



Teacher Education

What is the Conceptual Framework of the Teacher Education Unit?

The phrase that articulates the mission of the Teacher Education Program is **Preparing Caring, Reflective Teachers for a Changing World**. The framework is under-girded by the vision and mission of the university.

Eastern Mennonite University Mission Statement

Identity

A leader among faith-based universities, Eastern Mennonite University emphasizes peacebuilding, creation care, experiential learning, and cross-cultural engagement. Founded in 1917 in Harrisonburg, Virginia, EMU is an educational institution of Mennonite Church USA. EMU serves students of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds and confers undergraduate, graduate, and seminary degrees.

Mission

EMU educates students to serve and lead in a global context. Our Christian community challenges students to pursue their life calling through scholarly inquiry, artistic creation, guided practice, and life-changing cross-cultural encounter. We invite each person to follow Christ's call to
bear witness to faith,
serve with compassion, and
walk boldly in the way of nonviolence and peace.

Vision

EMU envisions a learning community marked by academic excellence, creative process, professional competence, and passionate Christian faith, offering healing and hope in our diverse world. To this end, we commit ourselves to
do justice,
love mercy, and
walk humbly with God.

Shared Values

EMU embodies the enduring values of the Anabaptist tradition:
Christian discipleship,
community,
service, and
peacebuilding.
Together we worship God, seek truth, and care for God's creation.

*Approved by the EMU Board of Trustees
June 28, 2008*

The **Conceptual Framework** articulates a shared vision for Eastern Mennonite University's Teacher Education Program in its efforts to prepare educators for P-12 classrooms. The Conceptual Framework provides direction for Teacher Education's programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. Included in the Conceptual Framework is an articulation of the Teacher Education Program's particular perspective, which will characterize EMU's teacher pre-service and MA graduates.

What Mission and Beliefs Guide the Education Department?

The mission of the EMU Teacher Education Program is to prepare competent, caring, reflective practitioners who advocate for children and youth, develop caring learning environments, initiate and respond creatively to change, and value service to others.

The teacher education program envisions preparing informed lifelong leaders and learners who value the dignity of all persons and are ready and willing to share a pilgrimage of openness and continuous growth as they invite others to join them. These reflective educators will offer healing and hope in a diverse world. The mission and vision are based on the following beliefs:

- We believe that teachers are best prepared through a rigorous liberal arts program that seeks integration across disciplines and cultures.
- We believe in a reflective teaching model that develops excellence in teaching, an ethic of caring, and creative problem solving.
- We believe in the integration of theory and reflective practice through purposeful and systematic experiences in college classrooms and field placements within P-12 classrooms.
- We believe that candidates have the power to serve as collaborative change agents with sensitivity to an interdependent world.
- We believe in the integration of Anabaptist principles with the profession of teaching based on a Christian world view valuing community, caring relationships, service to others, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and stewardship of resources.
- We believe that it is important for all candidates to respect and value cultural diversity, and to relate to students and communities in culturally appropriate ways.
- We believe that faculty who mentor candidates should nurture and model desirable personal and professional qualities.

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What are the Teacher Candidate Performance Outcomes?

Scholarship: to acquire knowledge through the liberal arts, Global Village General Education Curriculum and specialty area studies and to organize and integrate that knowledge across disciplines and cultures.

- demonstrate competency in general education knowledge and liberal arts.
- articulate major concepts, assumptions, debates, and methodologies of inquiry that are central to the discipline(s)/he teaches
- demonstrate awareness and apply meaningful connections across disciplines and cultures.

Inquiry: to generate questions and to use critical thinking to self-assess, to view problems collaboratively and from multiple perspectives, and to make informed, research-based decisions to enhance student learning.

- evaluate philosophies of education from multiple perspectives to articulate a personal philosophy that enhances student learning
- use inquiry-based strategies to enable students to construct knowledge
- analyze social contexts for reflection, problem-solving, and learning through dialogue
- draw upon personal and collegial reflections to evaluate and revise practice

Professional Knowledge: to demonstrate pedagogical and professional knowledge in order to create, manage, and assess diverse environments conducive to learning setting high expectations.

- plan appropriate instruction and assessment based on the knowledge of constructivist learning theory, subject matter, student development, instructional strategies, the learning context, and curriculum
- integrate informal and formal assessments into instruction, maintain records, and analyze data to inform teaching decisions and to monitor student progress
- adapt and/or create a variety of instruction to provide equitable opportunities for all learners including those from diverse cultural backgrounds and with exceptionalities
- understand how educational legal and policy issues affect students', guardians', and teachers' roles and responsibilities
- develop and design technologically mediated learning environments that are developmentally and task appropriate
- identify, locate, evaluate, and use appropriate instructional hardware and software to support Virginia's Standards of Learning and specialty professional associations standards

Communication: to acquire and use knowledge of effective verbal, nonverbal, and technological communication strategies to support student learning, to solve problems, and to create peaceable climates.

- demonstrate effective reading, writing, speaking, listening, and observation skills to enhance student learning
- communicates appropriately with parents or guardians of students and school personnel

- use electronic technologies to access, manage and exchange information for sound problem solving and decision making

Caring: to develop a nurturing spirit that honors diversity, advocates for students, integrates Christian faith and ethics, and promotes peacebuilding in diverse settings.

- plan and advocate for safe and just learning experiences for all students
- evaluate the effects of his or her actions on students, colleagues, and supervisors
- promote social harmony and peace building in learning communities
- model caring by treating students fairly and respectfully, promoting student feelings of self-worth, and creating a climate that allows access to appropriate learning opportunities for all students
- value stewardship of self, community, ideas, and environmental resources by integrating Christian faith and ethics with professional responsibility

Leadership: demonstrate high aspirations for themselves and their profession and to influence positive change in educational settings.

- view teaching as a vocation (conceptual framework)
- demonstrate resourcefulness and responsibility in educational settings influencing positive change.
- build professional relationships with colleagues
- participate in opportunities for professional growth

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What are the Dispositions?

The 3 Rs of Caring, Reflective Practitioners: Responsibility, Relationships, and Reflection provide the framework for specific dispositions the education program seeks to develop in candidates.

Caring About Personal and Professional Responsibility

1. demonstrates professional responsibility (ie. is consistent and punctual in attendance, comes to class prepared, meets deadlines, trustworthy, presents positive outlook, meets appropriate expectations regarding appearance)
2. takes responsibility for actions
3. regulates personal emotions
4. maintains collaborative, positive relationships with colleagues
5. develops positive relationships with those in authority
6. shows mature judgment
7. holds high expectations for all students

Caring About Relationships in Learning Communities:

1. considers multiple perspectives (listens actively, responds well to criticism or suggestions)
2. promotes compassionate and just learning environments
3. demonstrates passion/enthusiasm about learning and teaching
4. values diversity (eager to work with persons from a variety of perspectives and cultural/ethnic groups)

Caring About Reflective Practice:

1. makes decisions based upon reflection, research, and best practice
2. uses critical thinking to self-assess, to evaluate progress and to set realistic goals
3. commits to planning, teaching, assessment, and reflection as an ongoing process to enhance student learning

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What are the Knowledge Bases that Inform the Conceptual Framework?

Positioned in a university with religious and cultural roots in an Anabaptist tradition, the Education Department acknowledges and confronts the changing nature of schooling and schools without loss of the religious and moral values we have embraced for over 500 years. We prepare teachers for a changing world--A world that is increasingly technological, multicultural, postmodern, and secular. We do so with faith and optimism exhibited by Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) when they say,

In a world whose boundaries have become chipped and porous, new challenges present themselves not only to educators but for all those for whom contingency and loss and certainty do not mean the inevitable triumph of nihilism and despair but rather a state of possibility in which destiny and hope can be snatched from the weakening grasp of modernity. (p. 133)

Constructivism

The philosophical base is informed by the theory of constructivism. Constructivism is an ubiquitous term with definitions varying from Fosnot's "post-structuralist psychological theory that construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world," (1996, p. 30) to Henderson's "constructivist teaching can be defined as any deliberate, thoughtful, educational activity that is designed to facilitate students' active understanding." (1996, p. 9). Constructivist educators believe that "the act of teaching" cannot be distinguished from "the act of learning". Teachers using a constructivist approach emphasize big concepts, student questions, active learning, and collaboration. A constructivist approach seeks to connect theory to practice and views the student as "thinker, creator, and constructor." Integral to a constructivist theory of learning is creative problem solving. Teachers take responsibility for assessing and solving problems not through mechanistic "cook book" recipes, but by asking "What decisions should I be making?" "On what basis do I make these decisions?" and "What can I do to enhance learning?"

The conceptual framework of teacher preparation at EMU orients teacher candidates to education environments that support best practices using a constructivist approach. Starting in Exploring Teaching candidates use the following chart from Brooks and Brooks (1999) to begin to understand the continuum of teaching from traditional and constructivist perspectives. The paradigm is identified below.

A Look at School Environments

Traditional Classrooms	Constructivist Classrooms
Curriculum is presented part to whole, with emphasis on basic skills.	Curriculum is presented whole to part with emphasis on basic concepts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions is highly valued.
Curricular activities rely heavily on textbooks and workbooks.	Curricular activities rely heavily on primary sources of data and manipulative materials.
Students are viewed as “blank slates” onto which information is etched by the teacher.	Students are viewed as “thinkers” with emerging theories about the world.
Teachers generally behave in a didactic manner, disseminating information to students.	Teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment for students.
Teachers seek the correct answer to validate student learning.	Teachers seek the students’ points of view in order to understand students’ present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons.
Assessment of student learning is viewed as separate from teaching and occurs almost entirely through testing.	Assessment of student learning is interwoven with teaching and occurs through teacher observations of students at work and through student exhibitions and portfolios.
Students primary work in alone.	Students primary work in groups.

Reflection

The philosophical base is also informed by reflective teaching. Reflective Teaching is an inquiry approach that emphasizes an ethic of caring, a constructivist approach to teaching, and creative problem solving. Reflection encompasses and gives shape to the outcomes of the Education Department. When teachers care, they become reflective about the endeavor to learn, to teach, to communicate, to ask questions, and to become leaders.

The Education Department concurs with Dewey’s concept of reflection identified by Rodgers (2002) as a meaning making process, a systematic, rigorous disciplined way of thinking that needs to happen in community and which requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of self and others. In addition, the Education Department fully supports the INTASC standard on reflection and professional development that describes the teacher as “a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of her/his choices and actions on

others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community) and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally” (1992, p. 30). Reflection is at the heart of practice (Hole et. al. 2003).

Integration of Theory and Practice

Candidates participate in carefully arranged and fully integrated field based experiences beginning in the first year and culminating in the senior year with Student Teaching. The professional education curriculum emphasizes caring relationships, assertive but cooperative classroom management practices, peace and justice issues, and the integration of ethics with professional competency.

The ultimate goal of teacher education at EMU is to empower the candidate to develop a spirit of inquiry leading to informed decision making while applying values to action.

Members of the education faculty are committed to demonstrating the reflective model in their own teaching. Education classes utilize instructional activities such as collaborative learning strategies, class interaction and role-playing, microteaching lessons, and case studies. Instructors give special attention to the application of theory and practice by helping to make connections between relevant concepts through higher order questioning strategies. Reflective thinking skills -- the ability to evaluate and interpret evidence, modify views, and make objective judgments-- are stressed in all courses.

Caring

An ethic of caring respects the wonderful range of multiple talents and capacities of all individuals regardless of cultural, intellectual, or gender differences. A premium is placed on the dignity of all persons. According to Irvine (2003)

The task of teacher educators is to make sure that teacher education students and the people who evaluate and assess them understand the complexity of a term that seems so simple—*care*....Teacher characteristics and traits, such as being caring, are influenced by the multiple layers of and enigmatic nature of classroom practice. (p. 44-45).

Caring is at the core of the framework. The university’s general education framework is drawn from the biblical text, Micah 6:8 “act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The Teacher Education Program is committed to multicultural, peacebuilding and restorative justice endeavors. We expect our students to exhibit dispositions that reflect an understanding of the student as a “whole person” with complex personal, social, emotional and academic needs. The 3 Rs of Caring, Reflective Practitioners: Responsibility, Relationships, and Reflection provide the framework for specific dispositions the education program seeks to develop in candidates. Caring for others and for relationships remains central.

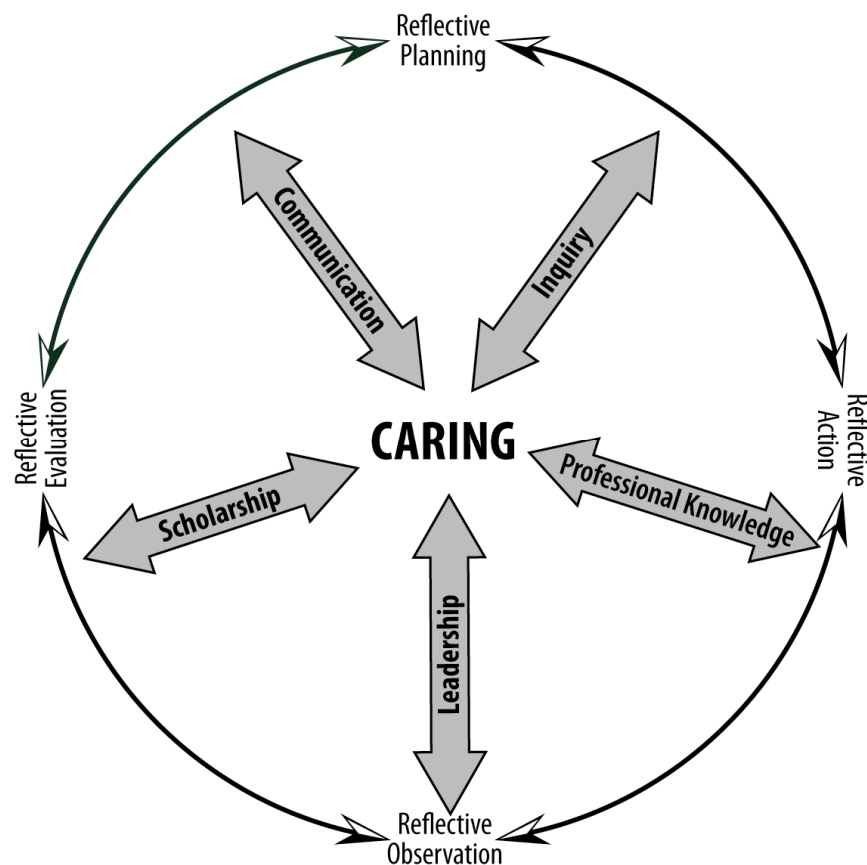
Beyond the definition of caring, the relationship of caring to reflection must be clear. The Teacher Education faculty want preservice teachers to care about others in a way that builds relationship but this is not to be understood solely as kindness or concern without action. Goldstein (2002) believes that, “the ethic of care provides a way of thinking about caring that repositions the concept, transforming it from a personality trait to a deliberate and decisive act” (p.16). Noddings (1984) distinguishes between the concepts of caring for and caring about and describes caring for as a personal response to another person. In contrast, caring about is a response to an idea or large, distant group of people such as caring about starving children in another country. Gay (2000) describes this caring as “multi dimensional responsiveness” which “places teachers in ethical, emotional and academic partnerships and speaks especially to the

expectations teachers have of their students. Caring teachers are distinguished by their high performance, expectations, advocacy, and empowerment of students as well as by their use of pedagogical practices that facilitate school success.” (p. 62)

This concept of caring permeates our program. It informs not only what we want teachers to learn and model in their classrooms, but the practices they employ. This can be accomplished by ensuring the mastery of program outcomes.

The Model

The Education Department’s perspective on the theme “Preparing Reflective Teachers for a Changing World” is illustrated in the following model.



Care about Scholarship requires that teachers understand and master the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) in order to engage students in meaningful learning.

Care about Professional Knowledge requires that teachers reflect on their practice to improve student learning as well as to employ instructional strategies to further develop students’ critical and creative thinking skills.

Care about Communication requires attention to detail in written and spoken language as well as a desire to listen and understand others with appreciation for the cultural dimensions of communication. Technology and media are used to facilitate student learning.

Care about Inquiry requires critical thinking about theory and practice, ethics and values, personal reflection and conduct.

Care about Leadership requires professional development and transforming approaches to education through advocacy for children and youth.

In summary, the theoretical knowledge bases that support the outcomes of the Teacher Education Program at EMU are informed by the theory of constructivism, employed with a commitment to authentic caring, and implemented with conscious, careful, and active reflection.

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NOTE: The above references are only representative of the total literature surveyed for program development.