

In what follows we offer a summary of the conceptual framework for the Reich College of Education's (RCOE) efforts to fulfill its mission, vision, and commitments. At the heart of our framework is the concept that highly effective organizations have a set of shared commitments. Through ongoing dialogue the membership of the organization creates, refines, and revises its activities. Such dialogue serves as the key means for communication among members. For the organization to remain effective, our commitments must stay in the public domain so that all members share in their ongoing creation and application.

I. Cultivating Communities of Practice

Broadly defined, a community of practice is a web of individuals bound together by a common set of goals and values. The RCOE cultivates vibrant and dynamic learning communities that bring together students, teachers, and teacher educators in the shared goal of achieving genuine praxis, in which we improve our pedagogical practices and our theoretical understanding of teaching and learning. Although the RCOE includes multiple communities of practice with their own distinctive characteristics, we share this goal as a unified community.

II: Advancing Professional Knowledge

The RCOE views itself as a professional school committed to advancing the knowledge and expertise of our respective fields. While we use a variety of theoretical perspectives in the preparation of educators, sociocultural and constructivist perspectives (e.g., Vygotsky, Piaget, Bruner, Dewey) are central to guiding our teaching and learning. Our core conceptualization of learning and knowing—that learning is a function of the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs and that knowledge is actively constructed—emerges from the intersection of these two perspectives. The RCOE emphasizes five areas of knowledge that are in accordance with our core commitments:

- (a) knowledge of learners,
- (b) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals,
- (c) knowledge of teaching,
- (d) knowledge of socially just principles and practices, and
- (e) knowledge of how to foster socially just relationships with diverse populations.

A) Knowledge of Learners

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005) state competent educators must develop a deep understanding of how individuals learn, including:

- The learner and his or her strengths, interests, and preconceptions;
- The knowledge, skills, and attitudes we want students to acquire and how they may be organized so they can use and transfer what they've learned;

- The assessment of learning that makes students' thinking visible and through feedback guides further learning;
- The community within which learning occurs, both within and outside the classroom (p. 7).

B) *Knowledge of Subject Matter and Curriculum Goals*

Based upon our commitment to social constructivism, we engage learners in the study of subject matter that extends to a deeper and richer understanding about how the content they study relates to their lives and their needs. This means they must have a deep understanding of the content themselves for which they have responsibility as well as the knowledge and ability to represent that content in meaningful ways for all students (Shulman, 1987). Educators' content knowledge most often is addressed through program standards at either the national and/or state levels. All of our programs are built on these standards and are held accountable for demonstrating their candidates' performance in relation to the standards. Each program's decision related to meeting the content standards is reflected in the curriculum check sheets prepared for all majors.

C) *Knowledge of Teaching*

Because content knowledge alone is insufficient for the preparation of teachers, it must be synthesized with pedagogical knowledge. While a number of general pedagogical theories and principles exist that all educators must come to understand, pedagogical knowledge often is subject specific and therefore our candidates explore such knowledge in that context, most notably in their subject specific methods courses and in their field experiences. Because learning is a career-long commitment, our goal is not to provide our candidates with all the skills and knowledge necessary to perform throughout their careers. Instead, our role is to help candidates develop the core understandings and skills that will prepare them for a lifetime of professional learning and development.

D) *Knowledge of Socially Just Principles and Practices*

We embrace approaches to education that are boldly and clearly anti-racist and anti-bias in focus (Nieto, 2009). As a result, the curricular knowledge we teach must also incorporate an analysis of how topics such as diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice intersect with our social systems (e.g., schools), especially as they are manifested on local, state, and national levels. This entails understanding the historical and contemporary dimensions of the personal and systematic forms of oppression associated with categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality and ability. To accomplish this goal, teachers and students must take on distinct roles and responsibilities. Teachers must actively engage in an analysis of how and what they teach their students supports and/or disrupts systems of privilege and oppression. Students, in turn, must develop the critical capacity to evaluate the value and validity of what they are learning from their teachers. Such a capacity involves seeking out and

remaining open to divergent viewpoints. It also involves critically appraising the validity of all perspectives, including ones personally held as well as those of their teachers (Shor, 1992).

E) Knowledge of How to Foster Socially Just Relationships with Diverse Populations

To more fully and authentically incorporate students in the learning process, we encourage our candidates to adopt approaches to teaching and learning that are often described as “critical multicultural education” and as “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Nieto, 2009). Both approaches entail viewing cultural differences as opportunities, resources and the places to ground pedagogical interactions. This work continuously extends outside the classroom through our efforts to offer community-based learning opportunities via Service Learning courses and projects as well as school-based practica. Our candidates must come to understand that their students’ families and their communities are resources that must be cultivated, appreciated and included within the construction of learning experiences for their children (Freire, 1970). As a result, we believe that our candidates must understand how to create inclusive and caring learning environments and how to foster genuine and meaningful interactions with their students’ families and broader communities (Noddings, 2005).

III: Developing Expertise in our Fields through Reflection and Inquiry

Expertise in a profession comes as a result of absorbing knowledge gained from theorists and from 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.

An important goal of the RCOE is to develop adaptive experts who are more likely to continue to develop their skills and add to their knowledge base as they “expand the depth and breadth of their expertise” (Bransford et al., 2005, p. 49). A cognitive apprenticeship “establishes a teaching and learning relationship in which interactions between ‘expert’ learners and ‘novice’ learners support the movement of the novice toward the expert end of the learning continuum” (Hock, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1999, p. 9). However, like Freire (1970), we note that the roles of expert and novice are not absolute, but instead are fluid as teachers and learners engage collaboratively in dynamic learning environments in which they co-explore their respective knowledge, perspectives, and experiences.

An important component in the process of developing expertise in one's field is the capacity to engage in active and reflective inquiry into one's practices. When professionals engage in reflective inquiry within the context of their own practice, they habitually ask themselves what happened during their work, how they responded emotionally to what happened, what about the experience was positive and negative, how the event may have been experienced by others or in light of different viewpoints, what conclusions might be drawn from the experience, and how they might improve upon their performance, thereby creating an action plan to advance their mission (Gibbs, 1988). Through reflection and inquiry, educators and other professionals learn to view the world from different perspectives and then use this knowledge to engage in professional practice that is responsive to the needs of diverse students and clients and addresses social inequities or injustices.

IV. Promoting a Core Set of Professional and Ethical Dispositions

Learning has to be more than the mere accumulation of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and values if it is to have meaning to those who teach or serve and to those who learn. As an expectation of their performance as members of the RCOE Community of Practice, we ask our candidates to behave in ways that reflect four key dispositions. Candidates must exhibit commitments to:

1. Meeting the needs of all learners.
2. Promoting the value and significance of diversity and social justice.
3. Engaging in reflective practice.
4. Demonstrating professional and ethical practice.

Candidates must have multiple opportunities to display the key behaviors associated with each disposition so that both the candidate and the observer can reach the conclusion that the candidate will be likely to display the disposition in future situations. The RCOE's focus on these four key dispositions does not imply that program areas do not have other dispositions for which candidates may be held responsible by their respective areas. However, we believe that such additional dispositions fit easily within the RCOE conceptual framework.

Disposition 1: Meeting the Needs of All Learners

Candidates are expected to maintain a positive and supportive learning environment for all individuals, and prepare developmentally appropriate interventions, lessons and activities. If our candidates exhibit these identified behaviors consistently and at high levels, they will have displayed their commitment to meeting the needs of all individuals they encounter in their chosen professions.

Disposition 2: Promoting the Value and Significance of Diversity and Social Justice

We are committed to creating emancipatory, socially just educational and therapeutic environments, and we actively encourage our community members to engage in the deeply

personal and professional work necessary to enable us all to collaborate with and advocate for the diverse populations with whom we work. We ask that our candidates develop:

- a commitment to understanding and promoting socially just educational practices;
- a desire to embrace and sustain the humility and openness necessary for understanding how good intentions might mask hidden biases and unjust actions;
- a valuing of alternative and divergent viewpoints and a sense of empathy and solidarity to ally with those marginalized within a social system;
- the courage to challenge and question the status quo, and the resilience to endure and act through adversity and resistance.

Disposition 3: Engaging in Reflective Practice

Our goal is to assist our candidates in developing behaviors that will provide us with an indication of their commitment to reflective practice. We expect candidates to reflect on and actively use feedback from mentors, evaluators and instructors. Candidates are also expected to engage in reflective self-analysis about their own teaching performance and the learning performance and behaviors of all of their students, clients, or other learners.

Disposition 4: Demonstrating Professional and Ethical Practice

Because teaching, leadership, and counseling are inherently moral and ethical enterprises, we expect candidates to work collaboratively with diverse populations and conduct themselves according to the highest ethical and moral standards. We also expect that candidates will assume active roles as participants in professional decision-making processes and meet all professional obligations.

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