DESIGN OF THE CURRICULUM/THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The teacher education program at Hope College has been uniquely and intentionally designed to prepare beginning teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to make and implement professional decisions in a changing world.

One glance at today’s classrooms quickly confirms to the observer that these “professional decisions” have become increasingly challenging and difficult. The student population is growing in diversity and the needs of those students are becoming more and more varied and demanding. Pressure from outside of school systems urges radical changes in instructional techniques and school structure, while students are distracted by an increasing range of enticing activities and diversions. The introduction of technology adds its own flavor to the mix. In short, today’s beginning teachers need very different “tools” than those needed even a few short years ago.

Developmental Levels

By its very nature, the Teacher Education Program at Hope College is developmental. This means that we recognize that students come to our program with varying degrees of readiness, experience and resolve, rather like an uncut gem - rough around the edges, but brimming with possibility. Students encounter courses that are keyed to three different levels, each building upon the previous. With each education course, students find themselves in related field experiences where they can apply learnings from the course.

-Level One - Choosing Teaching - At this level, students explore what it means to teach and determine if education will be an appropriate choice of profession.  

-Level Two - Learning How to Teach - Here, students take course work that is designed to explore the “nuts and bolts” of teaching.  

-Level Three - Applying Teaching - Students finally enter their student teaching assignments and synthesize the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes gained throughout the teacher education sequence and college preparation.

It is our job to recognize the “gem within” and help our students, as they move through the teacher education sequence, by cutting away the rough edges and polishing the emerging facets. As each student identifies his unique qualities, talents, skills and beliefs, the gem shines with increasing intensity, clarity and beauty.

We need to not only prepare individuals with the technical skills and academic depth necessary for teaching, but also to lead them to a discovery of who they are and what they stand for within the profession. Thus, the Teacher Education Program is intertwined with the general education liberal arts program of the College and the pursuit of major and minor areas of study. It is especially important for our students to explore their own learning styles and personal belief systems in order to more fully verify their calling and role within the profession.
Conceptual Orientations

In order to accomplish this, we have identified five different themes that shape our understanding of how individuals “grow into the profession.” While many teacher education programs identify themselves with one of these themes/orientations, we are deliberately eclectic in our program as we realize the important contributions of each perspective. These themes/orientations include:

- the personal orientation, which recognizes that as students proceed through the education sequence and related experiences, they will increasingly develop the values and attitudes necessary to become an effective educator;

- the technological orientation, which acknowledges that certain skills are necessary in the teaching/learning process;

- the practical orientation, which emphasizes the importance and value of field experience and practice;

- the academic orientation, which acknowledges the relationship between the liberal arts course work, the major and minor areas of study and the professional education sequence; and,

- the critical-social orientation, which supports the notion that all children can learn and that teachers must promote principles of equality and justice in learning communities.

Each orientation provides the teacher education faculty and the student the opportunity to look at the preparation process through a different lens and to subsequently cut, polish and refine the student’s knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

The student sees these orientations manifested in two distinct ways. One is the “look and feel” of our education classes which are rich in activities that encourage the student to analyze and apply newfound knowledge and skills. Students are expected to be active participants in each and every class. This requires preparation, energy and a clear desire to learn. We deliberately choose to teach in the manner that we expect our graduates to eventually teach.

Professional Abilities

The other way in which the orientations are played out is in the emphasis on the development of skills and professional dispositions. Six specific Professional Abilities are addressed throughout the Teacher Education Program. Students are expected to monitor and self-assess growth in each of the six areas at critical points in the program. The Professional Abilities include:

- Effective Communicator (listening, speaking, reading & writing)
- Professional Collaborator (working with others effectively)
- Curriculum Developer (creating, developing and managing teaching)
- Problem Solver (analyzing situations and reaching decisions)
-Decision Maker (determining how value systems impact decisions)
-Scholarly Educator (recognizing the continuing need for scholarly pursuit)

The Professional Abilities and the accompanying indicators are keyed to each of the three developmental levels identified in our program. They provide the student with clear expectations and standards that enable the student to talk about his growth over time in a succinct and specific manner.

The Hope College Teacher

What, then distinguishes the Hope College teacher from teachers prepared at other institutions? The defining characteristic of Hope College graduates lies in their understanding that teaching and learning are both intellectual and spiritual endeavors. They experience themselves as individuals who are discovering their unique gifts as educators and perhaps more importantly, see themselves as part of a larger spiritual context in their growing understanding of stewardship as they offer these gifts in the service of others.

This, then, is the “meat” of the Teacher Education Program at Hope College. Students enter the education sequence as “gems in the rough.” As they move through the program, the general education classes and preparation in the major and minor areas of study, they find themselves being “cut” as they are encouraged to look at things from different perspectives and perhaps even change their view of the world. With each cut, though, care is taken to polish and encourage the gem to emerge in a loving and supportive manner. The student sees each facet reflecting his growing (and glowing) professional abilities, skills, values and attitudes. At last, the gem appears, perhaps not yet in final form, but certainly in a stunning and decidedly different form than what was apparent at the beginning of the process.