Teacher as Reflective Problem Solver

Program Goals and Candidate Outcomes

Based on continuing discussions of desired outcomes, research of the relevant literature, formal and informal feedback from school administrators and teachers, dialogue among practitioners, and INTASC and NBPTS standards, we remain strongly committed that a beginning teacher should possess the willingness and capacity to

1. Ascertain and articulate personal professionally held philosophical and theoretical viewpoints about schooling and teaching/learning;

2. Commit to continuous reflective self-examination for personal/professional development;

3. Function as a change agent who can influence and improve the education of P-12 students;

4. Undertake the professional responsibility for the development of P-12 students' critical mindedness, problem-solving skills, self-motivation, cooperative social interaction, and a commitment to excellent performance;

5. Develop an adequate understanding of the social and psychological conditions of learning including cultural and linguistic differences, exceptionalities and developmental characteristics of P-12 students;

6. Develop, articulate and practice a constructivist, integrated, and multicultural curriculum and a pedagogy that promotes and honors individual dignity and rights of P-12 students consonant with the nature of a pluralistic and democratic society;

7. Develop learning experiences that promote acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions P-12 students need to function productively and to become critical participants in a democratic, pluralistic social and economic world;

8. Access current research findings regarding schooling and teaching/learning and use these findings in educational programs.

9. Develop a critical understanding of the central concepts, tools of inquiry and structures of representation and their interdisciplinary connections in pedagogical content knowledge that are central to the discipline(s) she/he teaches including the uses of educational multimedia technology;

10. Foster relationships between school and higher education colleagues, parents, governmental agencies, and individuals and groups in the larger community to support P-12 students' learning and well-being;

11. Develop a coherent, integrated view of the world of theory and practice;

12. Consistently reflect on a knowledge base, dispositional orientations, and performance characteristics.
Philosophy of the Teacher Education Program at Shepherd University

Through research on and discussion of reflective teacher education models and from our commitment to the development of both teachers and P-12 students who are disposed and prepared to live productively in a just, democratic, multicultural world, the PEU faculty designed a teacher education program that enables prospective teachers to acquire the above characteristics based on the following philosophical position:

The Teacher Education Program at Shepherd University is committed to the idea that knowledge enables one to make informed choices, to actively participate in the shaping of one's own life and the shaping of the social, cultural, political and economic structures of a democratic society. Education should empower all students and teachers to do this. Our purpose is to facilitate the development of prospective teachers who demonstrate the willingness and capacity for a pedagogy that truly empowers all P-12 students.

The schooling context is very complex and characterized by a significant degree of ambiguity. This ambiguous complexity of the teaching context precludes a formulaic approach to teaching. The emphasis is on the prospective teacher developing a philosophy and a set of principles that guide practice in the reflective process of problem solving. The teacher must be able to function in this complex and ambiguous context in a reflective manner: identifying problems, framing them, considering alternative solutions, and choosing and implementing courses of action. The criteria for the assessment of effective teaching must include not only curricular and pedagogical concerns but also the ethical dimensions of teaching/learning. Schooling is not done to students; it is done with students.

Model of the Teacher Education Program at Shepherd University

The figure below, Teacher as Reflective Problem Solver, illustrates the model chosen to operationalize the theme of TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER (TARPS). This theme expresses the character of the Teacher Education Program at Shepherd University. The model recognizes that to be a reflective problem solver, the prospective teacher consistently needs to reflect on Knowledge, Dispositions, and Performance.
Knowledge Goals

In order for teachers to engage pedagogical problems, they must refer to a knowledge base that supports their beliefs and actions. The ability to explicate a knowledge base that justifies the predispositions and assumptions that underlie teaching/learning behavior is a key characteristic of the TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER. The prospective teacher must possess knowledge of content, context, and learners.

The degree to which a teacher candidate has acquired, can explicate, and can use an adequate knowledge base acquired through completion of courses/experiences is assessed according to the following criteria:

The Candidate

1. Demonstrates an understanding of developmental issues (cognitive, social, emotional, physical) in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning;
2. Accesses and uses current research findings in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning experiences;
3. Demonstrates a critical understanding of the central concepts, tools of inquiry and structures of representation of subjects being taught and their interdisciplinary connections in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning experiences;
4. Possesses a coherent, integrated understanding of the world of theory and practice that is evident in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning experiences;
5. Considers the multicultural nature of classrooms and society in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning experiences;
6. Considers and uses educational multimedia in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and assessing teaching/learning experiences.

These goals are based in part on the works of Banks, 1988; Calderhead, 1992; Glaserfeld, 1984; Goodlad, 1984; Munby & Russell, 1992; Sleeter & Grant, 1988; Nieto, 1992; Piaget, 1954; Schon, 1986; Shulman, 1987; and Valli, 1992.
Disposition Goals

The development and refinement of a prospective teacher’s reflective disposition is a fundamental concern of our teacher education program. Our commitment to the development of reflective dispositions is strongly indicated by the use of both the terms "willingness" and "capacity" in the statement of Program Goals and Student Outcomes. Willingness means the demonstrated commitment to continual professional development to become a TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER. Capacity means demonstrating the ability to achieve professional and pedagogical goals.

Reflection is an innate human capacity. We seek to amplify that dimension of human ability so it becomes a conscious tool for effective teaching/learning. Candidates demonstrate the capacity to reflect on the day-to-day aspects of teaching/learning; to decide whether or not a teaching/learning activity achieves the purposes of a sound education; and to judge how this experience relates to the larger issues of democracy, justice, and equity in our multicultural society. The degree to which teacher candidates demonstrate a reflective disposition is assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

The Candidate:

1. Demonstrates the willingness and capacity to practice teaching/learning from our model's thematic structure: Action, Interpretation, and Critical Reflection;
2. Demonstrates the willingness and capacity to continuously engage in self-analytical and self-reflective processes for professional development;
3. Demonstrates the willingness and capacity to engage in critical discourse about education issues;
4. Displays respect for individual dignity and diverse learning orientations of all students;
5. Demonstrates a commitment to excellence in academics and practical teaching/learning experiences;
6. Demonstrates the willingness and capacity to assume personal responsibility for professional development.

Performance Goals

Performance goals are oriented toward developing the candidate's capacity to plan, implement, and assess a program of teaching/learning that is effective for all students. Prospective teachers must be skillful in reflecting on learner performance and teacher performance. The degree to which a teacher candidate performs as a TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER is assessed on the basis of the following criteria:

The Candidate:

1. Observes, describes, and analyzes self, individual student and group performance in order to design developmentally and individually appropriate and improved teaching/learning experiences;
2. Plans and implements teaching/learning experiences that develop students' problem solving capacity and critical thinking skills;
3. Plans and implements teaching/learning experiences that are based on a constructivist epistemology;
4. Plans and implements teaching/learning experiences that accommodate student diversity;
5. Plans and implements teaching/learning experiences that promote students' ability to function productively in society;
6. Plans and implements teaching/learning experiences that are based on explicit understanding of the core concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of knowledge that are central to the subjects being taught;
7. Uses a variety of strategies (e.g., portfolios, observations, presentations, essays, criterion-referenced tests, learning project results, norm-referenced tests) to assess the effectiveness of teaching/learning experiences;
8. Uses a variety of strategies (e.g., individualization, whole group, project groups, cooperative learning, learning centers, discussion, lecture) to optimize teaching/learning opportunities in the classroom;
9. Uses professional, community, and other resources outside the classroom to enhance student learning.

These goals are based in part on the work of Beyer, 1984; Cochran et al, 1993; Carr & Kemis, 1986; Clift et al, 1990; Goodman, 1984; Houston, 1990; Jackson, 1986; Valli, 1992; and Zeichner, 1987; 1990.
We have established a framework for the development of reflective dispositions that characterizes a TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER. In order to effectively respond to the range of concerns found in the classroom, a teacher needs to be concurrently reflective across three fields of consideration: Action, Interpretation, and Critical Reflection. The candidates examine their Action and are concerned with the effective application of pedagogical knowledge and strategies to achieve stated educational goals for every child. This action is subject to Interpretation. Here the candidates explicate and justify the assumptions and predispositions that underlie their teaching/learning activity. During the process of Critical Reflection, candidates assess the adequacy of the educational goals toward which the educational experience leads and incorporate moral and ethical criteria in assessing the outcomes of teaching/learning activities.

From this model, we have conceptualized and implemented an experience cycle for prospective teachers that involves them in a continuous process of action and reflection. This Action-Reflection-Action Cycle occurs over and over with each action serving to stimulate reflection and each reflection serving to stimulate action. The cycle occurs respective to the aspects of campus coursework and the field experiences as well as between the aspects of campus coursework and field experiences.

This cycle is programmatically accomplished by the interplay between coursework and field experience. Most courses in the Professional Education Studies sequence are characterized by a pattern of attendance in campus-based courses/experiences followed by performance in a field-based site. This campus-field-campus pattern ensures that each episode of action is followed by a systematic opportunity to reflect on practical experience and the theoretical frameworks that guide practical activity. Field experiences are not just opportunities for application but are occasions for critical reflection on the theory/practice interaction.

Action-Reflection-Action Cycle in the TARPS Model

ACTION
Planning and implementing strategies and actions for effective teaching/learning for all children

CRITICAL REFLECTION
Incorporates moral and ethical considerations of teaching/learning activity

INTERPRETATION
Explicates and justifies assumptions and predispositions and assesses goals
Attachment B

Revised Teacher As Reflective Problem Solver (TARPS), 2008