



What is the Conceptual Framework of the Undergraduate Teacher Education Unit?

*Becoming teachers who teach boldly in a changing world
through an ethic of care and critical reflection.*

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, in alignment with state, national, and specialized professional association standards, 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.

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*

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, value service to others, and teach boldly in a changing world through an ethic of care and critical reflection.

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 in the integration of Anabaptist principles within the profession of teaching emphasizing community, caring relationships, service to others, peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and stewardship of resources.
- We believe that candidates are best prepared through a rigorous liberal arts program that seeks connections across disciplines and cultures.
- We believe in a reflective teaching model that cultivates inquiry in teaching, promotes an ethic of care, and ensures learning for each learner.
- We believe in the integration of theory and critical reflective practice through purposeful and systematic experiences in university classrooms and field placements within P-12 settings.
- We believe that candidates have the power to serve as collaborative change agents with an ethical obligation to meet the needs of each learner.
- 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 nurture, model, and enact the qualities expected of candidates through engagement with the departmental learning community and broader professional contexts.

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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 and complex nature of schooling and schools. Aware that education has promise to build democracy and increase societal equity, we also recognize that systematic tendencies often allow schools to perpetuate unjust racial and class divisions. In our work with candidates and in our collaborative scholarship, we seek to address the tensions embedded in teaching and learning with an ethos of care, a commitment to justice, and a critical and sustaining hope. These commitments are anchored in religious and moral values embraced by Anabaptists for nearly 500 years and informed by educational theorists and theories including, but not limited to, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Paulo Freire, Nel Noddings, and Jerome Bruner. As we prepare teachers for a changing world, a world that is increasingly technological, multicultural, postmodern, and secular, we do so by incorporating the distinctive themes of Anabaptist faith into the ethos and pedagogy of education (Roth, 2011). We also work with a keen awareness that “teachers who re-imagine teaching as a set of critical practices disrupt the normative patterns of society and open up spaces for new voices to be heard” (Leland & Harste, 2000, p. 6).

The ultimate goal of teacher education at EMU is to provide learning experiences through which each candidate develops a stance of inquiry leading to informed, theoretically grounded, pedagogical decision-making. Embedded in this stance, as defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), is the expectation that practitioners in education “work in alliance with others to transform teaching, learning, leading, and schooling in accordance with democratic principles and social justice goals” (p. 118). It is in keeping with Anabaptist theology embodied at EMU that beliefs are synonymous with actions. The EMU teacher education program demonstrates the related conceptual understanding of teaching as praxis, a problem-posing cycle of learning, acting, and reflecting on that action, espoused by Freire (1970) and built upon by a range of theorists. Critical praxis as a model of teaching and learning is not only about theory informing practice, but also about practice informing theory (Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). According to Freire (1970), praxis is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 51). Thus, it is the aim of the EMU program to foster candidates who integrate theory and practice in dynamic ways for the purpose of transforming teaching and learning, schools and communities.

This dynamic concept of transformative teaching and learning as the enactment of critical praxis is complex and multi-faceted. Nurturing candidates as they experience and develop a model of teaching and learning in this way involves richly layered strands of program coordination. The development of this stance is shaped and supported by the program’s philosophical foundations in an ethic of care, constructivism, reflective practice, and expanding literacies for the 21st century.

An Ethic of Care

The university’s general education framework is drawn from the biblical text Micah 6:8, which calls us “to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.” The teacher education program is committed to culturally responsive teaching, peacebuilding, and restorative approaches in which critical caring within just relationships is paramount. We expect our candidates to reflect a willingness to listen and attend differentially to student needs and to promote school environments where students are treated with respect and learn to treat one another with respect (Lantieri & Patti, 2002). Regardless of cultural, intellectual, or gender

differences, an ethic of care respects the multiple talents and capacities of all individuals and preserves the dignity of all persons. We aim to prepare teachers who will successfully pursue an ethic of care as they build student-oriented classroom communities focused on student learning (Caldwell, 2008).

Caring is a way of being in relationship with others (Noddings, 2005). 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 (2003a) distinguishes between the concepts of *caring for* and *caring about* and describes *caring for* as a reciprocal, responsive, and relational transaction between the *carer* and the *cared-for*. 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. In *caring for*, the teacher meets the needs of students with diverse interests and abilities (Noddings, 2003b). 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” (p. 62). Katz (2007) characterizes this concept of *caring for* as “professional caring” in which the teacher cares for the student as a learner.

Such caring is not simple or rhetorical; critical care requires action. It moves intentionally beyond what Duncan-Andrade (2009) identifies as “false caring” through which “the more powerful members of a the relationship define themselves as caring despite the fact that the recipients of their so-called caring do not perceive it as such” (p. 183). Many educators care about students; EMU’s teacher education program recognizes that meaningful caring requires that educators “stand firm against racism, injustice, centralized power, poverty and other gross inequities throughout society for it is these conditions that diminish the dignity and debilitate the hopes of too many young people” (Beane & Apple, 2007, p. 13). Teachers who embody and enact critical caring demonstrate “high performance, expectations, advocacy, and empowerment of students” through “their use of pedagogical practices that facilitate school success” (Gay, 2000, p. 62).

Caring is also enacted through restorative approaches in education (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). A restorative framework relates both to nurturing relational behaviors in school settings and to building inclusive school communities. Recognizing that the aim of the teacher is to engage each student as learner, EMU teacher education nurtures candidates in valuing school discipline that mediates wrongs and restores relationships among all participants in the learning community. Also aware that differences in culture, ethnicity, race, skill, ability and behavior create rich and vibrant learning experiences, EMU candidates are nurtured to demonstrate caring by attending to the needs of diverse learners and the contributions of each to the learning community.

An ethic of care shapes many aspects of teacher education at EMU. It informs our program outcomes and the development of candidates’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions. For example,

- 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 Inquiry requires critical thinking about theory and practice, ethics and values, personal reflection and conduct.
- 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 Leadership requires professional development and transforming approaches to education through advocacy for children and youth.

Constructivism

The philosophical base for the teacher education program is further informed by the theory of constructivism. Constructivism is a ubiquitous term that represents both a theoretical position and a set of instructional principles. For example, Fosnot's (1996) understanding of constructivism is primarily theoretical, driven by a post-structuralist understanding of psychological theory that "construes learning as an interpretive, recursive, building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world" (p. 30). Henderson's notion of constructivism, by contrast, represents a more pedagogical understanding, viewing constructivist instruction as "any deliberate, thoughtful, educational activity that is designed to facilitate students' active understanding" (Henderson, as cited in Fosnot, 1996, p. 9). The constructivist approach taken by the EMU teacher education program seeks to integrate theory and practice, recognizing the importance of both practice grounded in theory and theory practically applied.

While acknowledging various approaches to constructivist instruction, our conceptual framework is rooted in constructivist theory. Based on the foundational theories of both Piaget and Vygotsky, constructivists share the notion that learners are actively constructing their own understanding of concepts and are not mere recipients of knowledge that is passed along to them. While Piaget viewed this construction of knowledge as primarily occurring in the mind of the individual learner, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in constructing knowledge. We value both perspectives and work to enhance the individual learning capacity of each student, while at the same time, acknowledging the sociocultural contexts of learning. This awareness of the "social, cultural, political embeddedness of teaching-learning is essential" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 132) and fosters the growth of transformative leaders, who not only engage in the realities of what exist but who also actively engage in social and cultural transformation.

Consistent with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, we view students and teachers as actively participating in a community of learners where knowledge is synergistically constructed through social interaction between all members of the learning community. In that the act of teaching cannot be distinguished from the act of learning, teachers using a constructivist approach see themselves as co-learners with their students and value the assets of each member of the learning community. While a variety of instructional approaches might be used within a constructivist framework, the primary emphasis is on student questioning, active learning, creative problem solving, and collaboration. In such learning communities, teachers and students alike take responsibility for assessing and solving problems collaboratively, not through mechanistic "cook book" recipes, but by asking, "What decisions should we be making," "On what basis do we make these decisions," and "What can we do to enhance learning?"

Reflective Practice

The philosophical base is also informed by the understanding that reflection is at the heart of practice (McEntee et al., 2003). Reflective practice is an "iterative process rather than a one-off event, involving repeated cycles of examining practice, adjusting practice and reflecting upon it, before trying it again" (Grushka, McLeod, & Reynolds, 2005, p. 239). The reflective process,

both reflecting-in-action and reflecting-on-action (Schon, 1993), allows the teacher to create meaning around practice. The new understanding that comes from reflection acts as the starting point for adapting one's practice (Kahn et al., 2006). Reflective teachers are able to carefully examine and analyze their teaching with the goal of gaining new insight and understanding into their own teaching, which increases their own capacity for learning as knowledge, skills, and dispositions change, and use the new understanding to improve student learning (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

Such reflective action and teaching, seen as a cycle of critical praxis intended to transform, requires support and development for candidates over the span of the program. Coming to see teaching, learning, and schooling from multiple perspectives and defined by competing agendas creates cognitive dissonance for many becoming teachers. The literature suggests there is a strong tendency for candidates, despite the philosophies of their teacher education programs, to revert to the teaching styles they experienced as K-12 students (Yost et al., 2000). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) note that this return to familiar models reproduces what Freire (1970) calls the banking model. Through a combination of coursework, collaborative processes, individual reflection, and consistent practicum experiences throughout the program, our candidates are nurtured in critical reflection in order to see and respond to elements of schooling that often go unnoted. The EMU program demonstrates commitment to developing critical reflection through which candidates move beyond descriptive awareness of classroom events to critical reflective action. Such action includes acknowledgement of productive tensions and transformative action in teaching and learning.

Critical reflection is the process of analyzing, reconsidering and questioning experiences within a broad context of issues related to social justice, curriculum development, learning theories, politics, and culture (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2006). Critical reflection requires an acknowledgement that teaching can empower or oppress. With an intentional focus on critical reflection, teachers can begin to question their assumptions about power structures within the classroom, create conditions where all voices are heard and where educational processes are open to negotiation, and create connections between educational outcomes and students' values and experiences (Brookfield, 1995). It is through the application of critical reflection that caring teachers will have the courage and competences to become effective agents for just learning communities (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Expanding Literacies for the 21st Century

We recognize that the teaching and learning of literacies for the 21st century is more complex and socio-culturally influenced than mastering a set of isolated and politically neutral language skills. Our program's concern for literacies is informed by works such as Heath's (1983) *Ways With Words* and the view that literacy, traditionally defined as reading and writing, is one aspect of an ethnographic understanding of communication. We also note the significant expansion of what counts as student literacy in and out of school settings as noted within New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1996; Street, 2001). Additionally, we share a growing concern for critical literacy and a commitment to literacy instruction that invites students to "read the world" (Freire, 1970). This rich foundation informs our attention to 21st century literacies including: technological proficiency with attention to equity, teaching within and across current educational tensions, and collaborative and ethical communications.

One aspect of technological proficiency in 21st century teaching is the functional use of a variety of technology tools (e.g. Smartboards, iPads, digital cameras, digital storytelling, blogging, online communities). Literacy skills for teaching and learning in the 21st century, however, are not limited to technological skills. Grabill and Hicks (2005) note, for example, that

“writing instruction must equip students with the tools, skills, and strategies not just to produce traditional texts using computer technology, but also to produce documents appropriate to the global and dispersed reach of the web” (p. 305). Teaching and learning with powerful tools of technology are essential for our candidates but only in relation to the ways that evolving technological literacies are used to expand the production, analysis, and evaluation of texts.

Teaching also requires more subtle 21st century literacy skills. Effective and dynamic teaching requires that teachers enact what Hines & Johnson (2007) call “Systems Literacies” and “Strategic Literacies.” The fluidity of the educational landscape requires that we prepare flexible, reflective, and critical educators who understand and enact hybridized approaches to teaching and learning in response to mixed messages. Such teachers recognize that school systems favor and disfavor theoretical approaches over time and position teachers and students within current dominant views. Shifts in the educational terrain are evidenced in overt political policies, in subtle sociocultural expectations, and in the rapidly evolving literacies of technology and media. With awareness of systems literacies and strategic literacies, we support candidates toward the goal of enacting teaching that simultaneously aims for theoretical ideals and attends to current (and shifting) realities.

In addition to technological proficiency and systems literacies, teaching and learning with 21st century literacy skills require collaborative and ethical community involvement. Our candidates will teach in educational climates that are changing. As Roth (2011) describes, “The context of our work is constantly changing, which requires communities to adapt and change in response. This means that healthy communities will always need to balance the inevitable diversity of individual difference and the constant reality of change with a deeper sense of coherence and a shared commitment to a larger whole” (p. 105). Understanding teaching as praxis involves posing and solving problems within communities and across cultural differences in a changing world. As candidates reflectively attend to deeply held and shared values, they must also be responsive to group dynamics in classrooms and in collegial groups. Such skills are not new to the demands of teaching, yet the dynamic nature of change, global community, and sustainability in the current era of education increase the value of a diverse range of teaching and learning literacies. EMU’s candidates are teachers and learners who will employ a wide range of 21st century literacies to meet and adapt to a changing world.

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What are the Candidate Performance Outcomes?

Scholarship: to acquire knowledge through the liberal arts, Core 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) 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 through critical reflection, problem-solving, and dialogue
- demonstrate teaching as praxis by drawing 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 and 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
- adapt and/or create a variety of instruction to provide equitable opportunities for all learners including those from diverse cultural backgrounds and with exceptionalities
- integrate informal and formal assessments into instruction, maintain records, and analyze data to inform teaching decisions and to monitor student progress
- examine how educational legal and policy issues affect students', caregivers', 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 caregivers 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 each student
- evaluate the effects of his or her actions on students, colleagues, and supervisors
- promote restorative approaches to peacebuilding 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 each student
- 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

- demonstrate resourcefulness and responsibility in creating just and equitable educational settings
- build productive and collaborative relationships with colleagues
- participate in opportunities for professional growth

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What are the Dispositions?

***Becoming teachers who teach boldly in a changing world
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The knowledge base and candidate performance outcomes provide the framework for dispositions that the education program seeks to develop in candidates.

Responsibility

1. Is punctual and consistent in attendance
2. Sets appropriate priorities and meets deadlines
3. Presents a positive outlook
4. Demonstrates mature judgment and regulates emotions
5. Takes responsibility for actions

Relationships

1. Listens actively to others
2. Demonstrates compassion and empathy towards others
3. Promotes justice in relationships
4. Willing to work with persons from a variety of perspectives and cultural/ethnic groups
5. Develops collaborative, positive relationships with peers and supervisors

Scholarship and Inquiry

1. Demonstrates curiosity/enthusiasm about learning
2. Asks pertinent questions
3. Applies knowledge in new settings or across settings
4. Analyzes and evaluates information across contexts
5. Considers issues from multiple perspectives

Reflective Action

1. Responds well to criticism or suggestions
2. Applies feedback to personal and professional growth
3. Demonstrates a sound decision-making process using self-reflection as well as other inputs
4. Self-assesses, evaluates progress, sets realistic goals

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