

KNOWLEDGEABLE PRACTICING PROFESSIONALS

Graduates of the University of North Alabama's College of Education and Human Sciences are knowledgeable practicing professionals who are prepared as outstanding educators and leaders through achievement of the highest standards of knowledge and practice to assist all students to learn.

Knowledge

Candidates exhibit content and pedagogical knowledge in their fields that is based on professional and personal integrity, excellence in content knowledge and innovation in learner-centered teaching and learning. Research-based scholarly knowledge is used in the preparation of candidates across disciplines and has engaged educators in the development, implementation, and evaluation of multiple approaches and diverse emphases in the teaching and learning process (Hogan-Garcia, 2003).

Practice

Candidates demonstrate the translation of theory to practice by applying concepts and knowledge bases, including theories, research, and education policies to create learning experiences that are meaningful for students. Classroom-based research supports best teaching practices and emphasizes ways candidates learn to become critical thinkers, effective practitioners and creative planners as they engage in problem-solving and application through learning labs and class integrated field experiences (Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

Conceptual Framework Commitments (Revised Spring 2012)

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Professionalism

1. Professionalism contributes to the educational value that faculty place upon themselves and the candidates in the teacher education program at the University of North Alabama. As professionals, we grow and experience changes in our respective fields. According to Farstrup's definition of what it means to be a professional, there is a continual reexamination of the purpose of educators while the ability to make decisions based on the best interests of students is refined. In addition, teachers should have the desire to be accountable and strive to respond to situations within schools and classrooms in a positive and ethical manner (as cited in Machado & Botnarescue, 2008).

Concern about teacher professionalism led to a study by Goodson and Choi (2008) who were able to attribute the professionalism of novice teachers to a means of self-reflection, understanding of the school environment and policies, and the support provided through opportunities for social and professional development. In the path to becoming a professional educator, there is the process of “progressing along a continuum of development” (Gordon & Browne, 2008, p.161). There is a need for teachers to have the ability to function effectively in the educational environment. Knowledge and skills are enhanced through experience and education, as well as the ability to critically examine current practice and policy (Klenowski, 2009). **As faculty members examine their own continuous professional behavior as life-long learners, university students may be inspired to likewise engage in professional activities (Daughetee, Puleo, & Thrower, 2010).** UNA candidates are encouraged to actively seek opportunities to grow professionally through reading professional literature, participating in professional organizations, using and assessing resources, and reflecting upon professional development experiences (Hawkins, 2008). Professional dispositions, as defined by the College of Education and Human Sciences, provide a source of guidance to the candidate and the opportunity for success as a professional in the field of education.

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Assessment

2. Assessment is the common approach to identifying competence level as well as deficiencies. Such assessment is typically performance-based and takes on various forms. Assessment of content knowledge at the conclusion of a teaching unit is labeled Summative while assessment integrated into the teaching is known as Diagnostic. The former has as an outcome, a grade while the latter is more effectively utilized to drive the teaching as various forms of student feedback dictate the pace of the teaching as well as the depth. Assessment is made challenging through the full realization of the individuality of each student. Success is enhanced when there is an appreciation from the teacher for the developmental level and progression of each pupil. While paying attention to the individual characteristics and needs of each student is not a novel concept, mastery of this approach proves elusive. As with most concepts in education and learning, assessment is dynamic with professionals continually making efforts to improve its effectiveness. An example is the Reflective Assessment Technique (RTI) recently described by Kennedy et. al. (2009). This directed, hands-on approach showed that teachers learn more about students compared to the traditional methods. Another approach has been labeled Response to Intervention (RTI) (Demski, 2009). RTI provides a framework for using data-based decisions regarding the assistance a student needs.

Assessment is a continual process and the College of Education and Human Sciences is committed to training candidates who can effectively design and evaluate multiple assessment techniques. This includes embracing new techniques which may further enhance teaching practices through assessment.

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Collaboration

3. Collaboration recognizes the integral role of social interactions and experiences in developing professional knowledge and practice (Buehl & Fives, 2009). **Interactive technologies (e.g., cloud computing and wikis) create new opportunities and challenges for collaborative learning (Blue & Tirotta, 2011; Kear, Woodthorpe, Robertson, & Hutchison, 2010).** Commitment to **collaborative** interaction allows for the development of learning communities in which collective discussions and inquiry create ongoing, evolving trajectories of learning (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Working collectively, collaborative teams can analyze data, develop and pursue shared goals, build shared knowledge, and provide mutual support and assistance (DuFour & DuFour, 2007). Through formal and informal interactions throughout their programs of study, initial and advanced candidates collaborate with such partners as general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, other school personnel, parents, students, paraprofessionals, university personnel, and laboratory schools (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Dahlgren & Chiriack, 2009; Friend & Bursuck, 2006; Harris & van Tassel, 2005; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Patterson, Webb, & Krudwig, 2009). Collaborative partnerships are valued as an effective approach for enhancing professional learning and improving student outcomes (**Darragh, Picanco, Tully, & Henning, 2011; DuFour & DuFour, 2007**). Bringing together the talents, expertise, and perspectives of diverse partners creates learning communities that are more responsive to the needs of all learners, including English Language Learners (**Kummerer, 2012; Levine & Marcus, 2007**) and other students with special needs (Carter et al., 2009; Nevin, Thousand, & Villa, 2009; Patterson et al., 2009).

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Technology

4. Technology has substantially transformed society within our lifetimes (McLoughlin, Wang, & Beasley, 2008). **Educational technology plays a pivotal role in creating and implementing instructional activities that foster understanding and promote student involvement in the learning process (Novak, Razzouk & Johnson, 2012).** The generation of students entering college today is better equipped to make use of electronic devices to help them achieve their academic goals (Nora & Snyder, 2008-2009). More than ever before, college students enter institutions of higher learning with skill in computer use and experience with the World Wide Web

(Nora & Snyder, 2008-2009). In addition, the quantity of information has expanded and become more global, access is quicker, dynamic information replaces static information, and information is more accessible than at any time in the past (Sabry & Barker, 2009; McLoughlin et al., 2008). **As institutions of learning purpose to educate individuals toward relevant, enduring, functional, application-oriented learning outcomes (Zitter, de Bruijn, Simons, & ten Cate, 2012)**, the increased use of technology in learning environments has been driven by the aspiration to improve means of instruction and, consequently, student learning (Nora & Snyder, 2008-2009). **Zitter et al. noted that learning environments, therefore, comprise not only the physical and social/cultural settings in which learners work, but also the digital environments which encompass the artifacts, documents, and tools the learners find in those settings.** An expanding body of professional literature advocates that technology improves both teaching and learning in higher education, and that there are connections between technology and knowledge (Mlitwa, 2007). Because today's learners routinely rely on MP3 players and cell phones to access a global mass of information, institutions of learning must recognize this reality by employing technology in conveying subject matter to students (McLoughlin et al., 2008). Also, to prepare learners to meet the demands of the current job market, it is essential that the use of technology be embedded in various disciplines to reflect the current professional practice of the work environment (McLoughlin et al., 2008). Technology establishes effective information processing literacy and the use of technologies to support instruction, assessment, facilitation of productivity, planning, and administrative tasks crucial to effective teaching and learning (Novak et al., 2012; Compaine, 2001). The faculty, therefore, help candidates to learn how to learn students in navigating through the available resources (Duhaney, 2005; Lockard & Abrams, 2001).

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Diversity

5. Diversity encompasses a broad range of knowledge, practice and dispositions such that initial and advanced candidates are prepared to: (a) infuse diverse racial, cultural and linguistic content into the curriculum (Lee & Dallman, 2008; Liggett & Finley, 2009); (b) utilize a repertoire of strategies for teaching diverse youth (O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008; Teel & Obidah, 2008); (c) recognize and appreciate diversity across a range of factors including culture, race, language, developmental levels, special needs and gender (Lee & Dallman, 2008; Valentin, 2006); (d) demonstrate a commitment to openness, self-understand local contexts, including cultures and communities affecting students, the professional context affecting teachers, and broader social and structural contexts (Nieto & Bode, 2008); (f) internationalize school curricula and teaching strategies through group identity and global awareness (Banks, 2009; Roberts, 2007); and (g) provide equity-focused education in the classroom and contribute to an empowering school culture (Zirkel, 2008).

Knowledgeable, Practicing Professionals: Reflection

6. Reflection is an integral component of all programs in the College of Education and Human Sciences. Simply put, reflection involves getting people thinking and talking about their experiences. It involves an in-depth consideration of events and situations, the people involved, what they experienced and how they feel about their experiences (Bolton, 2010). This intercourse can serve as a bridge between experiences and learning.

The concept of reflection has a historical foundation in John Dewey's work (1904-1933). Dewey defined reflective thinking as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1933, p. 9). John Dewey (1933) notes that reflection "enables us (as teachers) to direct our actions with foresight and to plan according to ends in view of purposes of which we are aware. It enables us to know what we are about when we act" (p.17). Dewey thought of teachers as students of learning who could and should reflect on their own practice and learn from one another. Schon (1983, 1996) discusses reflective practice as the act of thoughtfully considering one's own experiences in applying knowledge to practice while being coached by professionals in the discipline.

All programs share the vision of reflective practice and regard reflection as a social endeavor and a lifelong process. The unit is committed to preparing professionals to engage in reflective practice by analyzing and evaluating their work with an eye toward improvement, to search for opportunities to expand their curricular and pedagogical knowledge base to inform decision making, and to develop strategies for learning from their personal experiences, and from their colleagues.

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