

Conceptual Framework

The Vision and Mission of the unit

The mission of the Education Department is “to develop reflective decision-makers who are passionate, ethical school leaders, well prepared in the scholarship, methodology, and professionalism of teaching to successfully cultivate the diverse gifts of each student.”

Embedded within this mission statement is a commitment to preparing teachers who see themselves as critical players in the goal for all students to learn. The teacher characteristics found in the Conceptual Framework are found in the Indiana P-12 Developmental Standards, to which the Unit has aligned its Learner Outcomes and while Content is not addressed in the Indiana Standards, it is addressed in the INTASC standards. The Unit has chosen to add that to its Learner Outcomes.

Unit Learner Outcomes have also been aligned with the three Saint Mary’s College Learning Outcomes (Knowledge Acquisition & Integration of Learning, Cognitive and Communicative Skills—Problem-solving, Critical Thinking, Writing competence, and Oral Competence, and thirdly Intercultural Competence.

The three themes that guide the 3 Steps of the unit’s programs and appear as its logo are scholarship, mission, and competence.



Philosophy, purposes, goals, and institutional standards of the unit

Education Department graduates will have extensive professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to deliver effective instruction using a wide variety of methodologies in a manner that is student-centered and focused on individual needs. They will demonstrate compassion for the students and families they serve. Education Department graduates will be reflective practitioners and decision-makers who are able to analyze and grow from their teaching experiences throughout their professional careers.

To this end, all Education Department candidates at Saint Mary's are required to complete the Sophia Program, the new General Education program, at a high level of proficiency. The Education Department is delighted to be a participant in the Sophia Program through Education 201, Foundations to Teaching in a Multicultural Society. Secondary Education minors at Saint Mary's complete a major in their chosen field, in addition to completion of the Sophia program and 33 credit hours in Education. Likewise, Elementary Education majors complete specialized coursework appropriate to their fields of licensure. Beginning with the class of 2014, all Elementary Education majors must have a minor.

Teaching is an intellectual endeavor. Effective teachers are able to critically assess their practice and make changes to support student learning. A reflective teacher uses content to develop learning goals for students, clarifies the outcomes to be learned and ways of assessing them, and creates units of study and decides what instructional materials, activities, and assessments may be used, but the teacher, not the materials, controls decision-making (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007).

Knowledge bases, including theories, the wisdom of practice, and educational policies that drive the work of the unit

While the teacher education literature and research prior to 2000 outlined several models of teacher reflective decision-making (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1987; 1991; Schulman, 1987; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), the focus has shifted with the advent of standards-based

teaching. In no way, however, does this negate the importance of the teacher being a reflective decision-maker. As put by Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford (2007), “To successfully prepare effective teachers, teacher education should lay a foundation for lifelong learning.... The goal is to help teachers become adaptive experts. One professional development model that has proven successful in reforming mathematics and science teaching is the Reflective Teacher Model (RTM) where the critical construct of reflection helps teachers in changing their practice. (Weinburgh, Smith, & Clark, 2008).

From these various models of teacher thinking and reflective decision-making, we have developed some basic assumptions about the nature of reflective decision-making that inform our teacher education program. These assumptions include the ability to make decisions as a critical element in optimizing learning for all students in the classroom. Gathering, examining, organizing, analyzing, and evaluating information to define and clarify classroom situations and dilemmas is an important aspect of the teacher decision-making process. Reflecting on past experiences and learning and bringing knowledge to bear on the classroom situation enhances learning of new information, creating alternative solutions and courses of action, as well as examining the possible consequences of choices made.

Candidate proficiencies related to expected knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions, including proficiencies associated with diversity and technology, that are aligned with the expectations in professional, state, and institutional standards

The first theme, Scholarship, outlines the knowledge base needed for effective reflective practice. Clark and Walsh (2002) identified four components of the knowledge base of effective teachers: strong discipline knowledge; pedagogical skills appropriate to the environment and discipline; personal knowledge which included the ability to forge strong relationship with the students and a concern for individual students, as well as a firm moral code; and intimate knowledge of the context in which they were teaching. The Department so valued strong discipline knowledge that it adopted the Content Standard from INTASC.

This theme is enhanced through the alignment of Unit learning outcomes with the College Learning Outcome 1, Knowledge Acquisition & Integration of Learning.

Pedagogical skills are clearly aligned with State standards and the skills required to manifest those skills are aligned with the College Learning Outcome 2, (Cognitive and Communicative Skills—Problem-solving, Critical Thinking, Writing competence, and Oral Competence).

The scholarship of teaching is only one aspect of teaching and reflective decision-making. Beginning with Dewey (1933) educational researchers have noted that the affective characteristics of teachers (pedagogical skills, Clark & Walsh) not only influence their performance in the classroom, but also their ability to reflect upon and improve their practice, making them adaptive experts (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). The second theme, Mission, informs the conceptual framework at Saint Mary's College. Effective teaching depends on teachers having the affective and personal characteristics to reach out to students, families, and communities to make a difference in lives. We believe that our teacher candidates must develop a serious commitment to teaching and education, have a passion for the work they are doing, compassion for the students and families they serve, and an understanding of the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching (personal knowledge and an intimate knowledge of the context within they are teaching, Clark & Walsh). The dispositions of being reflective decision-makers (Standards 1-8), who are Passionate & ethical (Standard 6), who value diversity (Standards 1, 5, 6), who are able to work for and support issues of social justice, (Standards 1, 5, 6) and who are active against causes of alienation, poverty, and oppression (Standards 1, 5, 6) align not only with the State P-12 standards, but also with Saint Mary's College third learning outcome, Intercultural Competence and Social Responsibility.

Effective teachers know who they are and what they believe, as well as the content and pedagogical knowledge necessary for teaching. Schulman (2004) discussed three sources of teachers' personal and practical theories that shape their teaching practice. The first

source is their personal experience. Saint Mary's teacher candidates have a wealth of experience in the diverse schools in the South Bend area. From the first course in their preparation, where they spend 30 hours over the course of the semester, through their three semesters of methods courses, where they spend at least 5 hours per week, to the 15-week student teaching experience, the teacher candidates learn from their experience in the field.

The second source for developing teachers' practical theories is their values and what they think is good and bad in education. Those values shape the way teachers view everything that happens in the classroom, what they choose as goals for learning, what is viewed as success, and what is viewed as failure.

The unit's first two themes, scholarship and mission, work together to address shaping the values of its teacher candidates, providing the foundation for the third theme, competence. It is when knowledge and skill come together that all students are served and served well.

We believe in the learning theories that suggest students construct their own understanding and learn only when they are ready to learn. The work of Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1997) informed the development of our teacher education programs and how we model teaching for our candidates.

Scholarship, Mission, and Competence are the three themes that help us organize and make our teacher preparation program a coherent whole. While each has been discussed separately here, our vision suggests that all three themes must be interwoven if we are to reach our goal of developing teachers as reflective decision-makers, teachers who can make a difference in the lives of the young people they teach and in the world in which they live. To that end, we assess these themes at all three steps of both the Elementary and Secondary programs.

All teacher candidates are introduced to issues related to diversity in the introductory course, Foundations of Teaching in a Multicultural Society. Once candidates are admitted to the department, all courses address issues of diversity and a multicultural education. All

candidates must complete at least one field experience in the South Bend Community schools Corporation. The student body in the corporation is 40% White, 35% Black, 15% Hispanic, 8% Multiracial. Poverty is also a factor with 58% receiving free lunch, 10% receiving reduced lunch, and nearly 25% are classified as Special Education. We are gathering information about the number of new language learners and making field placements to ensure our candidates have experience with ELL students. The lesson plan format used by Elementary and Secondary Education candidates includes prompts regarding special needs and ELL students' accommodations.

The commitment to the use of technology by both faculty and candidates continues to grow. The Unit now has a classroom with a Smart Board. Each classroom is equipped with Internet capability and projection equipment. The required Education 220 (Applied Media and Instructional Technology) has been revamped to better match the technology needs of its 21st century candidates. Oral presentations in both Step 2 and 3 include technology requirements.

Decision points on candidate performance occur at the end of Step 1, acceptance to the department; the end of Step 2, the Critical Reflection on Teacher Standards; the end of the first semester of Step 3, oral presentation reflecting on Standard 3, and the end of Step 3, presentation of the Education Portfolio and passing Praxis II. Assessments used are shown on the accompanying schematic.

The conceptual framework allows for systematic assessment of both programs and candidates. With the alignment of State P-12 Developmental Standards, College Learning Outcomes, and the Unit Learning Outcomes, including Standard 8 (content), we are able to see how both candidates and programs are performing. The table below illustrates the alignment of outcomes.