
UNI Educator Preparation Program Vision/Mission/Belief Statements/Conceptual Framework 2023-2024

Vision

The UNI Educator Preparation Program seeks to be an influential source of excellence in knowledge and practice in education. We strive to inspire educators to effectively 1) apply content and pedagogy in practical settings, 2) navigate changing social and political contexts to promote social justice, and 3) demonstrate competence in leadership, advocacy, and collaboration.

Mission

The UNI Educator Preparation Program provides an authentic and challenging education that empowers candidates to serve as reflective, professional educators who advocate for students, schools, communities, and the profession in a dynamic and changing world.

Belief Statements

UNI Educator Preparation Program professionals believe the following are key components of a strong educator preparation program:

- 1. Candidates must deeply understand and reflect on student learning, the content of their subject matter and effective pedagogical practices.**
- 2. Candidates must engage in rich, purposeful, and authentic field-based experiences to develop appropriate dispositions and practices.**
- 3. Candidates have a responsibility to understand how historical, social, cultural, and political contexts impact education.**
- 4. Candidates must understand the importance of diversity and equity and engage in opportunities to promote social justice.**
- 5. Candidates must develop competence in the skills and dispositions that allow them to engage in effective leadership and advocacy.**
- 6. Candidates must develop strong skills in order to effectively collaborate with all stakeholders for student learning.**

Conceptual Framework

1. Candidates must deeply understand and reflect on student learning, the content of their subject matter and effective pedagogical practices.

Unpacking student learning, subject-matter and pedagogy.

Learning, content and pedagogy are complex ideas that candidates come to understand more deeply as a result of participating in UNI's Educator Preparation Program. For example, most candidates enter the program thinking of content solely as the subject matter they will teach (e.g., mathematics, reading, science, art, music, etc.), and they are right to assume that a deep understanding of this kind of content is an important factor in good teaching (cf. Osborne, Simon & Collins, 2003; Turner-Bisset, 1999). However, these same candidates are often relatively unaware of a more specialized kind of content that Shulman (1987) and others (e.g., Ball, Thames & Phelps, 2008) describe as *pedagogical content knowledge*—a knowledge that informs how content is taught and learned. A major part of what candidates learn in this program is that their “content” is a vitally important, complex network of subject-matter and pedagogical content knowledge that fundamentally affects their daily practice as educators.

Pedagogy is also an idea that candidates must deepen and expand through reflection. The typical dictionary definition of “pedagogy” refers simply to the act of teaching. However, what is left unsaid in this definition is that good pedagogy requires that an educator not only know how teachers teach, but also how learners learn. A lack of awareness of good teaching methods or how students learn can both create problems for an educator, and is a major topic in the writings of John Dewey (1902, 1938). For example, imagine a teacher who focuses solely on the teaching part of pedagogy. This teacher may be so unaware of and inflexible to the needs and capabilities of her students that her otherwise generally accepted, well organized teaching method remains ineffective. Alternatively, consider the teacher who has spent large amounts of time coming to understand his students' current understanding and building up positive relations in the classroom, but has only a shallow knowledge of the curricular tools and instructional strategies that are available to him. The students in this classroom may come to see this teacher as well-intentioned, but ultimately ineffective. In both examples, the teacher failed to practice their pedagogy in a more holistic sense.

Student-centered instruction.

As educator preparation professionals at UNI, we believe that serious reflection upon content and pedagogy can have a transformative effect upon educators in which they become more *student-centered* in their instruction (Jonassen & Easter, 2012; Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000). This type of instruction emphasizes the perspective that students (or, more generally, learners) should be at the center of nearly everything that a teacher does. When done well, student-centered instructors consider their students' personal characteristics, behaviors, and ever-changing background knowledge, while simultaneously considering goals for instruction, and the affordances and constraints of the content *upon* instruction. Put another way, student-centered instruction affects all aspects of instruction including planning, instructional design, classroom environment, and assessment practices. This concept of student-centered instruction as an end result of understanding and reflection upon content and pedagogy is a pervasive idea in UNI's Educator Preparation Program (Herring et al., 2015).

How candidates learn about learning, content and pedagogy.

From a structural perspective, candidates engage in learning about content and pedagogy through four highly integrated components of the UNI's Educator Preparation Program:

- A strong professional “core” of foundational coursework taken throughout the program that emphasizes key concepts in teaching and learning such as development, cognition, motivation, assessment, technology and individual differences, as well as social, cultural, political and historical contexts of education
- Authentic, systematic, and progressive field experiences that are linked to candidates' coursework and supervised by highly experienced specialists
- Robust content knowledge provided by experts in their respective fields
- Methods coursework that require candidates to integrate the very best instructional practices with their subject matter knowledge, and concepts they have learned in the professional core and in their targeted field experiences

We emphasize that a hallmark of these four components of UNI's Educator Preparation Program is that each is designed to have meaningful connections with the other components. For example, field experiences are tied to specific methods and core courses with the intention of helping candidates see the value of combining theory with practice. In addition, most educator preparation professionals who teach methods coursework are in the same department with faculty who teach subject matter content, allowing these professionals opportunities to communicate and collaborate with one another about how to better serve their educator preparation students. Lastly, the governance structure of UNI's Educator Preparation Program encourages broad participation and representation in the decision-making process of these components so that no one component is neglected.

Focus on understanding and reflection.

Helping candidates to understand and reflect upon their content and pedagogy is taken very seriously by the education preparation professionals at the University of Northern Iowa. The following are three reasons that support our belief that understanding and reflection should be at the heart of what we do as educator preparation professionals.

- It has been well established that practice must be deliberate in order for it to contribute toward expertise (Feltovitch, Prietula, & Ericsson, 2006). This deliberateness can take the form of candidates meaningfully reflecting upon what they learn in purposefully developed coursework and fieldwork.
- Much of learning to be a professional is about becoming self-regulated (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2004) and self-regulation improves by purposeful and meaningful reflection. Candidates slowly become more self-regulated, instructional decision makers, monitors of student and teacher behavior, and evaluators of personal performance as they demonstrate greater understanding of concepts and practices in their program. Furthermore, since learning to be self-regulated will occur throughout their professional careers, it is vital that candidates learn how to effectively reflect upon and develop deeper understanding of their content and pedagogy before leaving the program.
- Lortie (2002) explains that teachers undergo an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 61) in which a future teacher spends thousands of hours observing the practice of teaching, by virtue of having been a student, before ever receiving formal educator preparation instruction. This informal apprenticeship is helpful to teacher candidates because they are able to draw from many personal experiences. However, it can also instill in candidates the feeling that they know more than they actually do about their content and

pedagogy. If candidates are not confronted with experiences that challenge and expand their understanding of teaching and learning, they will likely find little incentive to do so on their own. For this reason, educator preparation professionals at UNI are devoted to providing deliberate and substantive opportunities for candidates to reflect upon what they know.

2. Candidates must engage in rich, purposeful, and authentic field-based experiences to develop appropriate dispositions and practices.

The UNI Educator Preparation Program firmly believes that rich, authentic, and supported field experiences serve as a critical bridge between the theoretical aspects of training and the practical, day-to-day experiences of teachers (NCATE, 2010). Calderhead (1989) emphasized that “teacher development is conceptualized as an ongoing process of experiencing practical teaching and learning situations, reflecting on them under the guidance of an expert, and developing one’s own insights into teaching through the interaction between personal reflection and theoretical notions offered by an expert.” UNI’s careful attention to intentional field-based experiences gives teacher candidates the opportunity to build their teaching skills, as well as their understanding of theory as a product of the activity, context, and culture of the school setting (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

UNI candidates are supported in a variety of field experiences throughout their preparation. These placements are selected to meet the diverse needs of each candidate, and supervision is provided by a collective partnership between university faculty and field-based expert educators in various partner schools across the Cedar Valley, state, nation, and world. UNI intentionally hires full-time, field experience faculty dedicated to serving as a unique and important bridge between the university and the ever-changing realities of P-12 classrooms.

UNI Educator Preparation faculty members partner with school professionals to create opportunities and advance learning for all. These faculty members serve as important voices on state and national education initiatives. They are grounded in our partner schools, participating in professional learning communities, team-teaching opportunities, and other scholarship endeavors. Many of these faculty members teach methods courses in their content areas, as well as graduate courses and workshops offered as professional development opportunities for in-service teachers.

Authentic field experiences: Early, often, and diverse.

Candidates participate in a variety of developmentally sequenced and closely supervised diverse field experiences that help them become increasingly self-reliant (Sleeter, 2008). These experiences occur early and often across all program areas (Zeichner, 2010). Field experience faculty serve as coaches for candidates, not only placing them in a variety of field experience settings, but helping them navigate the many teaching methods they see along the way through close supervision and continuous feedback. Candidates are exposed to and encouraged to take part in a variety of authentic school experiences early on in the program. These experiences are connected and tied to other coursework in the program and intended to build in sequence. Teacher candidates have opportunities to: design and implement instruction and assessment; use motivation and management strategies; accommodate and adapt instruction for diverse learners; integrate technology; collaborate in professional learning communities; and engage in purposeful reflection. Because of the collective partnership between university faculty and school partners, candidates are empowered to see themselves as a professional educator, taking responsibility and developing autonomy throughout the program.

Reflective practitioners.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program has a rich history of cultivating candidates as reflective practitioners skilled at "questioning the goals, values, and assumptions that guide teaching, as well as examining the context in which it is performed" (Larrivee, 2008). Candidates at UNI are prepared to reflect both *in practice* and *on practice* (Schon, 1983). In other words, candidates reflect both in the field and on their coursework. They are regularly asked to connect to, apply, and extend learning theories, to assess their own performance, to reflect on the assessment of others, and to set their own course of further development.

Throughout the program, candidates examine the contextual makeup of schools, collaborate with expert educators to gain understanding of student diversity, and reflect on their own assumptions that may influence their beliefs and actions. Because candidates participate in a number of authentic settings throughout their program, all of which are supervised by experts in the field, candidates are guided to use instructional practices that are focused on the needs of students instead of simply implementing teaching routines. Candidates are challenged to think beyond a surface, "I did this" to a more student-centered, "What did students learn?" understanding (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Ongoing assessment.

Because candidates are embedded in the P-12 schools early and often, it is imperative that a strong system of assessment exists to provide feedback and ensure candidate growth throughout the program. UNI's Educator Preparation Program is committed to developing a strong assessment system that is personalized to each candidate, aligned with coursework in the program, supportive of their development as empowered educators, and connected to the needs and institutional goals of schools. Continuous evaluation is a shared responsibility of both the expert educators in the field and the UNI faculty who supervise field experiences. In addition to a culminating evaluation, candidates are given ongoing feedback through the use of performance-based assessments. Finally, a Notification of Concern system is utilized to communicate concerns with candidates. These notifications are documented, shared with various levels of support to the candidate, and an action plan is developed to support candidates in developing the areas of concern.

3. Candidates have a responsibility to understand how historical, social, cultural, and political contexts impact education

Increasingly diverse and economically polarized.

United States Census Bureau (2022, 2021) data indicate that the US is becoming an increasingly diverse and stratified society. The Census Bureau projects that the US will become a "majority-minority" nation in the coming decades, and indicates that income inequality is causing a growing number of families to fall into poverty, a reality highlighted by National Center for Education Statistics (2022) data that point toward the growing number of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. The reality of this historical moment is that America's public schools are becoming more culturally diverse with each passing year, and recent trends in the American economy are leading to a significant rise in the number of students living in poverty.

Candidates gain knowledge and understanding of macro-level sociological trends in American society, and they learn to make connections between these trends and their professional practice. Candidates are encouraged to:

- Gain an in-depth understanding of contemporary American society.
- Consider the relationship between the schools in which they work and the communities they serve, such as the complex relationships between housing segregation along the lines of race, ethnicity, and social class, and school segregation in urban, suburban, and rural contexts.
- Consider the cultural and economic diversity of their students and incorporate this understanding into their professional practice.
- Explore the asymmetrical access to social, cultural, and political capital in American society and its impact on the day-to-day professional practice, student learning, and contemporary trends in education policy.

This sociological understanding serves as foundational knowledge to be incorporated into methods, curriculum, and assessment courses as candidates learn to work across differences to create a welcoming school environment in which all students can succeed and grow.

Engaging with political debate and policy reform.

Public education is in a period of unprecedented transformation and policy reform (Ball, 2012; Lubienski & Brewer, 2019; Reckhow & Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Verger et al, 2018). Public figures and citizens increasingly look to America's schools to address pressing concerns about cultural, economic, and political change. Americans are placing ever greater demands on the public education system and its educators to resolve issues of racial inequality, economic growth, and political polarization. The reality of this historical moment is that public education and educators are the focal point of increasingly heated political debate, controversy, and reform.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program candidates investigate recent trends in education policy and reform. They explore the issues animating on-going debate in education policy, and they research the various interest groups and policy actors driving educational change. The program encourages candidates to:

- Understand the historical and political context of contemporary education policy and reform.
- Explore and evaluate federal and state policies related to academic standards, assessment, accountability, and school choice.
- Understand the emergence of new policy actors and policy networks driving educational change at the local, national, and global levels.
- Evaluate the efficacy of current trends in education policy by evaluating the outcomes of specific policies through the lens of their stated goals.
- Consider the practical impact of current trends in education policy on their day-to-day practice, student learning, and the normative ideals of American public education.

These insights serve as foundational knowledge for candidates to explore and contextualize standards, assessment, and accountability in the field of education, and the controversies and debates currently roiling the education profession.

Preparing engaged citizens for a democratic society and globalized world.

The public school is a foundational institution in American democracy. Early advocacy for the creation of a public education system by founders of the republic, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, was predicated on the observation that "a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives" (Madison, 1822).

A society that places trust in the wise decision-making of its citizens to engage in open and honest political dialog and to choose the nation's leaders must work to facilitate the "diffusion of knowledge" among its citizens (Jefferson, 1786), and this observation continues to ring true in this current age of globalization and accelerating cultural, economic, social, and technological change.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program candidates gain an appreciation for the foundational role of teaching and public education in preserving democratic freedom and governance (Dewey, 1944; Thayer-Bacon, 2013). Candidates are encouraged to:

- Consider the democratic ethos of public education and its implications for their professional goals and practice.
- Explore how they can help students develop the knowledge, curiosity, and intellectual dispositions to become democratic citizens in a multicultural society.
- See themselves as advocates for students, communities, and public education.
- Consider the role of public education in the context of a globalized world of economic, cultural, and ideological exchange and conflict.

Candidates who complete their education at UNI will enter the field with the knowledge and skills to be advocates for their students, communities, and public education and to prepare future generations of engaged citizens for a democratic society.

4. Candidates must understand the importance of diversity and equity and engage in opportunities to promote social justice.

Why social justice?

UNI's Educator Preparation Program recognizes that public education is an important component of realizing a vibrant democracy, healthy environment, and safe communities. As such, it is important that schools, from the classroom to the playground, are grounded in a perspective that reflects a deep concern for social justice. Drawing upon Adams et al. (2022), we define social justice as both a process and goal. As a process, social justice calls educators to model a democratic method in their interactions with parents and students—to privilege transparency, shared-decision making power, and accessibility. As a goal, social justice speaks to "a world in which individuals have equitable access to resources, opportunities, and social power and are both able to develop their full capacities and capable of interacting democratically with others" (p. 1). In other words, the goal of social justice is to realize a society where individuals are free to live, learn, and love to the full extent of their capabilities. Overall, an education grounded in social justice recognizes that schools do not inhabit a vacuum—the struggles that educators face are connected to and reflective of larger systems of inequality that must be challenged to ensure an optimal learning environment.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program acknowledges that the history of public schooling shows a checkered history for efforts to realize a socially just education (Spring, 2012). On one hand, schools have reinforced privilege. People at the intersections of White, male, and wealthy have had access to educational opportunities that allowed them to maintain an undue amount of influence over social, political, and familial life. On the other hand, schools have perpetuated oppression based on perceived group membership (see Hardiman, Jackson & Griffin, 2007). Native American boarding schools, school segregation between White and Black students, and so-called "ability tracking" based on gender are just a few examples of the ways that traditionally marginalized groups have been oppressed within school systems. Many of these problems, or

their legacies, continue to afflict contemporary education. We believe that without due diligence, sensitive training, and persistent organizing, educators risk perpetuating these societal ills in their schools and into society.

Five forms of social justice.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program understands that social justice education can take many forms and should be characterized by an intersectional focus (i.e., that different forms of privilege/oppression are interrelated rather than simply additive, see Crenshaw, 1991). With these caveats in mind, we base our program on helping candidates engage in social justice by cultivating a sensitivity for and understanding of five forms of justice. They are:

- **Racial Justice:** Many schools across the U.S. remain deeply segregated and reflect inequitable treatment based on racial identity. Furthermore, educators often rely on frameworks that tokenize, repress, or denigrate non-dominant forms of knowledge. Such activities harm students' ability to learn, feel emotionally secure, and develop positive relationships within the school's culture.
- **Economic Justice:** School funding within the U.S. is largely dependent on the local property taxes of the district, making quality education for people from working class or poverty increasingly difficult to access. Furthermore, the increasing pressure from private sphere interests for schools to tailor their educational content toward pre-professional training skews the purpose of education as a component of a holistic, humanizing experience.
- **Sexual Justice:** Many states across the U.S. have proposed or passed legislation that has targeted LGBT students, making them feel unsafe and unwelcome in schools. Sexual education, when taught at all, is often dominated by curriculum that caters to heterosexual, monogamous relationships.
- **Gender Justice:** Schools within the U.S. are characterized by two problems that inhibit gender justice. First, gender is understood as a simple dichotomy between males and females, which makes gender non-conforming students the object of ridicule, scorn, and violence. Second, female students are often underserved by educators, which contributes to the gender gap between male and female students.
- **Dis/ability Justice:** Although many schools adhere to the letter of disability laws (e.g., IDEA and ADA), many schools have yet to model an inclusive and universally-designed environment for students with disabilities. As such, it promotes the notion that some students' physical, cognitive, or emotional abilities are normal while others are deviant, aberrant, or abnormal.

Candidates are encouraged to recognize that interracial dialogue, promoting equitable opportunities, providing safe and inclusive environments, and supporting students as they develop their whole identity are critical to becoming an effective educator in an increasingly diverse and economically polarized society.

Enacting social justice pedagogy.

UNI's Educator Preparation Program prepares candidates to educate all students. However, research has shown that educators across the country are often not adequately prepared to educate students who identify with groups different from their own (Ladson-Billings, 2000). For example, the knowledge, culture, and experiences of majority White, female, middle class educators may be significantly different from students they interact with in schools (Dee & Henkin, 2002). These differences can be problematic for educators given that knowledge of students is an important part of the knowledge base for teaching (Shulman, 1987). Candidates and faculty are encouraged to interrogate their own racial, economic, sexual, gender, and

dis/ability identities, the identities of students, and how both impact the teaching and learning process (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). UNI's Educator Preparation Program creates opportunities for candidates to work with P-12 students from many different and diverse backgrounds in the Cedar Valley, the state, the country, and the world.

Promoting social justice requires reflecting and acting on one's own relationship to social justice and teaching others to engage in the work. Candidates need opportunities to "understand the sociopolitical, cultural-historical conditions of one's life, community, society, and world" and to "[empower] them to change what is unjust" (Gutstein, 2006, p. 4). Therefore, candidates must first understand the need for students to: experience academic success, understand and value their culture, develop tools to analyze issues of social justice, and work to effect change (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Second, candidates must develop the cultural competence to work effectively with all students, and open lines of communication to the communities they serve (Gay & Kirkland, 1987). Third, they must maintain their students' cultural integrity, view their students' backgrounds as tools and resources as opposed to deficits and liabilities, and use their students' cultural/home/community funds of knowledge to further learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay & Baber, 1987). Finally, candidates should provide students with opportunities to understand issues of social justice, develop the tools to analyze these issues and work to potentially effect change (Gutstein, 2006).

UNI's Educator Preparation Program strives to support our candidates learning to understand what it means to promote social justice and to help them develop the tools and skills necessary to enact a pedagogy for social justice. This includes supporting candidates in learning the importance of getting to know their students' identities as individuals as well as how they fit into broader home, community, cultural, racial/ethnic, linguistic, and social class groups.

5. Candidates must develop competence in the skills and dispositions that allow them to engage in effective leadership and advocacy.

Rationale.

It has been said that children and young people are a relatively powerless group in society. They are rarely informed or consulted about new laws, policies, and decisions that affect their lives. Many times, children are simply the passive recipients of decisions made on their behalf by powerful adults. Because of this fact, children and young people rely, to a large extent, on adults to speak on their behalf and protect their rights (ALRC, 1997). To help all children receive a high quality, equitable education, it becomes the responsibility of educators to step forward and engage in leadership. Thus, it is crucial that candidates develop the skills and dispositions necessary to lead and advocate for students, families, communities, and the profession. Advocacy for educator professionalism and expanded leadership roles is based on the understanding that educators are in the best position to make critical decisions that impact students, because they have daily contact with them. Moreover, they are better able to implement changes in a comprehensive and continuous manner (Howey, 1988; Livingston, 1992).

Effective teacher leadership and advocacy.

Traditionally, teaching has been a "flat" career—the only way to expand one's role was to move away from the classroom into administration (Fullan, 1996). Recently, however, there has been a greater focus placed on the role of "Teacher Leader". According to the Iowa Department of Education, "Improving student learning requires improving the instruction they receive each day. There is no better way to do this than to empower our best teachers to lead the effort" (Iowa Department of Education, 2016). With this focus, it becomes the responsibility of Educator

Preparation Programs to produce the effective classroom teachers of today, who will have the skills and dispositions to become the teacher leaders of tomorrow.

To accomplish the goal of developing the skills and dispositions for engaging in effective leadership and advocacy of candidates, there has been a call to emphasize leadership skills in the areas of instruction, policy, and association to increase the sphere of influence for the classroom teacher (Center for Teaching Quality, 2014).

- **Instructional Leadership** holds the belief that outstanding professional practice must underpin all other efforts. This means more than being the best possible teacher within the four walls of one classroom—it means reaching out and sharing great teaching with others.
- **Policy Leadership** dictates that smart education policy should be shaped and guided by what accomplished teachers know about teaching and learning. Too often, individuals with little to no classroom experience are in charge of making policy decisions, despite the fact that nearly every decision made in and about schools has direct implications for instruction and the classroom. Excellent teacher leaders are willing to step up and step out of their classrooms to serve in school, district, state, or national policy leadership capacities, which help to shape and eventually implement the policies that best support student learning.
- **Association Leadership** promotes understanding how to create and guide meaningful, positive, and powerful collective action. It means learning to lead members of large and critical groups and steering the activities of those members in the direction of desired change. It also means advancing quality instructional practice and implementing the right policies to make that practice possible.

Helping to support the integration of these leadership areas for candidates, the InTASC standards highlight performance skills, critical dispositions, and essential knowledge associated with becoming a strong leader and advocate for education. In terms of leadership and advocacy the InTASC standards state:

- The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession (Standard 10).

How UNI candidates learn about effective leadership and advocacy.

UNI Educator Preparation Program candidates begin their development of competence in the skills and dispositions that allow them to engage in effective leadership and advocacy upon starting their program. For example, teacher education candidates are inducted into the UNI Educator Preparation Program during the UNI Teacher Education Convocation. It is during this time that candidates stand and take the Teacher Education Student Affirmation pledge. All candidates continue their development throughout coursework and field experience opportunities of their program. By assessing candidates, formally and informally, educator preparation faculty are able to evaluate positive growth and development for the skills and dispositions necessary for successful teaching, leadership, and advocacy.

6. Candidates must develop strong skills in order to effectively collaborate with all stakeholders for student learning.

Rationale.

At the core of collaboration is the belief that “the mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught, but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching, to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools” (DeFour, 2004). Collaboration among educators paves the way for the spread of effective teaching practices, improved outcomes for the students they teach, and the retention of the most accomplished educators in schools (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Collaboration between educators and parents, families, and the community builds relationships, fosters students’ cultural competence, and impacts students’ learning.

Effective educators are active participants in decision-making processes that build a shared vision and supportive culture, identify common goals, and monitor progress toward those goals. It further includes giving and receiving feedback on practice, examining student work, analyzing data from multiple sources, and taking responsibility for each student’s learning (InTASC, 2011). Collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility, engages veteran teachers in the induction of new teachers and in their own professional growth, increases educator retention, improves self-efficacy, and allocates resources to support collaborative planning, mentoring, and classroom observations (Kardos & Johnson, 2007; Yost, 2006).

How candidates learn about effective collaboration.

Hollins (2011) urges that “the process of learning to work collaboratively in a teacher community begins in [educator] preparation programs” (p. 402). In order for candidates to understand the importance of collaboration with stakeholders (i.e. parents, families, care-givers, and community members), they must become part of “professional communities of practice”. Communities of practice are contexts which allow candidates to participate in dialogue with peers and faculty so they might learn the discursive practices of the profession. In UNI’s Educator Preparation Program, we work to model these communities of practice through collaborative learning within coursework, teacher education data days, participation in national conferences and initiatives, professional learning communities, and in the intense mentoring of students in their field experiences in our partner schools.

Candidates are fully engaged in the school community throughout their program. They are exposed to the formal and informal discursive practices of their context. Moreover, these critical conversations are used as focused inquiry to frame conversations between candidates and faculty. These scaffolded conversations are used to guide instructional decision making, encourage candidate reflection, and make deeper connections with other educator preparation coursework.

Candidates are encouraged to become part of the school and local community through a number of opportunities. They participate in educational team situations such as professional learning communities, parent/teacher conferences, special education and support services meetings, and family and community outreach opportunities. This participation helps candidates understand the broader institutional context for teaching and learning, and begin to develop the skills needed for effective participation in school change throughout their careers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

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