

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS AT NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

A Community of Learners

All certification programs at NIU are based on the shared vision and goals of a community of learners. Our unique governance structure provides for responsive and reflective change in educator preparation programs by incorporating diverse perspectives and respect for the expertise of a variety of individuals, while maintaining a focus on the preparation of exemplary educators in the areas of knowledge, practice, and reflection. Each of these areas draws upon the strength of essential aspects of a community of learners in which educational 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.

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 life-long 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 teach based on the understanding that as a professional educator, he/she is 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.

Research indicates that students' learning is profoundly affected by experience. Students interact within the 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 teaching 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 learning communities, 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:

- require students to have a solid content and pedagogical knowledge base
- provide opportunities for collaboration
- teach curriculum grounded in the research literature
- incorporate appropriate methods and use of instructional design, assessment, and technology
- integrate issues of diversity
- employ faculty with a strong knowledge base and commitment to preparing professional educators
- provide field experiences
- require students to reflect on their experiences

Other common characteristics include development of the following skills:

- building professional relationships
- fostering educational collaboration
- working effectively with diverse populations
- creating and managing effective classroom environments
- practicing self-assessment
- promoting professional development
- engaging students in active learning
- communicating in professional settings

Tenets

The core set of tenets which undergirds the NIU Community of Learners model is broadly defined as knowledge, practice, and reflection. The faculty believe 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 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) for the advanced certification 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 Teacher Certification.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher understands the central concepts, methods of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) and creates learning experiences that make the content meaningful to all students.

The teacher understands how individuals grow, develop, and learn and provides learning opportunities that support the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students.

The teacher understands instructional planning and designs instruction based upon knowledge of the discipline, students, community, and curriculum goals.

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

PRACTICE

The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.

The teacher 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 teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.

The teacher uses knowledge of effective written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.

The teacher 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

The teacher 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 teacher understands education as a profession, maintains standards of professional conduct, and provides leadership to improve student learning and well being.

The teacher is a life-long learner of both content and pedagogy.

Performance Outcomes

The following performance outcomes are expected of students in the university's teacher certification programs.

<u>Performance Outcomes</u>	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Advanced</u>
One who communicates, cooperates, and collaborates 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"> • Recognizes social and political influences on professional practice • Demonstrates effective communication skills • Promotes leadership skill in others
One who demonstrates both general and discipline specific content knowledge; is knowledgeable about teachers and teaching, learners and learning, and schools and schooling; and thinks 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 meaningful to all students • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implements supportive professional environments • Incorporates learning and development theory into the conceptual base • Applies effective assessment strategies • 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
One who is a developing professional and a lifelong learner.	<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

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