

Northern Illinois University Conceptual Framework

For Education Professional Programs



A Community of Learners

Mission of the Institution and Unit

At Northern Illinois University, teacher education and other education professional certification programs are housed in the colleges of Education, Health & Human Sciences, Liberal Arts & Sciences, Visual & Performing Arts and Engineering and Engineering Technology and are administered at the university level. The mission of the unit as a whole is congruent with the mission of the university as a whole. “The central mission of the university is the transmission, expansion, and application of knowledge through teaching, research and artistry, and public service.”[\[1\]](#)

A Community of Learners

Our university wide commitment to the preparation of exemplary educators is reflected in our unique unit governance structure, and is based on the shared vision and goals of a community of learners. Our focus is on the preparation of exemplary educators who demonstrate the knowledge, practice, reflection and dispositions outlined in this document. Each of these draws upon the strength of essential aspects of a community of learners in which practice and reflection are based upon a broad general education and a sound disciplinary base of knowledge. The community of learners is enriched and strengthened by the interaction of its core elements: knowledge, practice and reflection (Schön, 1983; 1987; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004).

The goal of individual programs is to develop exemplary educators who have a broad general education, relevant disciplinary knowledge, and experience in and knowledge of contemporary best practices. The continuing professional effectiveness of our graduates is rooted in their lifelong learning and reflective practice. This cornerstone of NIU's conceptual framework prepares students to deal with the diverse interests of the communities in which they will serve based on the understanding that as a professional educator, they are part of that community of learners. NIU is committed to lifelong learning and to the effective use of creative and critical thinking skills in diverse and collaborative settings.

Candidates' learning is profoundly affected by experience (Dewey, 1997). Candidates interact within a community of learners comprised of faculty, field professionals, and peers. The professional development of a prospective educator within this community of learners incorporates classroom instruction and diverse field-based experiences that promote engagement in inquiry, collaboration, and reflection; development and refinement of effective practices; and a commitment to lifelong learning. Northern Illinois University's programs support the efforts of the Illinois State Board of Education to develop strong communities of learners, as delineated in *Preparing Educators for the*

21st Century (1997), by preparing educators who will become effective professionals within diverse educational settings.

Common Characteristics of the NIU Community of Learners

Future educators will attain a sound liberal education and acquire sufficient general knowledge and intellectual versatility to enable them to become informed and resourceful members of society. Although there are unique aspects to the variety of programs that prepare professional educators, there is a common set of values and goals that are shared by all of the programs. These are described below in terms of basic tenets and dispositions, proficiencies expected of all candidates, and performance outcomes shared by all programs.

Tenets

The tenets of knowledge, practice, and reflection are central to educator preparation at NIU. Each tenet is outlined below in relation to candidate knowledge, practice and reflection. The faculty believes that future professional educators need to demonstrate competencies identified by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for the initial certification programs and by the appropriate state and national professional associations for the advanced certification/endorsement programs. These competencies, as well as those established by the national organizations in each of the disciplines, are integral to the core tenets of knowledge, practice, and reflection that define the exemplary educator. As such, they are also a part of our University Assessment Plan for Certification in Education.

Knowledge (ECS, 2003; NCTAF, 1996; Shulman, 1987)

- * The candidates must have a thorough understanding of the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of their fields as delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards and shown through inquiry, critical analysis, and synthesis. All program completers pass the content examinations required for licensure.
- * The candidate understands how individuals grow, develop, and learn and provides learning opportunities that support the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students.
- * The candidate understands instructional planning and designs instruction/intervention based upon knowledge of the discipline, students, community, and curriculum goals.

- * The candidate understands various formal and informal assessment strategies and uses them to support the continuous development of all students.

Practice (Chung Wei, Andres, Darling-Hammond, 2009; Danielson, 2007; Knowles & Cole, 1996; NCTAF, 1996; Zeichner, 1992;)

- * The candidate understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.
- * The candidate uses an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- * The candidate understands and uses a variety of strategies to encourage the development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
- * The candidate uses knowledge of effective written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the education community.
- * The candidate understands the role of the community in education and develops and maintains collaborative relationships with colleagues, parents/guardians, and the community to support student learning and well being.

Reflection (Dewey, 1910, 1933; INTASC, 1992; Schön, 1983, 1987; Senge, 1990; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1991)

- * The candidate is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates how choices and actions affect students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community and actively seeks opportunities to grow professionally.
- * The candidate understands education as a profession, maintains standards of professional conduct, and provides leadership to improve student learning and well being.
- * The candidate is a life-long learner of both content and pedagogy.

Exemplary Educators

Through the integration of knowledge, practice and reflection in the curriculum, NIU strives to prepare candidates to become exemplary educators. The integration of the three tenets of the professional education unit are exemplified in the results of authentic projects undertaken by candidates such as action research and teacher work samples (Caskey, 2005; Stringer, 2007).

Dispositions

Dispositions are habits of mind and behaviors that are developed in the process of acquiring pedagogical knowledge, developing reflective capacities, and engaging in educative practice. Each of the following dispositions is assessed by each program in the unit along with dispositions specified by each Specialized Professional Association (SPA), other accrediting body, and/or other dispositions deemed appropriate by each respective program.

* **Caring** - An ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2005) supports a view of education as a worthy human activity that is integral to the betterment of the world. All students are viewed as competent and capable of learning, and educators take responsibility for teaching all students. A climate of trust, respect, and mutual responsibility allows educators to promote not only students' cognitive development, but their development as whole persons.

* **Collaboration** (Chappius, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009; Chung Wei, Andres, & Darling-Hammond, 2009; Crowther, Gerguson & Hann, 2009; Chappuis, 2007; Caskey, 2005) - One of the dispositions necessary to be an exemplary educator is collaboration with peers, other professionals, parents, students, and the community to promote effective teaching and learning. It is through collaboration that a productive community of learners can be built and sustained.

* **Creative and Critical Thinking** (Boostrom, 2005; Lipman, 2003; Paul and Elder, 2005;) - Exemplary educators must be able to think in creative ways to solve problems and address challenges as they arise. In addition, critical thinking is an essential attribute of educators who must be able to engage in processes such as analyzing, interpreting, evaluating, inferring, and self-regulating. Through the use of problem-based learning, cooperative learning, simulations, debates, and similar techniques, candidates are able to develop and demonstrate their critical thinking skills.

* **Diversity** (Hanson, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2007; Diller & Moule, 2005; Banks & Banks, 2004; Teaching Tolerance, 2001) - The Educator Preparation Programs strive to help candidates gain experience, insight, and expertise in working effectively with and teaching diverse others. To create a supportive community where candidates can learn about diversity in productive ways, the Teacher Education Program prioritizes recruiting and retaining diverse students, faculty, and staff. In addition, candidates work in clinical placements in diverse settings to learn about diversity and culturally relevant pedagogy from a first-hand perspective.

* **Life-Long Learning** (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Chappuis & Stiggins, 2009; Chung Wei, Andres & Darling-Hammond, 2009) - Exemplary educators are life-long learners who continually strive to grow, evolve, and refine their knowledge and pedagogy. They model their love of learning and life-long commitment to enhancing their knowledge.

* **Scholarship** (Stringer, 2007) - Teacher Educators in the Educator Preparation Program engage in scholarly activities to remain current, contribute to the knowledge base in their fields, and provide research-based instruction to their candidates. As a result, candidates are able to participate in scholarly pursuits related to teaching, including reading professional journals, conducting action research, and developing an understanding of the scholarship related to their content and pedagogy.

Proficiencies

I. Proficiencies expected of candidates include development of the following skills and dispositions:

- A. building professional relationships
- B. fostering educational collaboration
- C. working effectively with diverse populations
- D. creating and managing effective classroom or school environments
- E. practicing self-assessment
- F. engaging in professional development
- G. engaging students in active learning
- H. communicating in professional settings

II. Each program is committed to taking the following steps to facilitate acquisition of candidate expected proficiencies:

- A. requiring candidates to have a solid content and professional knowledge base;
- B. providing opportunities for collaboration;
- C. developing curriculum grounded in the research literature;
- D. incorporating appropriate methods and use of instructional design, assessment, and technology;
- E. integrating issues of diversity;
- F. employing faculty with a strong knowledge base, contemporary experiences and commitment to preparing professional educators;
- G. providing high quality field experiences; and
- H. requiring candidates to reflect on their experiences.

Performance Outcomes

The following performance outcomes are expected of candidates in the university's educator preparation programs in order to demonstrate the proficiencies outlined above.

<u>Performance Outcomes</u>	<u>Initial Programs</u>	<u>Advanced Programs</u>
1. Communicating, cooperating, and collaborating with others in diverse communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborates with colleagues • Promotes positive classroom interaction • Maintains rapport with students, families and communities • Demonstrates interpersonal skills • Demonstrates effective communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborates with professionals in educational community • Recognizes social and political influences on professional practice • Demonstrates effective communication skills • Promotes leadership skill in others
2. Demonstrating both general and discipline specific content knowledge; demonstrating knowledge about teachers and teaching, learners and learning, and schools and schooling; and thinking creatively and critically.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnoses students' needs • Creates positive learning environments • Analyzes subject matter content for effective communication to students • Plans instruction that makes content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements supportive professional environments • Incorporates learning and development theory into the conceptual base • Applies effective

	<p>meaningful to all students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrates knowledge across discipline and other content areas • Assesses student progress and uses findings to modify instruction • Promotes real-world problem solving and critical/creative thinking both within content and across content areas • Varies methods/pace of instruction to meet students' needs • Demonstrates technological literacy • Uses community resources to motivate learning • Evaluates instruction to better meet the students' needs 	<p>assessment strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates positive organizational structure • Integrates parent and community involvement • Models skills necessary to implement change • Integrates technology into specialty area • Uses technology effectively to enhance learning • Demonstrates knowledge of practice and reflection on respective state and national standards
<p>3. Demonstrating professional development and an interest in becoming a lifelong learner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects on own actions • Practices lifelong learning • Participates in professional organizations • Participates in communities of learners • Keeps informed of technological advances that would enhance learning and teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes involvement in professional organizations • Engages in continual professional renewal • Reflects on professional role and activities • Expands knowledge in specialty area • Builds communities of learners • Keeps informed of technological advances that would enhance professional performance

System by Which Candidate Performance and Unit Operations is Regularly Assessed

In order to assess the tenets of the conceptual framework as well as to assess dispositions, the unit collects data on key assessments once each year from all certification programs. In addition, the unit collects data from the Exit Survey, which is a survey of student teachers, their cooperating teachers, and their NIU supervisors, the Teacher Graduate Assessment, which is a survey of graduates in their first year of teaching, the Educational Administrative Graduate Assessment, which is a survey of administrator program completers in their first year post-program completion, and the NIU Alumni Survey, which is a survey of undergraduate and graduate alumni. To ensure that the data is being used to improve program functions and student outcomes, program representatives are asked to review the data and report on any changes that have been made as a result of data collected on each assessment. At the unit level, the data is compiled into an annual report. The Unit Assessment Committee then makes recommendations for improvement unit-wide and distributes the report to the programs as a means to contribute to the continuous improvement process.

The table below illustrates the alignment of the elements of the unit assessment system with the Conceptual Framework, state and national standards, and gateway points to program completion.

Alignment of Unit Assessments with the Conceptual Framework, State & National Standards, and Gateway Points in the Program

Assessments	Conceptual Framework			Illinois State Standards				SPA Standards	Gateway Point
	Tenets & Dispositions (pp. 3-5)	Proficiencies (p. 3)	Performance Outcomes (p. 6)	Illinois Professional Teaching Standards	Language Arts Standards for All Teachers	Technology Standards for All Teachers	Illinois Common Core of Special Education Knowledge		
Basic Skills Test (Initial Certification)	knowledge		2						Admission to program
Assessment of Professional Teaching (Initial Certification)	knowledge		2	b1A-F, b1K, b2A-C, c1B-D, c1F, c2C-D, c2E, c2F, d1A-D, d2A-I, e1A-E, e1G-H, e2A-F, e2H, e2J, f1A-D, f2A-E, f2G, g1A-C, g2A-G, h1A-E, h1G, h2A-E, h2G-I, i1A-E, i2A-F, i2L, j1A-D, j2A-E, k1A-D, k2A-F, k2H-I	a1A-C, a2A-D, b2E-F, c1A-B, c2A-E	a1, a2A-C, a2E, b1, b2A-C, b2E-I, c2A-E, d1, d2A-B, e1, e2A-D, e2F-G, f1, f2A-C, g2A, g2C, g2E, g2J-K, h1, h2A, h2D, i1, i2A, i2C	a1C, a2B, b1A, b1C-D, b1L-O, c1A-B, c1D-I, c2A-H, d1A-D, d1G, d1I, d1L, d2A, d2C-F, d2H-K, e1A-C, e1F, e1I-J, e1L, e1M, e1P, e1Q, e2A-F, e2H, e2J-L, f1A-B, f2A-D, f2G-L, g1A, g1E-F, g1H-I, g2B-E, g2I-J, h1A-D, h2B, h2D-F, i1A-C, i2A-B		Prior to certification
Licensure Assessment (or other assessment of content knowledge)	knowledge		2	See program reports				See program reports	Prior to student teaching (initial), or prior to certification (advanced)
Assessment of content knowledge	knowledge		2	See program reports				See program reports	Admission to program, Prior to student teaching (initial), or prior to program completion (advanced)
Assessment of candidate ability to plan	knowledge, practice		2	See program reports				See program reports	Prior to student teaching or prior to program completion
Assessment of student teaching or internship	knowledge, practice, reflection	II-B, II-C, II-D, II-E, II-G, II-H	1, 2, 3	See program reports				See program reports	Prior to program completion
Assessment of candidate effect on student learning/ environment	knowledge, practice, reflection	II-B, II-D, II-E, II-G, II-H	2, 3	See program reports				See program reports	Prior to program completion
Dispositions assessment	All dispositions	II-B, II-C, II-E, II-F, II-H	1, 2, 3	See program reports				See program reports	Prior to student teaching and prior to

									program completion
Exit Survey	knowledge, practice, reflection	II-A, II-B, II-C, II-E, II-H	1, 2, 3	All	All	All generally			At completion of student teaching
Teacher Graduate Assessment	knowledge, practice, reflection	II-A, II-B, II-C, II-E, II-H	1, 2, 3	All	All generally	All generally			A year after program completion

The conceptual framework document itself will be reviewed once each year by a standing subcommittee of the Committee on Initial Teacher Certification as well as by the Committee on Advanced Professional Certification in Education in order to ensure that it remains a current and living document and that it meets the needs of the unit, the programs, and accreditation needs.

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[1] Taken from the Mission and Scope Statement referenced at <http://www.niu.edu/provost/about/mission.shtml> .