced knowledge, skill, and competency acquired by candidates in these programs prepares them not only to be stronger educators, but also provides them with the advanced and specialized background to allow them to be leaders in their respective educational settings and positions. As prospective leaders, candidates will be in strategic positions that will allow them to provide guidance and direction to students and faculty with whom they work, to the educational and professional venues in which they serve, and to the communities in which they live. To this end our programs expect all students to acquire knowledge and understanding of basic educational research methods and proficiency at reading, using, and adapting the research literature to their work with individuals—students, faculty, and parents—and the systems and institutions within which they will work.

It is our goal to provide our candidates through our graduate degree and licensure programs with the advanced knowledge and skills to be exemplary educators who assume leadership positions in their schools, districts, profession, and communities and by so doing enhance the education of students and the lives of those students and their families.

Core Values

Our programs, initial and advanced, produce graduates who are capable of serving as leaders in their schools and communities. The following statements illustrate our core values.

1. **We are committed to excellence through self-study and periodic review.**

The quality of an educational program is related to its commitment to excellence through self-study and periodic systematic review. Data collected in mutual collaboration with our partner schools about our candidates and faculty help assure that goals and objectives are met and that these are consistent with: a) the school's mission and goals; b) local, state, regional and national needs for educators; c) state and national standards for professional practice; and d) the evolving body of scientific and professional knowledge that serves as the basis for educational practices.

2. **We value multiple perspectives.**

The best evaluation of educational outcomes is systematic, multifaceted, and includes multiple perspectives.

3. **We foster a sequential, cumulative preparation for life-long learning.**

The successful preparation of educators as leaders—whether at the initial or advanced level—is accomplished through a curriculum that is sequential, cumulative, graded in complexity, and designed to prepare the candidates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes for life-long learning.

4. **We uphold professional and ethical standards of conduct.**

The professional development of educators as leaders must foster, demonstrate, and require the highest level of ethical standards and conduct. These standards of professional ethics include attention to questions of equity and justice within educational contexts.

5. **We treat others with dignity, respect, and understanding.**

Students are the focal point of teaching and the learning process. Students, our own as well as those whom our candidates will teach in schools, must be treated with dignity and respect. We expect all candidates to acquire an understanding and respect for individual diversity along with an understanding of students' socio-cultural contexts and backgrounds.

6. **We connect research and practice.**

The application of research to practice and the connection between empirical studies and

practices is fundamental in preparing educators as leaders.

The Conceptual Framework: Preparing Educators as Leaders

At both the initial and the advanced levels, we believe that teaching is an honorable, dynamic, and vitally important profession. Preparing children and youth for life in a society that is distinguished by constant change, increased diversity, and difficult challenges requires educators who can serve as leaders in their profession -- individuals who will be role models in their schools and communities. With regard to our initial and advanced teacher licensure programs, professional and state standards provide the structure for the knowledge and competencies that we expect candidates to demonstrate. Although the standards for each program organize the professional knowledge base into slightly different strands or domains, common themes emerge.

The Three Themes

The Unit has identified three central themes upon which programs are based: 1) integrating research, theory, and practice; 2) educating diverse learners; and 3) demonstrating professionalism. These three interlocking themes are paramount to the framework that permeates our academic programs of study. In the following section, we briefly articulate the importance of these themes with research that aligns and supports our assumptions, values, and beliefs for preparing educators as leaders.

Theme One: Integrating Research, Theory, and Practice

The Unit believes that knowledge and application of both formal and informal research lead to effective, informed educational practices. Continuous review and incorporation of empirically-derived, successful methodology enhances teaching practices and leads to successful learner outcomes and informed decision making. Informed by research and theory, professionals are “ultimately about practice” (Shulman, 2004). Professionals translate their knowledge into skills and strategies that enable them to effectively serve their constituencies.

Effective educational leaders continually evaluate student understandings, attitudes, and abilities to inform instructional decisions. Educators must be able to engage in a process of evidence-based decision making that incorporates a variety of types of evidence (Schildkamp, Lai, & Earl, 2013). High-quality programs prize inquiry; they establish supportive learning environments where candidates are invited to explore and are encouraged to take risks and to question as part of their decision-making processes.

Arthur Levine (2006) recommended that schools of education primarily focus on classroom practice and that research institutions are perhaps best positioned to educate the majority of teachers through research to inform practice. The connection between research and practice is emphasized throughout research on teacher education, and field experiences become not just sites in which teacher candidates employ teaching practice, but sites in which candidates inquire about their practice (Zeichner, 2010). One key of effective educational practice, therefore, is to know, through discovery, inquiry, and investigation, when to employ a particular instructional strategy or provide a particular learning opportunity.

To prepare candidates for successful connection of research and practice, the Unit provides an integrated base of content knowledge, disciplinary practices, and evidence-based practices of teaching, learning, and assessment. Research conducted by Darling-Hammond supports that “a good teacher education program, first of all, is coherent. That is, it has an idea about what good teaching is and then it organizes all of its course work, all of the clinical experiences, around that vision” (2001, p. 15). Darling-Hammond’s (2006) article, *Constructing 21st Century Education*, suggested that clinical experience remains key to improving teacher education programs, noting that three components are critical to improving clinical experiences: (1) strict alignment and coherence between higher education coursework and clinical experiences in classrooms; (2) extensive and thoroughly supervised clinical experiences; and (3) close, proactive relationships between higher education institutions and schools to promote successful clinical partnerships.

The AACTE policy brief (2010), *The Clinical Preparation of Teachers*, stressed that a strong clinical preparation is a key factor in teachers’ and their future students’ success. This echoes researchers’ views that early and diverse field experiences in teacher education are essential to successful teacher education (Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2010). The Unit is committed to strengthening school-university partnerships in several ways including the expansion of the collaboration with professional development schools and placing candidates in diverse settings. We believe collaboration with partner schools is critical as well as providing candidates with strong clinical teachers and university supervisors. To accomplish this end, we engage candidates in school-embedded clinical work throughout their teacher preparation program, culminating in a year-long practicum and student teaching experience.

The transfer of theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical knowledge into practice is crucial. Engagement with field-based research is most likely to occur when candidates understand the process fundamentally and practice the process throughout their teacher education program. In the Unit, knowledge refers to both specific subject content area and pedagogy. The ability to combine the two in practice is a key component of our professional education courses, many of which include field-based experiences. Field-based experiences are pre-service opportunities for students to transfer knowledge into practice and early and diverse field experiences are key components to successful teacher education. Field placement experiences permit teacher candidates to assess student learning, to meet individual student needs, to understand the need to be resourceful and flexible, and to make appropriate adjustments in their teaching strategies and methods. Candidates are required to share their reflections with faculty, exchange ideas with them, and examine their effectiveness. The Unit shares a belief in and a commitment to the value of knowledge acquired through field-based experiences.

Candidates gain knowledge of research and practice through coursework, field experiences and capstone projects. In addition, our faculty consistently model effective instruction and, when appropriate, demonstrate or provide opportunities to connect research to practice. As a professional school, our faculty conduct research on education to increase the knowledge base that is continuously integrated into our educator preparation programs. Student-centered approaches to teaching and learning, a variety of educational technologies, and multiple approaches to assessment, among others, are important for candidates to experience as learners. This integrated practice supports candidates in future incorporation and implementation of

research in their field to apply performance-based best practice.

In the Unit, knowledge refers to both conceptual and pedagogical knowledge. Conceptual knowledge provides the foundation in the disciplines and content areas while pedagogical knowledge provides the understanding of how to translate conceptual knowledge into teaching practices used in the classroom (Shulman, 2004). We believe it is essential that all candidates master both types of knowledge for teaching.

Professional organizations such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), and the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) all identify as their first criterion the importance of content knowledge. CAEP asserts that candidates must know the content of their field. InTASC Standards expect that the teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) taught; and the NASBE believes that good teachers know their subject well. Our candidates in initial programs possess a deep understanding of the subject matter they will teach. They acquire this depth of understanding in coursework taken in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Candidates in the elementary program complete nearly 40 credit hours of general education requirements in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Middle and secondary majors are required to study the depth and breadth of their content area, therefore becoming informed about the major concepts and knowledge that comprise their discipline of study.

Borko and Putnam (2000) describe pedagogical knowledge as including (a) the educator's overarching concept of the purpose and nature of the content; (b) knowledge of potential understandings and misunderstandings; (c) knowledge of content, curriculum, and materials; and (d) knowledge of strategies and representations for practice. Knowledge of pedagogy in our initial programs is acquired over a multi-year sequence of professional education courses with field-based experiences. At all levels, our candidates acquire an in-depth understanding of the evolving body of professional knowledge in their field. In addition, the Unit shares a belief in and a commitment to the value of knowledge acquired through field-based experiences.

In a policy brief, Blanton, Pugach, and Florian (2011) found that teachers do not feel adequately prepared to be accountable for the achievement of learners who have disabilities, who are English language learners, who are from the lowest socioeconomic levels, or who are from minority groups who have historically lacked equitable access to education. The Unit embraces this challenge by preparing educators that believe that all students, including students with disabilities, are capable learners who are entitled to challenging, high-quality instruction that prepares them for college and careers.

At the advanced level, candidates prepare for new roles or develop additional expertise in their respective disciplines. As candidates prepare for new roles, such as school psychologist or school principal, they acquire specialized knowledge and skills and dispositions specific to their new professional responsibilities. Candidates who seek to develop additional expertise as classroom teachers complete advanced programs that allow them to gain additional subject matter content knowledge and more in-depth knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that is both

of a foundational nature as well as discipline-specific. Candidates in all advanced programs focus their study on acquiring the essential conceptual knowledge that represents the evolving nature of their fields with the most current research that is aligned with practice.

Theme Two: Educating Diverse Learners

Given the current and predicted demographics of U.S. schools, teacher candidates must be prepared to work in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Spezzini & Austin, 2011). Throughout their educator preparation programs, students should consider questions related to the socio-cultural worlds of learners, along with related issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice. Such considerations prepare educators to promote effective learning and civic engagement for all students.

Considerations of diversity and equity include topics related to race, gender, sexual orientation, ability/disability, and other traditionally recognized categories; broader questions such as the roles of power, privilege, and cultural values in education; and pedagogical issues such as culturally influenced ways of constructing and representing knowledge.

The Unit believes that educators must be committed to education for all students. The Unit promotes this value through instruction on inclusive teaching and the promotion of advocacy skills and democratic dispositions. In order to promote learning for all students, educators must believe in all students' ability to succeed, create learning environments that are warm and emotionally supportive, hold rigorous academic expectations for all students, connect with students' families and communities, and help students to identify and confront instances of injustice and inequity (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Morrison et al., 2008; Whipp, 2013).

The Unit is committed to preparing educators to educate all students. In order to succeed as teachers of diverse learners, future educators need opportunities to develop a sense of mission, a disposition for hard work and persistence, and a capacity for reflection situated in the sense of oneself as a teacher and scholar of education (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Thus, learning to be a teacher of diverse learners is not a matter of learning culture-specific instructional strategies in isolation, but rather a matter of developing a framework of understanding of both individual and structural factors that influence students and teaching practices (Delpit, 2005; Whipp, 2013). *Mission.* A sense of mission and connection to personal values is crucial for teacher motivation and persistence (Korthagen, 2004). Instruction regarding issues of inequity in schools can help to foster a sense of mission focused around social justice and culturally responsive teaching in future teachers (Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Whipp, 2013).

Persistence. Teacher burnout and attrition are serious issues in the field of education (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In order to ameliorate these problems, educators need a variety of resources and skills. The development of dispositions that promote persistence, such as teacher efficacy and a growth mindset, should be an integral part of educator preparation programs.

Self-reflection. To be successful educators, educator preparation students need opportunities to reflect on topics related to diversity, equity, and social justice in schools and communities. As a part of this process, future educators will need to reflect on their own identities and the roles of power and privilege in their own lives and experiences, both in and out of the classroom.

The Unit also strives to provide opportunities for varied and diverse practicum and field experiences. Opportunities to work directly with historically marginalized students and communities inform practice and provide candidates with opportunities to reflect on their own backgrounds and experiences and how these experiences have informed their education-related values and practices (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Theme Three: Demonstrating Professionalism

Effective leaders establish productive learning environments through both competence and care. Our programs initiate our candidates into a community of professionals who believe in ongoing inquiry and the value of strengthening of one's own practice. As such, our candidates know what it means to be a professional and exhibit these qualities as members of the educational community.

Candidates in the educator preparation program are engaged in professional learning that expects a commitment to ethical and caring practice in which continued learning and professional development are paramount. As such, while the initial focus of many beginning teachers often is limited to their own classrooms, our candidates are prepared to expand their horizons to the schools and communities they will serve, as well as to their professional associations at the state and national levels.

Candidates are prepared to understand the complex interrelationships of teachers, students, curriculum, and pedagogical practices as professionals in practice. Through coursework, demonstrations, projects, and field experiences, candidates must demonstrate their ability to implement and evaluate curricula, use effective instructional strategies for all students, and demonstrate respect and care for all students. We view the site of practice as a place from which candidates can hone and develop teaching practices and confront the conflicts and tensions they experience as beginning educators.

As cited by Ambrose (2002) and Yan (1999), teacher candidates who confront their inherent conflicts and seek to find resolutions embodying synthesis of opposing views deepen the level of their professional growth. Our candidates learn the importance of a strong commitment in working with professional colleagues about issues of professional practice, engagement with families, and communities. Part of being a professional is being committed to self-directed growth, being passionate about learning, and honoring the complexity of the education profession.

Becoming a professional educator requires a commitment to the profession. Consequently, novice educators and practitioners preparing for other professional roles, such as those we serve and prepare in the Unit, are at the beginning of a life-long path toward professionalism.

Summary

From the beginning of their academic programs of study, the Unit fosters our candidates'

understanding of the importance of connecting research and practice, ensures knowledge acquisition appropriate to their professional aspirations, and prepares candidates to effectively educate diverse learners, while developing a high regard for and ability to demonstrate professionalism as they progress through our programs.

By preparing educators as leaders in their future careers and by continually working to create programs designed to further enhance all levels of education, we believe these future educators will be positioned to bring about long-term, fundamental change. Our candidates learn to anticipate and plan for the future; construct and apply a coherent, integrated understanding of teaching and learning; engage in collaborative problem-solving and critical inquiry; strive to enable all students to reach their potential; and continually assess and improve their practice for the benefit of all students.

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