Conceptual Framework

History and Development

During the 2003-2004 academic year, the College of Education (COE) began the process of revisiting the conceptual framework (CF) that had been in place for more than 10 years. While the basic tenets of sound instructional practice and engagement with community/school partners in the “old” model were found to be acceptable, it was agreed by faculty and leadership within the unit that the conceptual framework was not reflective of current thought regarding the unit’s mission and desired outcomes. Additionally, a refined conceptual framework was needed to guide the further development of the assessment system for the unit and its candidates. During the spring semester of 2004, unit faculty met in an intensive work session to review the common standards/beliefs upon which the educator preparation programs were built. The results of this meeting became the foundation for the development of a new conceptual framework.

A committee of faculty and representatives of the professional community met for seven months to develop the finalized version of the new unit conceptual framework. The work of the committee included the dissemination of numerous drafts of the CF for feedback from stakeholders. The current version of the unit conceptual framework, the Delta P3 Model, was finalized in the spring semester of 2005 and has become the guide for all decision-making in the unit. Dissemination of the CF has occurred through all courses offered in the unit, meetings of constituents, newsletters, faculty meetings and other means. Documentation of dissemination and involvement of all constituency groups may be found in the documents room.

Overview

Shared Vision

Delta State University College of Education (COE) and its community partners in regional, public, and private educational systems have a shared vision of enhancing educational opportunities for all individuals who live and work in the Mississippi Delta. This vision is in accord with that of the university which states that “students will learn and grow in an environment that fosters discovery and creativity.” Delta State University is a regional university that “serves as an educational and cultural hub for the Mississippi Delta,” an area that is rich in cultural diversity. As a regional university, Delta State is committed to providing a quality education and local support for individuals within the region. The cultural and social climate in the area is taken into account when making decisions regarding the philosophies guiding the educational atmosphere at Delta State. The importance of collaboration, problem solving, and encouragement is fully recognized as the university community endeavors to provide candidates with a sound philosophical, theoretical and ethical foundation.

To this end, the College of Education continues to promote a vibrant educational community which serves as a catalyst for lifelong learning in the Mississippi Delta and
beyond its borders. The undergraduate programs prepare confident and competent teachers for a range of grade levels and settings. Graduate programs prepare candidates for a variety of professional and leadership roles in diverse educational environments. These roles include teaching, counseling, administration and supervision. Outreach efforts focus on renewing quality teaching within the Mississippi Delta by keeping professionals in the field connected to a broader educational community as well as providing the College of Education with continuous feedback on current needs in education, research, and on our training effectiveness. These efforts embody the belief that a professional educator is a life-long learner who engages in reflective practice through interactions within an educational community. Additional information on the university vision may be found in the documents room.

Mission

The mission of the unit and the conceptual framework are aligned with the mission of the university which partially states, “…the University provides programs and services that promote intellectual, cultural, ethical, physical, and social development. Students from different cultural socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds will develop the ability to respect and evaluate the thoughts of others; to develop, assess, and express their own thoughts effectively; and to use the techniques of research and performance associated with their disciplines.” The complete mission statement may be found in the documents room.

As an educational community, the unit supports the following principles as the foundation of its regional mission:

1. *Education is a life long endeavor.* Undergraduate teacher training programs build on the knowledge and experience-base candidates bring with them to college. A strong liberal arts core curriculum is the foundation to help students become well rounded and culturally literate. The degree-specific course content provides each candidate with opportunities to gain the professional skills/knowledge and to develop dispositions necessary for effective entry level teaching. Graduate programs build on undergraduate training to allow educators to further develop their skills or to redirect into related professional endeavors.

2. *Education is interactive and reflective.* Throughout the educator preparation programs, candidates interact with peers, faculty and community educators, and stakeholders to encourage reflective practice. Candidates are encouraged to improve practice through reflection, critical thinking, and assessment. Candidates carry this process into various educational environments in the spirit of collaboration to energize other educational communities.

3. *Education is culturally contextualized.* Candidates are encouraged to explore their own cultural development and its impact on others while being aware of and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of those with whom they work. A working
appreciation for cultural context enhances learning and allows for meaningful relationships with students, peers and administrators.

4. *Education is dynamic.* Unit academic programs are outcomes-driven and responsive to results of comprehensive assessment of individual candidates, courses, programs, field experiences, and the effects of unit efforts on the students in the public and private settings that are our partners in the Mississippi Delta. Programs are in continuous refinement based on results of multiple assessments.

5. *Education is enhanced by technology.* Technology is infused throughout all programs and services. Technology is viewed not as an end unto itself, but as a valuable tool for communication, content delivery, feedback, and assessment. Technology has become an integral part of faculty practice regarding instructional delivery. Unit assessment systems for individual classes and for program review are increasingly technology based. Technology is also appreciated as a tool for the educational community to link to the worldwide educational community for research and resources.

The Delta P3 Model

DELTA P3 MODEL

The shared vision/mission and candidate proficiencies for the unit are illustrated by the Delta P³ Model. The program platform is the Delta triangle, reflecting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for the development of effective candidates who positively impact student achievement. The Delta symbol is used not only because it
symbolizes the geographic region, but also because triangles are the strongest of polygons. The triangle is an appropriate representation since triangles are stable and can support heavy loads. Additionally, each side of the triangle supports the others; a triangle can only be weakened if one of its sides is lengthened or shortened. These figures combine easily with other polygons to form larger, more complex structures.

Surrounding the Delta triangle are the three critical candidate anchors or components that form the basis of the assessment system: performance, preparation, and professionalism.

1. **Preparation** is the professional training component. Effective candidates must demonstrate proficiencies that verify they have mastered the content of their disciplines, have exhibited competency in the skills necessary to effectively communicate this content to students, have, displayed knowledge of the systems of education including teaching, assessment, classroom management, and decision making.

2. **Performance** is the field based component of our programs. Each program includes intensive reflective field practice. Field experiences are sequenced and require data-driven supervision to ensure candidates’ growth in meeting proficiencies in the skills and dispositions needed to positively impact student learning. Field experiences provide the foundation for candidates to synthesize their preparation into an effective and dynamic teaching style capable of reaching a diverse student population.

3. **Professionalism** incorporates the proficiencies related to essential dispositions of a professional educator: compassion, self-reflection, respect for diversity, ethical practice, management of time and resources, creativity, flexibility, appreciation for and commitment to life-long learning, and collaboration

**Coherence**

Each of the three anchors is interdependent of the others and forms the basis for ensuring coherence across the entire unit to include curriculum, instruction, field experiences, clinical practice, and assessment of both candidate proficiencies and unit operations. The surrounding outer circle illustrates the role of the Delta Educational Community in ensuring that consistency and coherence are maintained across all programs. The triad of professionalism, preparation, and performance is encircled by the external and internal supports that renew and sustain candidates as they progress professionally through systematic programs of study. These supports include the internal resources provided by Delta State University faculty, staff, and leadership as well as support and feedback provided from external educational partners and alumni.

**Professional Commitments and Dispositions**

The conceptual framework is illustrative of a clear commitment to ensuring that all candidates are educated to be reflective practitioners with the preparation, performance,
and professionalism that allows them to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The unit focuses strongly on the dispositions of flexibility, dependability, respect for diversity, initiative, resourcefulness, professional growth, and collaborative behavior. Feedback from community partners indicates strong validation for the importance of the professional commitments and dispositions emphasized throughout all unit programs.

Commitment to Diversity

The commitment to diversity runs throughout all programs within the unit, as well as across the university. Specific activities and experiences within each educator preparation program are utilized to ensure appropriate knowledge, skills, and dispositions are in place to allow candidates to positively impact diverse learners. As part of the assessment system, the “Openness to Diversity and Challenge Survey” is also administered to candidates to use as an indicator of those issues surrounding diversity that need further elaboration both within and across programs. As indicated in information provided on both dispositions and in the three anchors of preparation, performance, and professionalism, candidates are expected to demonstrate their capacity for functioning within diverse settings with students and colleagues of varying backgrounds, capabilities, ethnicities, and beliefs. Additionally, as noted throughout the conceptual framework, the university and the unit actively support the recruitment of candidates, faculty, and community affiliations that are representative of the diversity of the region, state, and nation.

Commitment to Technology

The effective utilization of technology is infused across all aspects of programs within the unit. This commitment to technology is evidenced in the use of a technology assessment as part of the assessment system for candidates within all programs and in the conceptual framework as an inclusion in the three anchors of preparation, performance, and professionalism. Candidates are expected to make use of technology in multiple ways to include utilizing WebCt and TaskStream (web-base data collection tool), communicating with faculty and colleagues, completing PowerPoint presentations, and conducting research. Technology is viewed collectively as a tool for increasing productivity and positively impacting the learning environment both within the university setting and in the P-12 setting.

The unit and university support the effective use of technology across all aspects of university life. The university has provided funds for the installation of two “smart classrooms” for the College of Education and has supported “smart carts” for several divisions. Additionally, the university replaced all faculty and staff personal computers during the 2005-2006 academic year, while the college purchased technology-friendly copiers for each unit to allow ease of faculty use. The college and university have also been the recipients of several grants containing technology components that have positively impacted the Delta region, including school settings.
Candidate Proficiencies Aligned with Professional and State Standards

All teacher education programs within the unit have adopted the standards of the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) as the proficiencies which are represented by the conceptual framework and on which much of the assessment system is based. The INTASC standards are imbedded within the Student Teacher Assessment Instrument (STAI) which was developed collaboratively by the Mississippi Department of Education and the college and university teacher education programs across Mississippi. The alignment of STAI with INTASC standards may be found noted on the STAI document.

Additionally, the proficiencies of CACREP, ACEI, ELCC, and other professional organizations are also representative of the conceptual framework and serve as a guide for assessment within the initial and/or advanced programs. The proficiencies of INTASC and the professional organizations are recognized by the Mississippi Department of Education as the standards upon which educator preparation programs should be built. The chart below indicates which professional standards are aligned with the specific programs for educator preparation across the unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs</th>
<th>Professional Organization Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Art Education</td>
<td>National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biology Education</td>
<td>National Science Teachers Association (NSTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Leadership</td>
<td>Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>English Education</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health, Physical Education, &amp;</td>
<td>National Association for Sports &amp; Physical Education (NASPE)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics Education</td>
<td>National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Education</td>
<td>National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counseling</td>
<td>Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences Education</td>
<td>National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Philosophy of the Education Unit
The College of Education is one of four academic units of a state regional university that began as a teachers’ college in 1925. The institution is well-known for its emphasis on providing exceptional classroom instruction, and this focus on faculty as excellent instructors stimulates discussion and reflection on educational programs and practices, especially in terms of current trends and issues related to preparing educators for the new millennium. Faculty members have been encouraged and aided in designing classes that challenge candidates intellectually and that contribute to the development of sound critical thinking skills. Additionally, faculty aid candidates in developing insight into the structure of their disciplines necessary for the formation of each candidate’s personal philosophy of education. As a result of discussions and reflection, the faculty and community partners of the Delta State University College of Education have defined a philosophy of teaching and learning that is interwoven throughout the conceptual framework. The beliefs informing the pedagogical and programmatic decisions of the unit reflect the professional and social commitment to the culture of the Mississippi Delta, an agricultural area with high rates of illiteracy and the accompanying socio-economic problems. Within this social context, the unit’s philosophy of education provides a definitive direction for work with educator preparation program candidates and the greater community of educational partners.

**Philosophical Agreements**

**Candidates must be prepared for life-long learning.** Becoming an educator also means becoming a life-long learner. This process includes the development of a broad liberal arts foundation with a concentration of courses in the area of specialization which builds a foundation for understanding in the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. This liberal arts background contributes to the efficacy of candidates’ critical thinking abilities in an increasingly more technical and information-rich world. It also provides an appreciation of the arts and their essential role in adding beauty and harmony to the culture, while challenging the status quo and stimulating change. To be successful over the course of time, candidates must study more intensely their chosen areas of specialization. Candidates must have a content foundation that strengthens the understanding of structure, concepts, issues, and trends within a chosen field.

The breadth of a liberal arts education and the depth of specialization enable candidates to see linkages among disciplines. Perceptions of the connections among diverse ideas contribute to creative and critical thinking. Insights derived from a liberal arts education contribute to improved communication skills because candidates develop common understandings that allow them to articulate their ideas more clearly.

**Candidates must be prepared for the technological world.** A broad liberal arts education and expertise in a discipline or the arts is not adequate for prolonged success. Prospective educators must be proficient in the practical application of technology in their areas of specialization and in pedagogical strategies. This means using technology for more than simplistic drills and tutorials. There is little doubt that to be considered literate, candidates, with facilitation from us, must be able to manipulate information and explore the world outside the classroom through the use of technology. They must be
able to evaluate the relevancy and accuracy of information. Faculty must accept the challenge of integrating technology into the classroom through creative and innovative thinking, thus preparing candidates to make technology an enhancement to their intellectual pursuits and a part of their future classrooms.

**Candidates must be active learners.** Teaching must engage candidates and stimulate their intellectual curiosity and critical thinking skills. To be engaged is to be active in the learning process. Candidates must be constructing or co-constructing knowledge with their peers while they work on solving problems. Cooperating teachers must also be a facilitator in their candidates’ construction of knowledge. Education is not just the transmission of knowledge. At one time, learners depended solely on rote learning of discrete information and content transmitted exclusively through lecture or direct instruction. This mode of instruction may have prepared learners for the industrial world, but the shift to the information world demands a new model. The faculty and its educational partners, therefore, have embraced teaching strategies that demand the use of candidates’ critical thinking skills and problem-solving abilities. The world is complex, and its problems have few right and wrong answers, and this dualistic mode of thinking assumes that absolutes exist. Through problem solving and collaboration, candidates discern that there may be degrees of resolution to the problem or that they can move to agreeable positions on issues.

**Candidates must understand that learning is a developmental process.** Individuals do not simply keep adding knowledge; they move from concrete to more abstract forms of thinking. There is evidence that activity and emotional connections to problems stimulate development and enhance learning. Development begins initially in the social interaction of the individual which leads to cognitive and socio-emotional growth. This growth is enhanced as learners engage in collaboration and problem-solving. Candidates must, therefore, be educated in the processes associated with learning and development.

**Candidates must see themselves as professionals with an ethical commitment to their candidates and communities.** Candidates are encouraged to become caring educators who serve their respective communities and their profession with a high degree of ethical conduct. Candidates must strive to understand and participate in the social heritage of the communities in which they serve as educators. They must empower their students to explore their unique gifts and abilities. Participating in discussions of critical issues and current research encourages candidates to continue their professional growth and development. Candidates are encouraged and supported to participate in professional organizations resulting in enhanced social and professional identity and ethical behavior.

**Unit Goals**

The College of Education faculty, leadership, and educational partners develop and deliver dynamic and varied educator preparation programs that reflect the dual, yet shared, responsibilities of faculty and candidates. Since the scope of the vision includes input from all members of the Delta Educational Community, faculty, staff, and leadership serve as a conduit between the larger educational community and candidates.
who will ultimately serve that community. Expectations based on input from the entire educational community are communicated to candidates in three interdependent areas necessary for effective educator training: preparation, professionalism, and performance. The following goals for the educator preparation programs ensure that these purposes are accomplished.

**Preparation**

**Goal 1**
Candidates will be prepared to meet the ever-changing needs of a diverse student population. The curriculum for all programs has been designed to: a) address standards-based knowledge and skills that ensure candidates are properly prepared in their chosen fields and are eligible for licensure, b) provide opportunities for development of effective communication skills and appropriate dispositions, and c) assist in the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

**Goal 2**
A wide variety of programs and services will be provided in order to improve the quality of life and raise the educational level of the citizens of the Delta and the surrounding area.

**Goal 3**
Technological applications will be modeled in the classroom and candidates will be trained to integrate technology into their own educational environments. This integration of technology into the classroom is supported by the services provided in the Center for Teaching and Learning, housed in the College of Education.

**Goal 4**
Standards-based graduate programs will provide individuals with opportunities for advanced study and research in preparation for roles as leaders in a variety of educational settings.

**Performance**

**Goal 5**
Faculty will communicate to candidates the importance of effective classroom management, using a variety of strategies to promote cooperation and learning as well as the importance of organizing time, space, and activities.

**Goal 6**
A sequence of field experiences and internships will be provided to prepare candidates to effectively plan, implement, assess, and evaluate classroom-based instruction to ensure appropriate student learning in diverse educational settings.

**Goal 7**
A comprehensive system of candidate evaluation will be implemented and maintained utilizing both formative and summative measures throughout the candidates’ program of study.

**Professionalism**

**Goal 8**

Programs in the College of Education will be provided which cultivate intellectual curiosity, promote scholarship, and support community engagement through service-learning experiences to create a new generation of productive citizens.

**Goal 9**

Highly qualified, diverse, and creative faculty who are committed to excellence in teaching, service, and scholarly activity will be consistently recruited.

**Goal 10**

A climate in which candidates and employees are valued and nurtured will be supported and maintained. The faculty, staff, candidates, and leaders work collectively to provide a positive, safe teaching and learning environment.

**Goal 11**

A student-centered environment that encourages holistic personal development will be promoted. Candidates will be encouraged to participate in a wide range of activities designed to foster diverse personal and professional development including those of a cultural, athletic, and/or community-oriented nature.

**Goal 12**

Recruitment of faculty and candidates will focus on identifying those individuals who can achieve success in supporting and enhancing a rigorous, expansive, and diverse educational experience within the P-12 community as well as the college classroom involvement.

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**Conceptual Framework Knowledge Bases**

American culture has evolved from its agrarian/mercantile roots in the Eighteenth Century, through the Industrial Revolution of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, to the technological boom of today. Each new cultural era created a corresponding set of needs in public education.

Traditional education has its roots in the development of programs designed to prepare agricultural workers for a factory market during the Industrial Revolution. Historically, education provided the skills necessary for mass production in the industrial economy. Teaching during this time period involved rote learning and rigid academic requirements that emphasized the humanities and liberal arts. Toward the end of the Twentieth Century, education began to feel the strain of an outdated philosophy and system. Schools and colleges continued the same teaching practices that had been used at the turn
of the Twentieth Century. However, students were struggling to learn contemporary skills using outdated techniques. It was time for a change (Educational history, n.d.).

In the Age of Technology, it became clear that education must adjust to a new teaching philosophy and methods more conducive to success in the Twenty-first Century. Because of technology, massive amounts of information became available at a moment’s notice through the internet, databanks, and other computer related sources. As a result, the need for rote memorization was replaced by a need to locate information in a timely manner (Educational history, n.d.).

Today, students must know how to synthesize massive quantities of information, make decisions on pertinent issues, and work collaboratively in a positive manner. “The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the ‘right’ answers and regurgitate someone else’s meaning” (Constructivism, n.d., Discussion section, para. 4). Higher order thinking skills are essential in meeting the needs of the student preparing for the new millennium. In order to be a success in the world today, students need confidence that is fostered by support and encouragement. They must be able to define information and provide a variety of solutions to a problem. They must also have the ability to think and problem solve without being forced into a standard plan. In the past, it was easy to teach in a recipe format; now, thinking “outside the box” is essential to success (Constructivism). The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the College of Education believe it is essential to provide a learning environment that is conducive to meeting these needs.

*Theories and Theorists*

Although the demands of each cultural era have driven the educational practice in that age, seminal thinkers from each time period continue to influence education today. Some of the theories and theorists that have been especially influential in philosophy and practice at Delta State University have been the Progressivism of John Dewey, the Cognitive Developmental Theory of Jean Piaget, and the Social Constructivism of Lev Vygotsky. Emerging research also continues to inform the practice of the unit. (e.g., Pratt, 2002).

In the early Twentieth Century, Dewey viewed public education as a laboratory of democracy. The school was an extension of civil society, with students operating as members of a community of learners. For Dewey, learning was a naturalistic interaction between the human organism and the social environment (Field, 2001).

While John Dewey was developing his ideas in the United States, Lev Vygotsky was developing his theories in Russia. However, his ideas were not known in the Western Hemisphere until the 1960’s. Vygotsky’s Theory of Social Constructivism focuses on the learning activity rather than the individual learner (Huang, 2002; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, n.d.; Zhu, 1998). For social constructivists, learning is a “process of social negotiation or collaborative sense making, mentoring, and joint knowledge construction” (Zhu, p. 234). Therefore, all learning has its roots in social
interaction and culture, with collaboration driving the learner’s construction of knowledge (Borthick, Jones, & Wakai, 2003). From the earliest interactions, young children learn to communicate for social reasons and learn behaviors that are specific to their culture (Doolittle, 1997; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky suggested that “development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help form a child’s own view of the world” (Gallagher, n.d., Theory section, para. 1). He also suggested that all learning takes place in a cultural context that is mediated by language, beliefs, and activities practiced within a culture (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; John-Steiner & Mahn; Mahn, 1999).

This theory “combines social environment and cognition. [Individuals] acquire ways of thinking and behaving that make up a culture by interacting with a more knowledgeable person” (Gallagher, n.d., Theory section, para. 2). This interaction leads to continuous changes in thoughts and behaviors (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). When beginning activities, learners depend on others with greater knowledge and experience; but as time passes, they become more able to take responsibility for their own learning. This validates the use of collaboration in effective teaching (John-Steiner & Mahn).

In social constructivism, emphasis is placed on learning content and application in a practical environment rather than learning in isolation through memorization and recitation of facts. While more traditional theories led to the belief that rote memorization and mental exercises were important to improve the brain’s ability to function, Vygotsky believed that the environment and culture are stronger influences (Huang, 2002; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Mahn, 1999). This would explain many of the differences between individuals and what they know and learn (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). Vygotsky also believed that social learning actually leads to cognitive development that culminates in higher order mental processing (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999). This implies that the social community has a great impact, not only on what and how students learn, but on the improvement of learning and changes in the amount and quality of learning (Harland, 2003; Jaramillo, 1996; Riddle & Dabbagh).

More traditional theories emphasized learning as an outcome only, while Vygotsky believed that learning is a process and the process is actually the outcome (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999). Therefore, the process of learning can be transferred to other situations and by perfecting the process one can become a life-long learner. In the world today, we realize the importance of life-long learning because information and technology become obsolete in a short time. If individuals cannot process information and adapt to new information, they will be ill equipped to be successful in the Twenty-first Century.

Later in the Twentieth Century, Jean Piaget influenced American education, especially in elementary education and in the sciences and math. Unlike Dewey and Vygotsky who emphasized the social nature of education, Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development emphasized the process through which individual children order their world. For Piaget, the teacher must provide a rich environment to encourage the development of increasingly complex mental schemata (Huang, 2002; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996).
The philosophical themes that emerge from a study of these three theorists and others, with particular emphasis on Vygotsky, serve as the foundation for philosophy and practice across the unit and is the foundation of the conceptual framework. These themes include (a) the school as a model for democracy, (b) learning as a process of social interaction, and (c) a rich experience base as a foundation for cognitive development.

The Culture of the Mississippi Delta

The University Mission Statement (Delta State University, 2004) identifies Delta State University as a regional university that serves as an educational and cultural hub for the Mississippi Delta. The Mississippi Delta is an area that is rich in cultural diversity. As a regional university, Delta State is committed to providing a quality education and local support for individuals within the region. We must take into account the cultural and social climate in the area when making decisions regarding the philosophies guiding the educational atmosphere at Delta State. We realize the importance of collaboration, problem solving, and encouragement, and we endeavor to provide our candidates with a sound philosophy, theoretical and ethical foundation.

The Mississippi Delta is an agricultural area with high rates of societal challenges related to a historically low socioeconomic status. As a result, many of the inhabitants of the region are undereducated. Many of our candidates are first generation college students lacking the support and encouragement vital to the completion of a college education.

Many believe these barriers are difficult or impossible to overcome. We believe the right environment can make a difference in the success of all students. The decision to emphasize Vygotsky’s theory as the foundation for our plan results from understanding the importance of culture to this area. Candidates at Delta State represent many different cultures and backgrounds. The candidates have been exposed to certain patterns of thinking, belief systems, and cultural understandings, including myths and taboos, and prejudices that are part of their cultural experiences. As a result, content cannot be culturally neutral (Jaramillo, 1996). Social constructivists believe that although students begin with what they have experienced in their social environment, if adequate support is provided in the educational setting, cultural challenges can be addressed (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999).

It is imperative that educational institutions focus on providing students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in society and a community environment suitable for practicing these skills. Based on this theory and what we know about educating students for the Twenty-first Century, we must continue to provide and improve the learning community and environment and ensure the opportunity for candidates to address their individual social and cultural diversity (Harland, 2003).

It is essential that we provide an environment that is helpful to the learner. We must take measures to ensure continuous improvement in the interaction among faculty, staff, and students. Further, the total learning environment must be supportive and encouraging as students learn to construct new knowledge bases that may be inconsistent with their
original cultural beliefs. The goal is not to change cultural beliefs, but to help students merge new ideas and beliefs with the old (Fosnot, 1996).

Encouraging Effective Teaching

Current research in education has expanded the social constructivist viewpoint on learning to value differences in individual styles and practices that result in effective teaching. One model of interest suggests that there are five perspectives on effective teaching: transmission, developmental, apprenticeship, nurturing, and social reform (Pratt, 2002). Each of these perspectives can result in effective teaching and can be found throughout the programs in the College of Education.

Each perspective includes beliefs and underlying intentions. The methods used by individual teachers reflect the perspective from which they operate. Many perspectives overlap and teachers tend to ascribe to only one or two perspectives as their major way of teaching (Pratt, 2002).

In the State of Mississippi, middle and secondary education majors typically have a degree or an emphasis in the area of content in which they teach. As a result, the transmission perspective is generally utilized because it places major emphasis on content mastery. In order to do this, transmission teachers spend a great deal of time in preparation and organization of information. They are specific about the objectives for learning and how to attain those objectives. They use assessment as a means for determining the level of understanding of the content. Their passion about the content material often makes an impression on the learner (Pratt, 2002).

The developmental perspective perceives teaching as a more constructivist approach. This perspective is common in elementary, early childhood, and some special education classrooms. Developmental teachers understand how their students learn and utilize the learner’s own experiential base as a means for improving learning. Typically, developmental teachers value prior knowledge and challenge the learner by using effective questioning and meaningful examples. The use of these strategies helps the teacher to take the learner from previous ways of thinking to more complex and intricate ones. Developmental teachers generally have a large accumulation of techniques and examples to use to help learners build their own means of understanding (Pratt, 2002).

The apprentice perspective is found throughout the unit in courses including field experiences. This perspective emphasizes learning that occurs in authentic tasks practiced in real settings. Recognizing that it is difficult to transfer information learned only in a college classroom setting to work sites, the apprentice perspective emphasizes the transferring of information into a usable skill for practice settings. Teachers find ways to help the learner to acquire the identity of the profession by learning the language, values, and practices of a skilled professional. These instructors provide opportunities for learners to work on meaningful and relevant tasks. Scaffolding and the use of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development are often utilized in this approach to teaching (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999; Pratt, 2002).
The teacher practicing the nurturing perspective has high expectations of learners, but believes that the learners’ confidence and self-esteem affect their success. This teacher takes extra time to understand why learners have certain problems with success and attempts to relieve the fear of failure that many have acquired. The nurturing teacher searches for a balance between challenging learners and meeting their emotional needs. These teachers provide a great deal of encouragement and support, as well as clear expectations and reasonable goals for each learner. Assessment may address individual progress rather than just academic success (Pratt, 2002).

Finally, the social reform perspective generally suggests a view that includes teachers who are passionate, not only about the content, but about the learner’s ability to actually make a difference in the world. They work hard to promote the dignity of their learners and place great value on diversity within the classroom environment. These teachers have high ideals that they want to impart to their learners and are quite fervent in doing so. They encourage students to look, not only at content, but also at the particular setting in which facts occur. They believe that the circumstances of a situation help the learner better appreciate what is being learned. These teachers often cause learners to question what they have previously taken for granted and help them to look at life more critically (Pratt, 2002).

The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the unit continues to seek ways to support these themes of (a) the school as a model for democracy, (b) learning as a process of social interaction, and (c) a rich experience base as a foundation for cognitive development. It is believed that utilizing multiple perspectives of teaching allows candidates to appreciate more fully the diverse learning experiences encountered on the campus of Delta State University. The importance of helping each candidate take the experiences they bring with them to find more effective ways of learning and communicating is recognized fully by the unit. The faculty, leadership, and community partners of the College of Education have demonstrated a commitment to provide each of the unit’s candidates with a comprehensive, balanced, and effective education in an environment in which learning is encouraged and high expectations are evident.
References


