

SUNY Potsdam Teacher Education Conceptual Framework

A Tradition of Excellence: Preparing Creative and Reflective Educators

(Updated November, 2006)

Introduction

The State University of New York College at Potsdam has a long history of service to the people of the North Country and New York State. Located between the Adirondack Mountains and the St. Lawrence River Valley, the College provides educational and cultural opportunities for its students, faculty members and the greater college community. Established as St. Lawrence Academy in 1816, the institution evolved into Potsdam Normal School in 1867 and Potsdam State Teachers College in 1942. SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music was founded in 1886 as one of the first institutions in the country to have programs dedicated to preparing specialists in teaching music in the public schools. In 1948, the college became part of The State University of New York, the largest university system in the United States.

Over 4300 students are enrolled in programs at SUNY Potsdam, including more than 3600 undergraduate and 600 graduate students. About 88% of our students are residents of New York State, with over half of those from northern New York State. Most of the over 1500 students registered in professional education programs are from New York, with a significant majority from the northern New York region (Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2006).

Foundational Documents for Development of the Conceptual Framework

SUNY Potsdam Mission Statement (revised 2006). The State University of New York at Potsdam prepares students to act as engaged global citizens and to lead lives enriched by critical thought, creativity, and discovery. As an inclusive scholarly community rooted in our historic role in providing exemplary teacher and music education, and leadership in the fine and performing arts, we are committed to the liberal arts and sciences as an academic foundation for all students. With an abiding sense of responsibility to our region and to the world beyond, SUNY Potsdam fosters an appreciation of and respect for the variety of human experience (www.potsdam.edu).

Teacher Education Mission Statement (1995). The Department of Teacher Education at SUNY Potsdam is committed to the preparation and enhancement of teachers who are grounded in disciplinary knowledge emanating from the arts and sciences and in curricular and instructional theory and practice. The department strives to assist teachers to become reflective practitioners, life-long learners, and persons able to integrate their knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy, students, the school and the larger community to maximize the education and welfare of all students. The Department of Teacher Education is committed to preparing and sustaining teachers who hold knowledge and attitudes needed in dealing with the challenges facing schools today and in the future. These new challenges include: increased diversity of the student population in terms of abilities, linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds; rapid technological advancements; changes in assessment practices; and school restructuring and reform.

The Crane School of Music Mission Statement (1995). The Crane School of Music is a community of musician/educators committed to fostering a vital music society. Thriving programs in performance, composition, music business and the academic disciplines of music history and theory enrich our long-standing heritage of leadership in music education. Our undergraduate programs are designed to provide a strong comprehensive foundation across all areas of study, whereas our graduate programs bring greater depth and focus to these areas. In keeping with SUNY-Potsdam's mission as a student-centered institution, Crane students and faculty collaborate in pursuing a broad range of opportunities for artistic, personal, and professional growth. Blending proven traditional approaches and promising educational innovations in a uniquely supportive and cooperative learning community, the Crane School equips students with both foundations and the flexibility needed for the challenges of the 21st century.

Commitment to Diversity

The College's commitment to diversity is inclusive of race, national, or ethnic background, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion and socioeconomic background as are the education programs offered by the Professional Education Unit. This is reflected in the College's efforts to recruit and retain students from under-represented groups from the neighboring Akwesasne/Mohawk reservation and from major urban areas including New York City and Syracuse. These outreach efforts have also led to the establishment and development of partnerships with local school districts serving Mohawk students and with urban educational partnerships in New York City and Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Twenty eight of the 40 North Country school districts used for field experiences and student teaching have been identified by New York State Education Department as *high-needs school districts*, based primarily on population poverty rates and the proportion of English language learners. The College has accepted its responsibility to the students and teachers of those districts along with the other schools in the North Country. This work is evident in the College's federally and state funded educational outreach programs housed in the Center for Diversity and the continued commitment of our education programs to establish strong professional development partnerships with the schools in this area.

Through ongoing and collective works, the programs of SUNY Potsdam's Professional Education Unit have assured that the College and our graduates are committed to students of diverse backgrounds and their educational needs. Recognizing the need for preparing students to enter a global society, the College is committed to promoting multiculturalism and diversity throughout the campus, with efforts made to assure access to all. This includes recruiting and graduating a diverse student population as well as developing an understanding of and appreciation for diverse cultures. Access to higher education for all was a goal from our earliest years (Lahey, 1966). The College strives to ensure that our commitment to multiculturalism and diversity goes beyond the classroom and is "bound by a continuous thread that is sewn throughout the campus and our service community." (Robinson, 2001)

SUNY Potsdam Conceptual Framework (2001)
A Tradition of Excellence:
Preparing Creative and Reflective Educators

In 1999, the State of New York required all of its teacher education programs to be revised and re-registered. As part of this process the SUNY Potsdam faculty in education programs revisited their mission statement and developed a conceptual framework organized around three main themes.

- **Well Educated Citizen**
- **Reflective Practitioner**
- **Principled Educator**
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- **Well-Educated Citizen**
- critically analyzes and solves problems
- organizes thought and communicates effectively
- understands history and our social and political institutions
- understands and respects other cultures and our intercultural world
- understands the impact of science and technology on our lives
- appropriately uses technology
- has experience creating and appreciating the arts
- has a broad and deep understanding of the subject matter one teaches
- models the skills, attitudes, and values of inquiry appropriate to one's discipline

Reflective Practitioner

- models inquiry, practice, and reflection
- effectively uses research-based models of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- meets the diverse learning needs of students
- applies knowledge of local, state, and national standards
- effectively uses instructional and assistive technology
- promotes inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving
- creates positive learning environments for all students
- uses research, reflection and discourse throughout one's career
- prepared to become an instructional leader

Principled Educator

- behaves in a professional manner
- maintains a high level of competence and integrity in one's practice
- willing to take risks, be flexible, and show comfort with uncertainty
- works well with others
- takes responsibility for one's own actions
- recognizes and respects one's own diversity and that of others
- fosters positive relationships with students, parents, administrators, colleagues, and agencies in the community to support student learning and well being

Conceptual Framework Knowledge Base

A Tradition of Excellence:

Preparing Creative and Reflective Educators

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In so doing, we have focused our efforts on the three central questions identified by the National Academy of Education's Committee on Teacher Education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005), namely the knowledge and skills effective teachers need and the professional commitments that will allow them to help every child succeed.

Well Educated Citizen

Content knowledge and the skills for learning and using that knowledge are the foundation of any teacher preparation program. From its earliest beginnings in 1816, education at SUNY Potsdam (then St. Lawrence Academy) was based on a firm grounding in the content disciplines from which the school would prepare quality teachers for the region (Lahey, 1966). When Asa Brainard became preceptor in 1828, he set about the task of developing a curriculum to meet the needs of the changing society, coupled with a way of learning to allow students to take advantage of the curriculum. Mastery in the content disciplines has remained a central mission of the college since that time.

SUNY Potsdam today still believes that the full college community must be involved in preparing teachers to meet the needs of today's elementary and secondary school students. All undergraduate students at the College complete a general education program that is committed to developing our students' skills as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and graduates who have the ability to organize thought and communicate effectively in written and oral form. Supported by faculty from all three schools at the College, the General Education Program seeks to provide students with a deep and broad understanding of history and our social and political institutions; an understanding of the impact of science and technology on our lives; experience in creating and appreciating the arts; and the intercultural understandings that are so essential in our interactive and intercultural world. Learning to use technology as research, analysis, and communication tools during their years at SUNY Potsdam, our students are prepared to maintain their technical skills throughout their lifetime (SUNY Potsdam Catalog, 2006, p.70-72). The General Education program provides strong support to the development of our undergraduate candidates as *well educated citizens*.

In their role as teachers, our candidates must also have a deep and flexible understanding of the subjects they teach as the foundation for their pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Through their academic majors, graduates of the SUNY Potsdam teacher education programs acquire a broad and deep knowledge of this subject matter; develop appropriate modes of inquiry for their discipline(s) and see a variety of appropriate instructional and assessment techniques modeled by their teachers. They learn to model the skills, attitudes, and values of inquiry appropriate to their discipline while developing a life-long love and curiosity for the subject. Their strong liberal arts majors or concentrations ensure that SUNY Potsdam's teacher education graduates have the content knowledge to support the New York Learning Standards appropriate for their certification area (INTASC, 1992; New York State Department of Education, n.d.).

Our graduate programs consider a strong foundation in the disciplines as the primary criteria for admission. Whether the graduate applicants received their baccalaureate preparation at SUNY Potsdam or at another institution, we seek to assure that the breadth, depth and strength of that knowledge base will support the pursuit of a career in teaching through demonstration of the completion of an academic major and general education requirements.

Our faculty also understands that their own growth in their disciplines is critical to effective teaching. While the scholarship of teaching is the most prevalent way our faculty contributes to the growth of the knowledge base, SUNY Potsdam professors also engage in the scholarship of discovery, integration, and application (Boyer, 1990).

Reflective Practitioner

Becoming a good teacher requires more than completing an excellent education in the liberal arts and sciences (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein, 1995; Hill, Schilling & Ball, 2004). Teacher education research shows that liberally educated college students do not necessarily acquire the knowledge, insight, and imagination essential for good teaching. Instead, as argued by Linda Darling-Hammond (1987), good teaching “requires knowledge of and insight into the minds of students, and relentless imagination in forging connections that will make understanding the possession of the learner, not just the teacher. Such knowledge, insight and imagination ... must be developed and nurtured through careful and disciplined inquiry, practice and reflection.” (p. 44)

This disciplined inquiry begins with helping novice teachers develop a sense of themselves as learners. Early in their programs our candidates are asked to articulate their philosophy of education and are given the opportunity to identify their own preferred learning styles. By examining their own strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs about learning, they are better able to provide appropriate instruction for their diverse students.

Education programs at SUNY Potsdam seek to develop and nurture inquiry, practice, and reflection by working with the arts and sciences faculty to ensure that the content knowledge base for teachers is strong and appropriate. Building on that strong liberal arts foundation, the teacher education programs at SUNY Potsdam provide our candidates with the understanding of how best to teach. These best teaching practices are research-based and represent both general and content-specific teaching methodology (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004).

However, "teachers learn best by studying, doing, reflecting; by collaborating with other teachers; by looking closely at students and their work; and by sharing what they see." (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 8) Carefully developed sequences of education courses and integrated field-based programs provide these best learning experiences for pre-service and inservice teachers at SUNY Potsdam. Field supervisors carefully guide our candidates in reflecting on their own practice, using the techniques of cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Working closely with our preK-12 school partners, essential experiential opportunities are developed to help teachers to connect the theoretical and experiential aspects of teaching. Program advisory groups made up of SUNY Potsdam faculty and alumni and faculty and administrators from our preK-12 school partners inform and advise all of our teacher education programs.

SUNY Potsdam's teacher education candidates build their understanding of best teaching practices by focusing on the following four areas:

Diverse learning and developmental needs of students. Understanding how children and adolescents develop and learn is essential for successful teaching. Through interrelated coursework in the arts and sciences, education, and practicum experience, teacher education candidates at SUNY Potsdam learn how to support the intellectual, social, physical, and emotional development of diverse learners. Through a variety of field experiences, program candidates have the opportunity to observe, implement, and reflect on instructional practices deemed appropriate for these different developmental stages and learning needs. (INTASC, 1992, Principles 2 and 3; Smith, 1998)

Curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Effective curriculum development, instructional planning and design of informal and formal means of assessment are central to good teaching. Using research-based models of curriculum and instruction, SUNY Potsdam candidates develop curricular and instructional plans based on the needs of their students, the subject matter and its disciplinary structures, and state and local standards (INTASC, 1992, Principles 1 and 2). Building on their knowledge of the diverse learning and developmental needs of their students, SUNY Potsdam candidates learn to develop or select content, resources, and strategies that respond to cultural, linguistic and gender differences and the developmental stages and special learning needs of their students (INTASC, 1992, Principle 3; Smith, 1998). They will promote inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving in their classrooms, by using a variety of instructional strategies. These instructional plans recognize students as active learners, participants in learning, and creators of knowledge (INTASC, 1992, Principle 4 and 7).

Our candidates also become skilled in the use of instructional and assistive technologies. They understand how to help their students acquire information, communicate, and enhance understanding using appropriate technologies (State of New York, 1998; INTASC, 1992, Principle 6). In addition, our candidates are prepared to help their students develop an understanding of ethical and effective uses of information and information technology.

If good learning experiences are to be challenging, coherent, and aimed at developing the full range of students' capabilities, then curriculum, instruction, and assessment must be coordinated and interrelated rather than being delivered out of context. (New York State Education Department, 1994). In accordance with the New York State Education Department's view of assessment, the education faculty at SUNY Potsdam both model for and develop in our candidates the ability to use a variety of assessment tools to evaluate student performance and to inform instruction. Preservice and inservice teachers learn to value and use a variety of tools to assess the growth and development of diverse learners. They understand how to align their curriculum, instruction and assessments with state standards to ensure that each student has the opportunity to meet those standards. In addition, they learn to communicate the results of these assessments to students, parents, administrators, and other members of the school community in a constructive and informative manner (INTASC, 1992, Principles 6, 7, 8 and 10). During their capstone practica, they demonstrate these capabilities through preparation of a data-based teaching unit (Girod, 2002).

Learning environment for all students. "In the kind of country we are and aspire to be, teaching and learning for understanding cannot be rationed to a few" (Holmes Group, 1990, p. 29). Graduates of SUNY Potsdam teacher education programs are able to create classrooms where "everybody's children participate in making knowledge and meaning--where each child is a valued member of a community of learning" (Holmes Group, 1990, p.29). Using effective, research-based instructional and behavioral management strategies, our candidates learn to develop learning environments that encourage self-discipline, self-advocacy, self-esteem, and self-reflection in their students. They create accessible and flexible instructional environments based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002). They also apply their knowledge of motivational and classroom management techniques to foster the interest, cooperation and achievement of all students. Their classrooms are inviting, well organized and make effective use of available instructional technology. The learning environments created will promote effective, culturally responsive communication and collaboration with and among students, parents, and school-community personnel (INTASC, 1992, Principles 5, 6, and 10; Smith, 1998).

Reflective teaching leading to educational reform. Reflection provides the foundation for innovation and change. Accomplished teachers today "model what it means to be an educated person – they read, they question, they are curious about and willing to try new things. They are familiar with learning theories and instructional strategies and stay abreast of current issues in American education. They respect the cultural and family differences students bring to their classroom. These accomplished teachers critically examine their practice on a regular basis, to deepen knowledge, expand their repertoire of skills, and incorporate new findings into their practice (Girod, 2002; NBPTS, n. d., Core Proposition 4).

SUNY Potsdam's teacher education programs seek to prepare teachers who are prepared to become the instructional leaders in their schools. This preparation begins with an introduction to the history, philosophy, and role of education in our society. Our candidates begin with knowledge of how local, state and national standards are developed and implemented in schools. They come to understand how they can become involved in this process and how to participate in relevant professional educational organizations.

Through the use of inquiry, reflection, and discourse, the education faculty at SUNY Potsdam encourages their students to continually examine their own practice. The ability to engage in quantitative, qualitative and action research helps provide candidates with "disciplined ways to evaluate both their intuitive beliefs about teaching and the effectiveness of instructional approaches derived from theories and research" (Ross, 1990, p. 101). SUNY Potsdam candidates exit the program with the tools needed to continue this research, reflection, and discourse throughout their careers. They will seek out and value the voices of all stakeholders. Our graduates will be prepared to make well-informed curricular and instructional decisions for their schools. (INTASC, 1992, Principle 9)

Principled Educator

Teachers are role models for their students. It is therefore imperative that they be professionally ethical and maintain a high level of competence and integrity in practicing their profession. The teacher education programs at SUNY Potsdam are committed to developing teachers who exhibit the values and dispositions that will influence positively the lives of all of their students. Dispositions are “the professional virtues, qualities and habits of mind and behavior held and developed by teachers on the basis of their knowledge, understanding, and commitments to students, families, their colleagues, and communities” (Sockett, 2006, p.23).

Preservice teachers must recognize that their teacher education program is only the beginning of their journey toward becoming a model teacher. If the journey is to be successful, they must continue to develop as a teacher, be comfortable with uncertainty, be flexible, and be willing to take risks throughout their careers. They must also demonstrate the ability to work well with others and to take responsibility for their own actions.

Knowing that they are preparing children and adolescents to enter a global society, graduates of the SUNY Potsdam teacher education programs need to demonstrate a knowledge of and respect for the diverse cultures, socioeconomic status, religions, gender, language, sexual orientation, and physical and mental abilities of represented among members of this society. Early in their programs, candidates learn to recognize the diversity in their backgrounds and how that diversity influences them as a person. They use these experiences as a foundation to learn about and to value the diversity in the communities where they will teach (Smith, 1998; Zeichner, 1993). Whether working with students, parents, colleagues, administrators, or agencies in the larger community, our graduates will display the dispositions needed to foster positive relationships to support their students' learning and well-being.

Summary

Teacher education has been and continues to be central to the mission of SUNY Potsdam. The college community and the College's preK-12 school partners are working together to develop tomorrow's teachers today. These teachers will be well prepared to meet the needs of today's schools and develop into the educational leaders of the future. Whether the schools are in our immediate College service area, or a part of the program's broadening urban and international partnerships, our graduates are prepared as well-educated citizens, reflective practitioners and principled educators to serve, individually as teachers and collectively as life-long learners, the diverse needs of the communities in which they live and work.

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